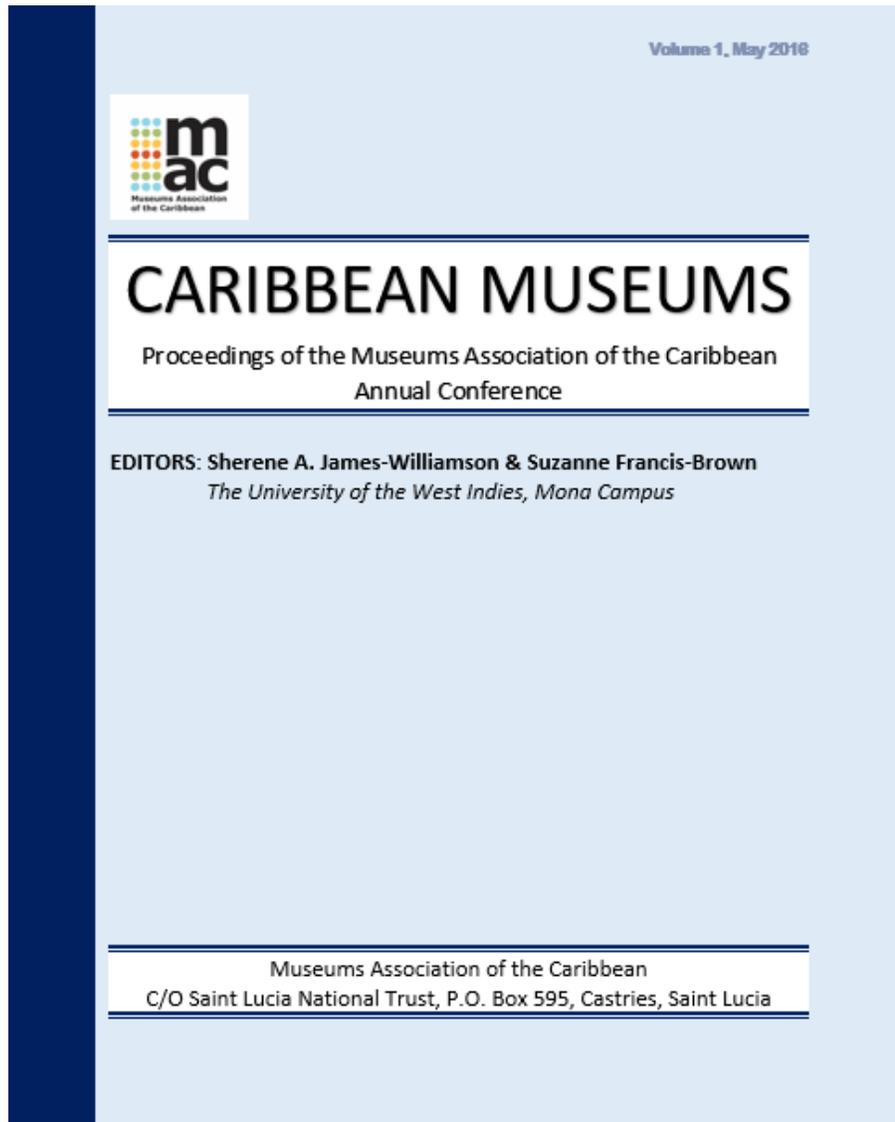


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Keynote Address

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Good morning to you all. When I was so kindly asked to address you this morning on this really auspicious occasion I was both thrilled and suspicious.

I was thrilled because I had seriously considered in offering a paper to be presented but due to other responsibilities never got around to submitting the requisite abstract. And here I am speaking to you this morning. Do not worry it will not be the paper that I had hoped to give as I have still not yet written the abstract.

I was suspicious because when I was younger, notice I did not say young, as that is still a moot point, museums were glass case environments through which you viewed stuffed animals, rocks, and other inanimate and mineral based artifacts. I was suspicious because maybe I was to be put in a glass case as a specimen of an older generation of Jamaicans to be seen as a display. I am very glad to see that the glass case does not exist. I am actually animate and so will address you with pleasure and give off my best.

Perhaps the statement of being of an older generation is the place to begin with just the same remarks of museums being glass case

exhibitions. What I am seeing is change and that is encouraging. Our Caribbean people are thinking, we are becoming more assured of who we are and how we wish to determine and display from whence we have come and what we have done. This is exhilarating but has major hurdles yet to be overcome in the area of establishing museums. But before I address the hurdles let me affirm the need for refreshing those museums that we already have and the need for creating many more but trying to emulate the scale of those built in the developed world such as the Smithsonian in not on, just be us.

Now you will have to forgive me for attempting to address these hurdles from a Caribbean perspective as my experience is limited to Jamaica. So let us begin. One of the hurdles is the availability and adequacy of funding. When one goes to find the money the common question posed as an answer is what for? But there are further interrogations. Why do you want to waste your time and energy researching and displaying the past? Who will it serve? And of course lastly why do you need so much?

I am sure many of you have faced these responses. The question that I want us to

consider is to remember that they will be there and to plan how to prepare your answers in advance. No I am not going to answer them now, that is why you have the wonderful range of sessions in which to ponder the hows. What I would like to remind us this morning of is the fact that we have to face them. In my own first experience it took me 4 years to persuade the people who were responsible for the unused building to allow me to restore it at my own, meaning museum, cost. Today they enjoy the building and it earns them revenue that they could never have been earned otherwise. After that I had a precedent to build on so that becomes one of the answers to the questions. In fact, this was the platform for the subsequent effort being much shorter to get the space and then the funding but that second effort took longer to finish than the first is another story. My experience that I have just shared is open for all to use. Good luck.

Another hurdle is where can the space be found? This is serious hurdle and an interesting challenge. In many instances we run cap in hand to Governments but with frustrating results or should I say with no positive results. I am sure that we have scattered throughout our Caribbean empty buildings that can be restored for the alternative use as display areas for our passion to create museums. The questions are in response to our requests is who is going to restore the building? What danger or damage will your work cause and so on? How long will you want it for? Will there be any return for the owners and so on?

The up-front answer is that the building will be restored and maintained - so why should you worry. This may work in some cases so look for these sites but assuredly not for other sites so this is a major hurdle, space, without which there can be no museum. We may have to sacrifice our desire for more space initially but like the hermit crab we should use the space we can find until we begin to outgrow it and then seek for another larger one.

We are currently having the experience in Jamaica now with creating a new building and are now having difficulty finding the requisite funds to both invest in the exhibitions and to staff it. May I call this the yin and the yang of museums, those who want to create the building but not know how it can be used and those of us who know what we want but cannot get the space or even the money.

I was involved in such an earlier attempt which got so exciting that everyone jumped on board and the idea grew to the point where it imploded as being impossible to fund its recurring or its running expenses. However, that experience was not learnt by those who have planned and executed the present capital investment who have created the building but are not able to as yet continue to fund its contents and running costs. These issues are hurdles that you must discuss, the holistic approach to museum creation and sustainability.

But I am jumping ahead of myself. The last hurdle that I wish to address is of that the problem of sustainability. In our Caribbean it

speaks essentially to being able to pay our bills. There are not many angels who will give museums handouts from time to time. The Jamaican story presently consuming the nation's attention is just that, the failure of an attraction called Outamani. The agency in this case is a Government agency who like Icarus may have gotten too close to the sun and you know what happens if you get too close there. We will wait and see.

So a major part of the planning has to take into account not just what we want to achieve but how will it collect or earn adequate income to meet its on-going obligations. These include guiding and maintenance as well as management. The other aspect of sustainability that we often forget is the cost of refreshing displays. Museums cannot attract people unless there is something new presented from time to time.

I must ask you all to consider a game I learnt many years ago from a well-known Caribbean academic who many of you may know but I will keep his name secret for now. He taught me to understand and practice role playing. In other words, when I come up with my brilliant ideas I then put them to the test of asking myself for example if I was the teacher seeking to plan an "off campus" visit for my class what would I think as the teacher of what my brilliant idea would mean and how it would be received. And the answers usually are scrap it, it won't work. So it goes on the heap of "brilliant ideas". By the way this heap continues to get bigger almost every week. So test yourself on what you wish to create by playing yourself as the audience of

your idea. It is an interesting experience and will save you many heartaches. So again the challenge is not to just create what you want but to fathom what our communities want and indeed need as well.

So having put up the three hurdles and now you have the money, you have the space and an audience through who you can pay the light bill what next? First is to disabuse yourself of the idea that you are going to create something that we all believe when we start on this journey, that which is a Smithsonian, British Museum or similar. Do not be disappointed if it does not go quite like that. You did not raise enough money, you could not find the space and the income budget was not able to meet the expenditure budget. I have been there too right here in Jamaica.

Having crossed the three hurdles this is where the real challenge begins, where the creativity becomes critical. It is the how to interpret the story that is burning in your hearts and heads. But remember the idea of role playing. Again I am not going to answer but pose questions to be answered. The first question to which you all know better than me is why a museum, what kind of museum? I argue today as I have earlier that the glass case is not the only way in this modern world. Change is here. Some of the challenges are how to integrate the video or just sound presentations with the static, how to integrate the information on posters to highlight the static be they objects or just pictures. These in my view are exciting times. One of the new measurements is that must be considered is that of the attention span. It varies

considerably from culture to culture, by age group and from that of yesteryear. In most cases today the attention span is limited. Study it in your community and in the culture of your society and in particular of your proposed audience. Museums are basically based on the visual impact and yes many can be just boring after a few minutes. Try adding sound and feel or action. One of my memorable visits to a museum has been the Natural History Museum in New York with it's Butterfly Hall with live butterflies. For the child's mind in my adult body it was just fab as it was for the kids around me. No sound but plenty feel as the butterflies pitched on my arms and head. Zoos too are museum of the Natural animal world. The zoo in Kingston has a Budgerigar cage in which one can enter having purchased seed and hold out your hands from which these lovely little birds pitch and feed. And of course there is much more, even smell can be engaged.

I have rattled on and on. My overall views are that we have much to consider, lots of questions posed but no answers as they will come in the workshops. That as I have said earlier is why these symposia are so important for collective consideration.

What I am really preaching in the church of our history and heritage today are the principles of collaboration and consultation. We have been brought up in silos, protecting turf, ignoring positive and even negative criticisms on our ego trips. And yes it takes a strong ego to plan and execute a museum.

We are like many of the tourists who visit our shores but do not wish to try our food, for example Jamaica's patties or jerk, Barbados's flying fish and cou cou or shall I say "worse still" Trinidad's Shark and Bake. There was a wonderful ad by the Grace Kennedy company years ago when they launched the Grace brand and the statement was "Try in nuh". They reached out to all. Shall I say more on this, no!

May I now speak briefly on my substantive role as chairman of the Jamaica National Heritage Trust. All our countries have much history and a number of sites of the historic built environment remaining. Here we have challenges. Who built them is one such challenge. Why is because we innately want to rid ourselves of the colonial and enslavement stigma. But let us examine what our ancestors went through and what they contributed to what remains. If we examine these aspects carefully we will find in many cases the colonial masters were those who ordered the buildings and maybe even the design. Much of the work was done by the ancestors and it is up to us to highlight their skills and their contributions during these very difficult times. May I be critical to say that our academics need to examine and interpret the history from this perspective. This is still a challenge today, the "why for" that we want to maintain and even restore these sites. They are the museums of the skills of our past, of the ancestors.

When you go to Port Royal you will be shown the restoration that is now ongoing and let me leave that ball alone to say that I am sure that

your guide will be fulsome on that subject. When you go the synagogue which was once planned to be sold and a modern building placed elsewhere I am sure that your guide will also be fulsome on what is happening and why.

When you go to the synagogue downtown which was once planned to be sold and a modern building uptown I am sure that your guide will be also fulsome not that the destruction not take place but eventually the site was turned into the Jamaican Jewish Heritage center. Many of our churches, public building, forts and civil engineering sites are testament to the skills of yesterday and speak volumes of how good things were done then. If we can find evidence of who did what it will enrich these stories. We can use forts and other old buildings, even churches for wide variety of activities and nowadays not be particular as to their use but particular to their construction.

Some of our island homes have been particularly good presentations of maintenance and restoration in this regard and the buildings themselves as I have indicated before are really “lived in” museums.

One of the finest examples of the alternative use of an old building is the hotel in San Juan known as El Convento, yes an old convent, lovely. And yes I could wax warm about Bimshire and St. Kitts each in the own way have been remarkable in preserving and presenting their historic sites. Where we have to be stronger is in telling their stories.

In Falmouth we have a school built on the lands of Fort Balcarres. This fort is named after the then Governor who tricked the Maroons in 1797, held them captive and sent them to Canada. Some were re-located to Freetown, Sierra Leone. Some even returned to Jamaica from there, yet others stayed in Canada and their descendants are there until today. But I am willing to guarantee that the children and possibly most teachers in that school know nothing of the history of the name associated with the fort and its impact on the Maroon story.

We at the Trust are responsible for archaeology. Only over the last 20 years have we been able to practice Archaeological Impact Assessment and this only on Highway development. The artifacts that we find, conserve, research, catalogue and offer to our museums tell us so much of our past, our rich past. That we should be much more proactive in Archaeological Impact Assessment is true. However, we do have some other academic archaeological activity on specific sites and we do practice Rescue Archaeology.

What artifacts that we have lost over the many years is un-measurable, generations of history either destroyed by development, mining or road construction. So in your discourses look too at the policies that our Governments should be encouraged to adopt for this field.

Finally, may I say again that with regards to museums, the more the better, may I say to museums and I include art galleries and have added to these old built sites, interpret them

clearly, add aspects of the other senses other than sight, remember to attention span of your audiences, try to make them sustainable, that is to earn enough to pay their bills and lastly be justly proud when you get one more going.

My last comment is the need to get our adult Caribbean population to visit our museums, to bring their children to museums, not to just depend on school visits. One way may be to reward adults during an announced museum week when they turn up with their children. Think about it.

May I now say to myself enough, these delegates have a full program. I hope that I have given you some of my insights into directions to take, into questions to answer and remember that all work makes for a dull person, enjoy and thanks for the opportunity to speak to you this morning.

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