

**George A. O. Alleyne**  
**Director, PAHO ·**  
**10 November 2001**

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**IN THE SHADE OF THE OLD SANDBOX TREE**  
(St. Michael, Barbados)\*\*

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Mr. Chairman, first let me thank you for this honor you have given me this evening. It is doubly meaningful because it comes from an institution I revere and it has been given in the presence of many of my friends of yesteryear. I will treasure it and the moving words that have accompanied it, and in addition feel some satisfaction in having my name coupled with that of my good friend Cammie Smith. I must also thank Neville Nicholls for his very handsome introduction. I hope you will appreciate that these are the words of a friend and friendship begets generosity of spirit. I wish to believe that this honor is some recognition of a life spent in service to people of the Americas and also a recognition of the contribution of my devoted wife who regrets that she cannot be here, my family and the numerous persons who have helped me along the way.

There was a time years ago that I would be flippant and say that these distinctions were a sign of advancing age, but now that is not a joke anymore. At these times I am conscious of the lines from Ovid that my master made me learn 56 years ago “Dum vires annique sinunt, tolerate labores, Jam veniet tacito, curva senecta pede.” – while years and strength allow, tolerate work, as presently bent old age will come with silent foot.

This is the second time I am speaking to an Old Harrisonian Society’s dinner. The last time I spoke was a rather complicated affair. There was a first attempt that had to be aborted because Errol Barrow died on the weekend before and the dinner had to be postponed. You can imagine how glad I was that there was no postponement on this occasion and that Prime Minister Arthur is here and in good health. I would never wish to be associated with a tradition of having my speeches presaging the passing of prime ministers.

On that previous occasion, I reflected on the idyllic seven years I spent in Crumpton Street and empathized with Thomas Gray on his return to Eton as he reminisced:

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\* **Pan American Health Organization, Pan American Sanitary Bureau, Regional Office for the Americas of the World Health Organization.**

\*\* **Presented at the Old Harrisonian Society, St. Michael, Barbados. 10 November 2001.**

*Ah, happy hills, ah, pleasing shade,  
Ah, fields below'd in vain  
Where once my careless childhood stray'd  
A stranger yet to pain!*

Of course, we have no hills, but the shade of the sandbox tree in the quadrangle is as sharp in my memories as any of Eton's shades would have been to Gray.

I also spoke then in favor of elitism, for which I was roundly criticized in the local press. I have to tell you that I am still an unrepentant elitist, provided I am in accord with the discriminators of that elitism. I also told one of my best jokes which was appreciated most by those who had sat at the feet of masters like "Bronze" and the "Gollywog."

It is inevitable that on occasions such as this, I will conjure up memories of my schooldays, many of which are bound up with stories of people and places. As Sartre wrote: "Man lives surrounded by his stories and the stories of others. He sees everything that happens to him through them and he tries to live his life as if he were recounting it." Many of my stories of those days treat as boys many people who now are men of substance in our society, but I still see them in the lunch shed buying Mary's ham-cutters or John's rock cakes or dawdling in the shadow of the clock whose face had to be covered with a grille, because legend had it that Clyde Walcott or perhaps some other maestro had broken it with a mighty six. I reflect on the impact those persons have had on our society and our development. There is no doubt that Harrison College has contributed mightily to the leadership of our country in all spheres, and I have often tried to link the formation of those early years with our development.

There are numerous theories about our success in maintaining a society that has shown remarkable stability and progressiveness over the years. My reflection on this was sharpened even more by the Prime Minister's speech in August of this year when he outlined the government's financial policies that were being designed with full appreciation that the years of the fat kine had come to an end globally and locally and this was the time for prudence. The global nature of the economy means that there is no possibility of a Marshall Plan to rescue any country or countries. It is a truth that by the sweat of our own brows we shall eat bread.

My friend Courtney Blackman, in describing the features of the "Barbados Model" of sound economic performance, cites seven fortunate historical accidents that in retrospect can be seen to have contributed to the success of this country which is the envy of many in the world for its political and economic stability and its civilized form of life. These accidents embrace both natural and social phenomena which, taken together, produced the Barbados of today. He makes the point that many of those accidents would not have been regarded as being particularly felicitous by the persons who were experiencing them. But such is the nature of history.

Havelock Brewster has explored the aspect of the social capital that we possess and compares Barbados with Jamaica, with the conclusion that much of our more positive

and pleasant development is due to our high level of social capital. That kind of capital embraces the series of social networks and aggregations of norms in our society, prominent among which are trust that make for a social fabric that is favorable and contributory to the other instruments of human development.

But recently, I have had to examine other reasons for the growth and prosperity of countries and have tried to relate them to our society. I will be personal and refer to a recommendation that J.C. Hammond wrote for me when I left Harrison College at age 18—and I am blushing, contrary to the belief that black people do not blush. He wrote:

“Alleyne is obviously a boy of outstanding ability, and his school record has been consistently brilliant. He is also of sound character and has been a reliable prefect.” I particularly like the part of being a reliable prefect and thereby hangs many tales. But the point I wish to emphasize is the mention he makes of character, a qualification he would have made about the vast majority of boys of my day.

One morning, Sylvester Hewitt and I sat on Bertie Callender’s veranda and looked over some old roll calls as Bertie expounded on the thesis that boys do not change their character and he could detect in all of the boys of his class the seeds of what they would become. He included Tom Adams among that group. I must add that our discussion was helped enormously because Bertie had acquired a tool that opened coconuts swiftly and allowed us to have our rum appropriately chased.

I have wondered about the character of persons of my generation and its formation as a resource for development in the various places in which we have labored. This type of resource has been examined more closely by Robert Fogel who gained the Nobel Prize for economics in 1993. Fogel refers to the spiritual capital of a nation as being of an importance equal to, if not greater, than many of the inputs that figure traditionally in the standard econometric models. Let me quote from Fogel writing of the resources that comprise this spiritual capital:

“I have in mind such vital assets as a vision of opportunity and a work ethic. A common characteristic of such assets is that they are transferred from one individual to another mainly very early in the life of the recipient. Self-esteem and a sense of family solidarity begin to be transferred to children along with mother’s milk and with pabulum. Other spiritual resources begin to be transferred during the toddler and toilet-training stages, including a sense of discipline, a capacity to resist or control impulses, and a sense of community. Telling nursery rhymes such as “This little piggy went to market,” recounting the autobiographies of the mother and father, and family histories going back to two or three generations convey a sense of the mainstream of work and life, an ethic of benevolence, a vision of opportunity and a thirst for knowledge.”

Most of you here and especially those of my generation can relate to these as the kinds of resources we acquired. I am also sure that those resources, many of which would

have been bound up in the soundness of my character as described by Hammond would have been buttressed and fortified by my seven years in Harrison College. Fogel contends that one of the great problems of our time is that in societies such as ours which have advanced materially, there is the risk not so much from the increasing maldistribution of income, but from the maldistribution of this spiritual capital. There are well known techniques for correcting or alleviating the maldistribution of income at the household level, but we have to think more seriously about the kind of state interventions that can correct the problem of maldistribution of spiritual capital. I would hope that some of these interventions might be included in the measures to which the Prime Minister referred to in his speech when he spoke in broad terms of human resource development.

I am confident that in contemplating the measures to be put in place to ensure our continued prosperity due cognizance will be taken of the health of our people. I have argued here before, that our health is important in and of itself, but also it has an instrumental value which is of equal importance to its intrinsic or constitutive worth. There is nothing base or venal in suggesting that the health of a population is a productive asset. This is not the place to go into the mechanisms by which health does contribute to our prosperity, but I will refer briefly to some aspects that have come to the fore very recently. Nutrition is very important. Your height is not only genetically determined, but also reflects the cumulative effect of your nutrition. You are all sitting, so I can tell you that there is good evidence that tall men earn more money than short men, and before I have to define what I mean by a short man, let me say that the relationship between height and earnings is a linear one and there is no single cut-off point. I am going to posit that the same holds for women.

But the following question has been put to me on occasion by Presidents and Prime Ministers when they buy my argument that the health of their nation is the wealth of their nation. What is the policy lever that I need to apply or address in order to achieve this health improvement? There are many possibilities, but I am coming to the conclusion that there is much merit in focusing not only on the health of the individual through the life course, but we must pay particular attention to the health of the pregnant woman. We now have good data to show that the economic earnings of adults are very much related to the dietary intake of their mothers and their nutrition in the early years of life. The nutrition of our children and their mothers is important if they are to be able to take advantage of the educational opportunities that Harrison College continues to offer.

But enough of technical matters! Let us agree with Bob Marley and get together and feel alright.

Mr. Chairman, once again let me thank you for this honor. I hope that I will be spared to be able to continue to be of some service and that from time to time my input may help to make a difference here. I have always been deeply sensitive to the need to remember my origins and those persons who have helped me. I have been ever conscious of one of Brutus' justifications for the murder of Caesar. He says:

*But 'tis common proof,  
That lowliness is young ambition's ladder,  
Whereto the climber-upward turns his face;  
But when he once attains the upmost rung,  
He then unto the ladder turns his back,  
Looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees  
By which he did ascend.*

I do not know whether I have attained the upmost rung or not, but I hope that the character that Hammond ascribed to me will forever prevent me from turning my back upon the ladder.