

ABSTRACT

Nation-Builders In The Works Of Kamau Brathwaite.

Paula Ann Ellis

The dream of many thinkers in the region is still for the building of an integrated assembly of West Indian nation-states. The process of this nation-building, though generally seen as being the domain of political and economic contributors, also occupies cultural spheres which often overlap those others. It is therefore important that the creative citizen's gifts to nation-building be acknowledged as well. Indeed, it has been said that,

The artist is the emotional organ of the people, the aesthetic seismograph which records the quakes and shakings of the national conscience.¹

Kamau Brathwaite is a multi-faceted, creative, West Indian who is not only a respected historian and literary critic, but also an outstanding poet. His contribution to West Indian nation-building is expressed in his writing which reflects the oft-repeated instructions of his poetically-created ancestors:

build now
the new
villages, you
must mix spittle
with dirt, dung
to saliva and
sweat: ...²

That the Prelude to his first major poem "Right of Passage," which is filled with such calls to 'building', ends in disaster as "flame burns the village down," is the poet's early admission of the difficulty of the nation-builder's task.

This Thesis looks at nation-builders in Brathwaite's works by examining his major essays, his own historical research, and the contributions of specific characters as they appear in his two trilogies of poetry. The study reveals that for Brathwaite, the early nation-builders' obstacles are diverse, but not necessarily defeating. However, his optimism declines in his later poetry which suggests what, for him, is lived reality. Building a homogenous West Indian nation seems then, neither possible nor truly necessary. Consequently, it appears that as this dream fades, what Brathwaite ultimately desires is to find that 'whole' West Indian person who may at least keep the hope of some type of integration alive.

Keywords: Paula Ann Ellis; Kamau Brathwaite; Nation-Builders.

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