

ENCUENTROS



*Welcoming Each Other:
Cultural Transformation
of the Caribbean
in the 21st Century*

Lecture by

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WELCOMING EACH OTHER: CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE CARIBBEAN IN THE 21ST CENTURY

By Earl Lovelace

Good evening ladies and gentlemen, friends. First allow me to say how honored I am to have been invited to this forum. For this I would like to especially thank Anne Vena and the organizers of this evening's program for bringing me here so speedily.

I spent many important years here in Washington, D.C.; first at Howard University, and later at the University of the District of Columbia, and close by at Johns Hopkins University; and I have many friends here and great memories.

I was very fortunate to be here during the Black Power movement in the 1970s; at the time when *Black was Beautiful* and the hairstyle was *The natural*, and there was a certain street militancy about. Then, in discussions with a group of friends, some of whom are no longer with us (and whose absence makes Washington, D.C. a different place for me), we thrashed out many ideas that have influenced my outlook. One of the discussions was, naturally, the differences and similarities between the state of the African American and African Caribbean person.

What came through was the idea that we in the Caribbean have labored under a false sense of freedom, that, indeed, Independence and Black governance, as well as the majority position of Black people in the islands, have contrived to mask for us the quality of our living. On the other hand, the more severe forms of racism in the United States have shaped an African American response that makes it impossible for them to accept anything less than complete liberation.

We in the Caribbean have become satisfied with a degree of liveable freedom, dangerous because our satisfaction with it could see us institutionalizing the permanent acceptance of ourselves as second-class citizens.

It is the need to understand the nature of this second-classness, and to overcome it that is one of the motive forces at the root of my recent novel, *Salt*. I believe that there can be no useful cultural transformation of the Caribbean until that second-classness is overcome. And we will not be able to properly overcome it until we retrace our

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steps and understand how we have arrived here. Making this journey in *Salt* has brought me closer to an appreciation of the need for **reparation**, both as an instrument to free Africans from their sense of second-classness, and as the means by which the disparate groups that make up Caribbean society might be able to face each other, approach their belonging to the region, and welcome each other to a new beginning.

Reparation, then, is the idea in which I anchor the theme of my lecture, *Welcoming Each Other: Cultural Transformation of the Caribbean in the 21st Century*.

Let me begin with the novel, *Salt*. The first chapter is entitled "Bango":

"I look to see what kind of danger Uncle Bango brought with him into our front yard on those Saturdays, but there was nothing I could identify as threatening. And I knew of no possession of his, or of any previous differences between either my mother and him, or him and my father, no family quarrel. All that I could see separating him from my other uncles was this story that he was ever willing to tell. So it had to be his story.

"'Watch the landscape of this island,' he began with the self-assured conviction that my mother couldn't stand in him. 'And you know that they coulda never hold people here surrendered to unfreedom.' The sky, the sea, every green leaf and tangle of vines sing freedom. Birds frisk and flutter and whistle and sing. Just so a yard cock will draw up his chest and crow. Things here have their own mind. The rain decide when it going to fall. Sometimes in the middle of the day, the sky clear, you hear a rushing swooping sound and voops it fall down. Other times it set up whole day and then you sure that now, yes, it going to fall, it just

clear away. It had no brooding inscrutable wilderness here. There was no wild and passionate uproar to make people feel they is beast, to stir this great evil wickedness in their blood to make them want to go out and murder people. Maybe that madness seized Columbus and the first set of conquerors when they land here and wanted the Carib people to believe that they was gods; but afterwards, after they settle in the island and decide that, yes, is here we going to live now, they begin to discover how hard it was to be gods.

"The heat, the diseases, the weight of armor they had to carry in the hot sun, the imperial poses they had to strike, the powdered wigs to wear, the churches to build, the heathen to baptize, the illiterates to educate, the animals to tame, the numerous species of plants to name, history to write, flags to plant, parades to make, the militia to assemble, letters to write home. And all around them, this rousing greenness bursting in the wet season and another quieter shade perspiring in the dry.

"On top of that they had to put up with the noise from Blackpeople. Whole night Blackpeople have their drums going as they dance in the bush. All those dances. All those lascivious bodies leaping and bending down. They couldn't see them in the dark among the shadows and trees; but they could hear. They had to listen to them dance the Bamboula Bamboula, the Quelbay, the Manding, the Juba, the Ibo, the Pique, the Halicord, the Coromanti, the Congo, the Chiffon, the Banda, the Pencow, the Cherrup, the Kalinda, the Bongo. It was hard for Whitepeople. It had days they wanted to just sit down under a breadfruit tree and cool off, to reach up and pick a ripe

river, the way it changes its timbre as it flows, transforming everything in its path. I was desperate to start, but wait: what about the passengers? Who was going to be traveling on this boat? Up until now I had been imagining myself on it, writing music happily away as the sights went by. Now I had to get myself off the boat and make room for the travelers. But first I had to find them.

How does an opera composer find his characters? At the beginning, it feels like looking for someone you know nothing about. In the process of looking for them, however, I become aware that while some are quickly discarded, others are eagerly retained – as if I knew instinctively what I am looking for. I then try to find out why such contradictory feelings should manifest themselves so convincingly, and it is in this process that I end up unveiling the characters in my opera. I suspect that the characters that remain have some aspect of me going down that journey, as I imagined it. It is as if I had cheated and stayed on board, but split into many characters and hidden inside them. This is where a librettist comes in.

When I say an opera librettist, what I really mean is a supremely gifted mind reader with endless patience, total flexibility, great literary skills and no ego. They are rare, as you can well imagine. In the scale of human types, they stand at the top, close to saints and martyrs. Their most frequent reply to the composer, however, is far from sainthood: “Why the hell don’t you write it yourself, then?” Many composers do, of course. But since

it was not the case with me, I will talk a little more about this quite inexplicable form of collaboration.

If I put my mind to it, I can certainly understand their feelings. They have to produce a text that hardly stands up by itself – they must trust music they can’t hear. And they can’t hear it simply because it is not composed yet. The composer “knows” the music he will write, so he asks the librettist to write words along those lines. Sometimes the librettist reads the composer’s mind successfully and it is all joy; but then there are times when he is asked to cut this, insert that, get everybody on stage saying something so they can all sing, all different but at the same time, not too short, not too long, No! not that vowel... until “Why the hell don’t you write it yourself, then?” puts an end to the working session.

Writing opera is a work of perseverance. We persevered and eventually found our characters; we found our story too. In the early 1900s, the great opera star Florencia Grimaldi reprises the river journey she made twenty years before with her one true love, the naturalist Cristobal Ribeiro da Silva. Searching for the rarest of butterflies, he mysteriously disappeared into the Amazonian jungle. Her stated mission is to sing at the fabled opera house in remote Manaus, but her secret desire is to find her lover once more.

Florencia Grimaldi, a native of South America who has triumphed all over the world, undertakes the journey that will

he tell you he forget. You tell him to shoot and he forget to load the rifle. You tell him to get up at five, and nine o'clock he now yawning and stretching: he didn't hear you; or, he hear something different to what you tell him. You is the expert, but he believe that he know better than you what it is you want him to do, and he do it and he mess it up.

"Four hundred years it take them to find out that you can't keep people in captivity. Four hundred years! And it didn't happen just so. People had to revolt. People had to poison people. Port-of-Spain had to burn down. A hurricane had to hit the island. Haiti had to defeat Napoleon. People had to run away up the mountains. People had to fight. And then they agree, yes. We can't hold people in captivity here.

"But now they had another problem: it was not how to keep people in captivity. It was how to set people at liberty." (*Salt*, pp. 3-7)

This business of setting our people at liberty is now our concern. If the earlier part of our history was concerned with struggling against the dehumanization of enslavement, it could be said that the latter part of our history, the part that begins with Emancipation, has been preoccupied with the question of **how** to set people at liberty.

I should let you know that here I am using Trinidad and Tobago to represent the Caribbean. It is a truly West Indian community peopled by Barbadians, Vincentians, Grenadians, St. Lucians, Martinique, by Africans from other parts of the Caribbean as well, of course, and by Africans from the continent, Indians, Chinese, and Europeans. It is one of the last countries to be settled, it is rich in natural resources, a culture that has

produced the steelband and calypso and many artists from different disciplines. It maintains as well a presence of African institutions, Shango, Orisha, and Shouters alongside Indian religious forms and expressions.

Trinidad, in particular, is a complex, cosmopolitan society with a population today of 1.3 million, with roughly 41% African, 41% Indian, a small minority of Chinese, Lebanese and Europeans, and with traces of Amerindians found in mixtures with the African population. Europeans, of course, came as conquerors, administrators, and planters. The Africans were brought enslaved, and the Indians came as indentured workers for the sugar plantations. After Emancipation, the Europeans thought it cheaper and overall more useful to import Indians rather than be confronted with the challenges from liberated Africans. Having used the Africans, they discarded them without compensation, and turned their attention to the Indians who became important because they provided the labor for their sugar industry.

This situation, of course, set up tensions from the very beginning between Africans, who by their struggles against enslavement bore the brunt of colonial opprobrium, and the Indians, who were seen by them as reaping the benefits they had worked for. Beneath the surface, then, of this and other relationships, there is resentment, competition, victimhood, shame, and guilt. Despite our great possibilities and the contributions made by each group within the spheres of its ingenuity, tensions consume our energies, and place each group on the defensive; and limit the quality of the creative address we might make to our future.

It is against this background that we need to find a way to welcome each other into a New World of new, liberating and creative relationships. How and where to begin?

In the Caribbean, the Europeans, who were the principal beneficiaries of African enslavement, do not have the moral authority to make the welcome. The Indians, as more recent arrivals, are not themselves secure enough within the landscape to do it. The Africans might be the ones best placed to do it since they, more than any other group, have made liberation the central theme of their existence, and have laid the foundation for a new society. They have been so obviously disadvantaged by the old society that they require a new one.

But the Africans' struggle for a new world is a very complex thing. And while they have done much to place the need for a new world squarely on the table, they have not so far managed to equip themselves with the means to liberate themselves, and so genuinely make others welcome. One of the reasons for this is what I alluded to earlier: Emancipation, self-government, and Independence never delivered their liberation to them. And while these have been important landmarks in our struggle for personhood, they never produced what the propaganda surrounding them seemed to promise. Indeed, to begin with, our acceptance of *Emancipation* as an event that fully emancipated Africans is the foundation stone of the betrayal of Africans and their hopes for the society after enslavement. It was the event that demonstrated the hesitations, and the fears the colonizers had about truly making African liberation possible, and encouraging a new world.

The 1834 Emancipation required that Africans who had been enslaved continue to work six years before being fully freed. And it was due only to protest action by the same Africans that caused the British to move the date up to 1838. The Emancipation itself did not seek to cultivate a new set of relations between the Africans who had been enslaved and the colonizers, nor did it explore any new ways for the economic system to be run. It maintained the same plantation system. Indians replaced Africans on the plantations, and whatever benefits, if we can call them that, that could have gone to labor, were reaped by the Indians. The planters were compensated for their loss of the labor of the previously enslaved Africans. Africans were simply set at liberty, without apology or compensation, and pushed outside the organizing system of the plantation.

It took from 1834 to 1956 for Africans, liberated from *Enslavement*, to arrive at political representation. By the time Independence came in 1962, the Black leadership, that had by then come to power, did not see fit to address the omissions of the 120-odd years that had passed. The lengthy period of colonization had had its effect. They did not know how **not** to accept a second-class status for Africans. On the personal level, power gave them their privilege. More importantly for them, there was something called *nation* now to be protected, and they harbored a sense of guilt that liberation of Africans might upset the country... Lord Brougham in the House of Commons argued the same point in 1824: "It is for the sake of the blacks themselves, as subsidiary to their own improvement, that the present state of things must for the time being be maintained. It is, because to them,

the bulk of our fellow subjects in the Colonies, liberty, if suddenly given, and still more, if violently obtained, by men yet unprepared to receive it, would be a curse and not a blessing, that emancipation must be the work of time..."

It took the Black power revolt in Trinidad in 1970 to make demands for African dignity in a society over which a Black government presided. As a result of our failure to properly close accounts with that portion of our past, the resentments, the guilt, the shame, the sense of victimhood have all remained, fanned by the flames of a propaganda (coming to us from all sections of the media) that has sought to assuage the conscience of European guilt by presenting Africans as degraded people unworthy of being accepted as fully human.

I have the view that it is the creativity of a people that is the real basis for their development, and that self-confidence is the key to freeing people to be creative. It is my opinion that Africans in the Caribbean, perhaps Africans in the world, have been largely placed on the defensive, and much of our energy has been employed in defending assaults on the personality.

It sounds strange that Africans in the Caribbean should be thought to be on the defensive, when the image we have of Caribbean people shows them to be fun-loving, and ready to party at the drop of a hat. Indeed, the Caribbean can also be seen as a place of joy, of fetes, and of celebration. In Trinidad and Tobago we have one of the biggest celebrations in the world - Carnival. What accounts for this? What is this business about being defensive? There is, of course, the idea that the cultivation of joy, if you will, might be seen as a defense against

cynicism.

Just a few days ago I read an article on the direction of calypso by a professor of English at the University of the West Indies, Gordon Rohlehr. Gordon writes: "So the contemporary calypso describes two contradictory impulses. The first is parochial, inner directed, quite often defensively aggressive, in which the citizens of a small 'post colonial nation' reassure themselves that they are creators by celebrating what they have created and by claiming themselves and the works of their hands and minds jealously and zealously in the face of an appropriating world that at times includes 'rival' Caribbean states, many of which have their own carnivals and their own competing calypso or soca music. The second impulse is externally oriented and involves the calypso's ongoing encounter with an external market that imposes its own terms, standards and conditions of access. The conflict between the parochial and the international orientations of cultural production is intense, confused but inevitable. Sometimes the same singer can, in the same disc, project contradictory signals as to the direction in which he believes the music should be taken..." (*Trinidad and Tobago Review*, 1998)

What Rohlehr sees as a conflict between the parochial and the international may not be all that confusing to the calypsonian. In fact, the calypsonian is aware that the music has to go in the two directions, parochial and international, simultaneously. This kind of duality has already been institutionalized in our calypso. For the Calypso Monarch competition, there is a convention that requires that calypsonians sing two types of songs: one is a party song which makes us dance

and have a good time, and the other is called a social commentary in which the calypsonian is expected to give some thought-provoking analysis of society. In this latter type of calypso, singers sing about inequality, the state of the world, political problems, etc. Indeed this conventional requirement has at times prompted more 'serious' calypsonians to question the convention. One of our calypsonians, Black Stalin, known for his strong social commentary-type calypso, refused for years to sing the party song. He had a song in which his fans beg him to sing the party song, but he explains to them that even though he wants to sing one, he couldn't until the social conditions that so demanded his attention were alleviated. While there was injustice and hunger and oppression, he couldn't sing the party song.

It seems to me that this duality is rooted in our psyche, and might owe much to our need, in the circumstances of our history, to cultivate a sense of joy even as we hit out at injustices. Indeed, what this expresses is the psychological flexibility of the Trinidadian, and even perhaps the Caribbean person. So the sense of joy, when it surfaces, must not be seen as trivial, nor totally descriptive of the whole person; similarly, the very serious concerns when they are expressed should not be seen as an aberration to be dismissed.

Perhaps it is the expression of this duality that has confused our African American brethren, and given solace to those who want to believe that we have surrendered ourselves to accepting a second-class condition. In a sense our experience has taught us the impossibility of choosing between the celebrating of ourselves, and the simultaneous demanding of better conditions.

This is something we need to more formally understand about ourselves.

I have been talking about the African Caribbean person because I believe their liberation is the key to the positive cultural transformation of the region. This should not surprise anybody since African enslavement was at the center of the creation of the Caribbean that we know today. What I hope I have shown is that neither enslavement of Africans nor their liberation have been properly addressed, and this has prevented the various groups from evolving too far beyond the themes which preoccupied them when they first arrived in the New World. The African's central concern is still the fight against enslavement; the Indian is still obsessed with overcoming the poverty he arrived in; and the European is still embattled, building fortresses for his protection, still preoccupied with his vulnerability. I am convinced that none of these groups want to remain in these positions. Each group wants to liberate its own creative energies and address the new concerns of the 21st century. That is why, it seems to me, we must all come together on the question of **reparation**, as the means by which we can clean the slates, and approach a new beginning.

Reparation requires not only action but an understanding of why it is needed. I am not sure that I can even convey a sense of the violation of the very idea of what it is to be human that enslavement involved. I am not sure I can convey the Africans' sense of loss of home.

"He had no idea of the sky in that place, of the land, of the roads, of the shape of the leaves, of the smell of the earth, of his people in that setting of home. He had no idea of

their dances, of their songs, of the language. He had no idea of the loss he had lost.” (*Salt*, p. 173)

I don’t know if I can convey to you why it is necessary for human beings, men and women, each one of us, not to accept for ourselves anything less than full personhood, why we will not be and ought not be satisfied with less.

Let Bango speak:

“I know I should be thankful for your offer of land,’ Bango began, his voice straining to be polite, looking for Miss Myrtle with an appeal that made me feel that what he was saying was as much for her benefit as for mine.

“Into my mind plopped a picture of my father standing pathetic and heroic before his column of dinged and mossy bricks, on land that was not his own. And I began to settle back for the falsetto of false modesty, of self-pity and martyrdom that I had come to recognize as the voice of my father’s generation struggling with its victimhood and its pride. But that was not what I got from Bango.

“‘Understand from the start,’ he said. ‘I ain’t come here to make the Whiteman the devil. I not here to make him into another creature inhabiting another world outside the human order. I grant him no licence to pursue wickedness and brutality. I come to call him to account, as a brother, to ask him to take responsibility for his humanness, just as I have to take responsibility for mine. And if you think it is easy for either one of us, then you making an error. This business of being human is tougher than being the devil, or being God for that matter. And it doesn’t matter whether in the role of brutalized or brutalizer.

“‘How you going to live in liberty with a people whose bondage you make the basis of your land settlement policy? When the scramble for land is the scramble to hold people enslaved, when the law, your law, require that for every forty acres a whiteman he have to have at least one man in bondage, and for every man bonded a free colored was entitled to fifteen acres of land. How you going to free a people who you root up from their homeland and force against their will to give their labor for three hundred years to you?’

“These was the questions Whitepeople in this island had to answer.

“There was never any magic about what they had to do. People know it already. In every part of the world. From time begin, people have always done each other wrong, not because one fella is so much more wicked than the next, but because to be stupid is the principal part of what it is to be human. And unless we want to doom ourselves to remain forever locked into the terrors of the error of our stupidity, we try to repair the wrong by making reparation: so many cows, so much land, so you could face again yourself and restore for yourself and the one you injure the sense of what it is to be human.” (*Salt*, pp. 167-169)

It is not only the White man that bears responsibility. The leadership in the Caribbean today is Black, and it too has had its hesitations. It has followed the same script written by the Europeans, and has left society still feeling a sense of victimhood, guilt, shame and resentment, with ethnic groups vulnerable in their relations one with the other, their differences easily exploited, especially for partisan political purposes.

In his novel, *Palace of the Peacock*, the

Guyanese writer Wilson Harris talks about the Caribbean, and has one of his characters, the Elizabethan adventurer Donne say, "We are all outside the folk. No one belongs yet." Indeed, Harris sees the longing for belonging as one of the impulses that govern our behavior, as powerful as the impulse to rule or be ruled. How do we belong? Not, Harris says, by simply ruling, or seeking to dominate, or by exerting power over the natives, or marrying one of the folk.

In his novel, the characters repeat an earlier journey they had made up a river into the Guyanese interior during which they all died. However, they come to an understanding of the meaning of the journey, and the meaning of death; they realize that there is nothing to fear, and at the end of the novel, the narrator contemplates his own dead body, and understands that he has come home at last to the folk. He says, "Now at last we held in our hands what we had been forever seeking, and what we had eternally possessed." They understand that they, we are all heirs to the world, and to claim it we have to come to it with the humility of the folk. It is in the spirit of this humility that I propose reparation as the means by which we might begin to clear the ground to welcome each other into this space.

In order to welcome others, we need to be guided by the idea that power must uphold, protect and affirm what it is to be human. Our humanity is not negotiable. I want to suggest that the state has the power and authority to affirm and promote the ideal of what it is to be human.

We need to pursue the full restoration of personhood for both the brutalized and the brutalizer, those who have been injured and those who in injuring others have injured

themselves. And we need to do so not solely as victims but as persons, in spite of the terrible impositions that have been placed upon us. As humans, we need to find solidarity with the struggles of people to maintain and uphold human dignity. What a terrible indictment of the human condition if we accept *unfreedom* as our lot.

Reparation (not reparations) is something for all of us, not just for one party. As in any relationship where there has been a breach of trust, you have to repair the breach in order to start again, until the next time, when positions might well be changed, since human stupidity will not and cannot end. In the Bible, Peter said, "Lord, my brother has offended me and I have forgiven him seven times. How many times shall he offend me and I forgive him?" And Jesus answered, "I say unto you seventy times seven." That is not so much a parable about willy nilly forgiveness, as it is about the human proclivity to err. In relationships we can expect endless wrongs to be done to us, and we can expect that we will also do wrong countless times; this is what it means to be human. Being human also means saying you are sorry, and doing whatever it takes to restore the relationship you violated.

Ghettos, criminal activity, drug pushing, unwed mothers, low IQs, etc. have been placed at the door of African people in the New World. The argument of those hostile to our liberation is that somehow Africans are unfit to be accorded full human rights. This I believe to be a response of guilt. It is necessary for the guilty to rationalize his guilt, to make the victim of the crime the criminal. This cannot and should not last. Nor can we allow Africans to be designated as former slaves, as if that was their

aboriginal condition. In the West Indies alone there were ninety-nine recorded rebellions, called *slave* rebellions, but those who rebel are not *slaves*, but persons conscious of their personhood and the impositions on it.

We must examine the effects on our psyche of these unrelenting negative presentations. The principal problem facing Africans is not an event in the past, it is not past enslavement; it is the day-to-day onslaught that keeps us off balance and on the defensive. It is the insistent and deliberate cultivation by others of images that deny us our true personality.

It is in this context that our artists must find as well as be given the resources with which to take back the images that have been so brutalized by the media of the western world. I believe that we and our educators have the task to return images of dignity and humanity to Africans, and the power of the state must be placed in the service of this idea. For it is my view that development is about developing people, so that people may then change the world. It is about developing a self-confident, affirmative people who will do what needs to be done.

In the Caribbean we are at some disadvantage in terms of resources in the media, and we have so far been consuming in film and television mainly what has been coming out of the United States. So changes here in the portrayal of Black people will benefit us as well in the Caribbean. In the end though, nobody will be able to tell our story as well as we who have lived it. We expect that reparation will place in our hands the resources to tell our continuing story.

I should say in ending that I speak as an artist, a writer. I am someone whose power

and duty is simply, with compassion and firmness, to call us to account as humans, and to tenaciously insist that we honor the highest ideal of what it is to be human. I must state again how heroic, courageous, and generous we are, and also how horrid and stupid at times. I would like to help us see our way to begin to repair the faith we break with each other so that we may face ourselves and each other again.

I have these few concrete suggestions to offer: 1) that discussions on reparation begin in society, 2) that monuments be erected to those who have struggled, 3) that the power of the state be responsible for setting the highest standards for humanity, and 4) that Black people both take back and be given back the task of constructing our own self image.

The Enslavement of Africans has been an event that robbed us of time as well as the rewards of our labor, but it is not yet the end of the day. People have bounced back from worse situations. Ultimately, reparation is a means by which a wounded society might begin to heal itself, and be helped to pause and contemplate again what it means to be human. Reparation will help us to welcome each other in the short life we all share, in the small Caribbean region, in a smaller and smaller world. Thank you.

(Mr. Lovelace's presentation was followed by a question and answer period.)

Question: Do you think that the Truth and Reconciliation Committee in South Africa is working along the same lines as your idea?

Answer: Yes, I would say first of all that I think it is very important that they have such a forum. I remember looking at it very closely, and wondering how such a process might work in the Caribbean, but over one hundred years have passed since we just flipped over to supposed independence. That is the problem that we are dealing with now, how to heal something that has festered for one hundred years.

Question: Could you please explain what are *free coloreds*?

Answer: This is another problem we face in the Caribbean. Free coloreds are people who may also be called mulatto, a mixture of Black and White, who were also landowners within the plantation system. In Trinidad, where the Europeans were granted forty acres for every African enslaved on their plantations, the free coloreds were given fifteen acres. They were a very important group in the Caribbean because they were privileged, had opportunities, and so on. Yet they did not identify with the Africans, and never provided leadership or resources to the Africans' cause. What this meant was that the group closest to Africans and most equipped to help in their liberation and development was alienated from them.

Question: I admire your idea of reparation. In the United States the same promise was made, but not kept. What are your concrete ideas for implementing reparation?

Answer: The principal idea I have is that people must be given back a positive image of themselves. I remember seeing a little boy getting knocked down by a car. I thought he was dead. Later I saw the boy back up, healthy and playing. I have seen many situations in which people have been injured by an event and have recovered. I have also seen people from modest beginnings who have pushed themselves to achieve success in the world. The only thing standing in the way of being self-confident and self-affirming is having a defensive attitude, so for me the business of getting a positive image of one's self is my central idea of what reparation is all about. People should have monuments, things that celebrate them, and make them feel they are somebody in the world. There are other things perhaps that might come, but I must say I have not given them much thought because for me the central question is one getting one's self back. When I walk in the world, I must feel that I belong here and nobody must question my right to be here. I think in the process of discussing it, people themselves will come up with ideas of what they should do.

Question: What about the idea of shadow-snatching? Would that be a useful metaphor here?

Answer: I think it is more than shadow. When I look at television, for example (and I mean U.S. television because it reaches us in Trinidad and is available to everybody), and I see someone killed by a Black person, the media is making an association between Black people and every disaster being imagined. That is what I am talking about, presenting people either negatively or

positively not only to themselves, but to the communities in which they must function. I think it is very difficult for a child, Black or White, to be exposed to these negative images of Black people and not feel a little uneasy.

Question: Do you equate the state with government? If your notion of reparation means empowerment, here you leave nothing to civil society, you should widen your scope to ordinary people.

Answer: Yes, ordinary people could carry this idea forward. In Jamaica some time ago a group of Rastafarian brethren was pushing this idea, and in Trinidad there was a group with the same idea; in a way having civil society take the initiative makes it easier for government. I still feel though that there is a certain value for the Caribbean governments to make a statement about reparation, because the psychological impact around the world would be tremendous. I agree with you that one needs to look very closely at home to get people involved in this discussion.

Question: Black people not only have to deal with how they feel but also how they are perceived. How does that work in the Caribbean?

Answer: Well, I think you can internalize the constant media presentation. I don't want somebody to make me feel right, I want the presentation of those images to be in my own hands. I don't want to see a film every day that places Black people in a degraded position.

Question: Are you saying the Caribbean governments should make this a world movement?

Answer: I see other possibilities, and as we begin to talk about it, people begin to get new ideas. When we talk about government, we are talking about ordinary people who themselves have been in a process of education, who have been put into office, and who have a certain view. We will have to think about how to go about getting government involved. When you point out that reparation is all about hope, it becomes a process that might enhance us all, and be useful for our own development. Anyone would be willing to embrace that idea.

Thank you very much.



Earl Lovelace was born on July 13, 1935 in Toco, Trinidad and is Visiting Professor in the Africana Studies Department of Wellesley College in Massachusetts. A former Guggenheim fellow, he is the author of five novels, including *Salt*, which won the 1997 Commonwealth Writers Prize, as well as Best Book Award for the Canada-Caribbean Region; other fiction awards include the Carifesta Award in 1995 and the Chaconia Gold Medal (National Award of Trinidad and Tobago) in 1989. Of his nine plays, *The New Hardware Store* won Best Play 1981 from the Trinidad and Tobago Drama Association, and *My Name is Village* won Best Play in the Folk Theatre Competition in 1976. He received the Independence Literary Award from British Petroleum for his 1984 novel *While Gods are Falling*; and the Pegasus Literary Award for his Outstanding Contribution to the Arts in Trinidad and Tobago in 1966. He has been Writer-in-Residence at the London Arts Board (1995-96), NEH Visiting Professor at Hartwick College in New York, Visiting Novelist at Johns Hopkins University (1973-74) and Lecturer at the University of the District of Columbia (1971-73). Mr. Lovelace began his career at the *Trinidad Guardian* in 1953.

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EARL LOVELACE

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