



Government of the
Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

National Cultural Policy ADDENDUM II HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

[Culture]

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW (CULTURE)

This addendum to the National Cultural Policy briefly charts the developmental path saw Trinidad and Tobago become the diverse society that it is. It also highlights some of the major institutional developments in the sector.

BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW FOR TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

The people of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago comprise a rich cultural mosaic, emanating from many religious and ethnic origins, which characterize the nation as culturally diverse. This cultural diversity is seen as one of the strengths of the society and one of the major factors in the quest for development.

The nature, meaning and significance of our culture can be seen against the background of the historical forces and experiences that have impinged upon the social, economic and political development of the peoples of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and within the broader framework of the ongoing tasks of creating and managing a democratic society. The term “democratic” here refers not to any specific model of Western style democracies, but rather to the demonstrated principles, values and laws which the people of Trinidad and Tobago have come to associate with their lifestyle. This includes a responsible government elected by the majority of our citizens, and the realistic, accessible political mechanism present in the system of government whereby the People have become empowered, and share in the decisions that shape their lives individually and socially. The location of our culture within the context of creating a democratic society is not simply a theoretical approach, but one that is of absolute necessity.

Indigenous Peoples

The foundation of Trinidad and Tobago’s culture is found in the early existence of several distinct tribes of First Peoples: The Yao; Lokono, Nepoio; Shabao; Carinepagoto; Calipunians; Chaimas; and the Chaguanas.

Prior to the conquest of the country of the Europeans, these First Peoples established settlements throughout the country including in Arima, Mucurapo and Tobago. The use of indigenous crops, their modes of dress, some current place names derived from their native languages---many of which still exist today such as Naparima and Carapichaima---serve as a still-present testimony to our rich, cultural heritage. The island of Trinidad--- originally called Kairi--- served as a religious and spiritual centre for many tribes throughout the Caribbean and on the South American mainland, and possesses many sacred sites.

The European Influence

The native population and the local landscape were significantly transformed by encounters with successive waves of European explorers and colonists who brought with them their culture and social systems. The first wave was led by Christopher Columbus, who ‘rediscovered’ the island on his third voyage to the Indies in 1498.

Spanish colonization led to the enslavement and decimation of the First People. An early example of resistance was the 1699 Arena massacre in which Amerindian tribes rose up and killed Capuchin friars, the Governor and his entourage and burnt down the Mission Church. Meanwhile the Spanish settlers did little to develop the country’s infrastructure.

The composition and cultural make-up of Trinidad and Tobago was changed by the 1783 Cedula of population issued by the King of Spain encouraging the immigration of French planters with their African slaves. By 1797 the population consisted of approximately 10,000 African slaves, 1,000 Indigenous Peoples, 2,000 whites and 4,500 free people of colour. Former Prime Minister and historian Dr. Eric Williams stated, “Trinidad was Spanish in name, French in fact, and African at its base.” By 1797 the English captured Trinidad, however British customs and culture made little impact as the French speaking people- made up of planters and slaves- consisted of more than 95% of the population. By 1838, with a population of nearly 40,000 the French customs and culture remained in the ascendancy and the French patois would remain an important and prevalent language for at least 100 more years.

Tobago

In 1498, Columbus, on his third voyage, also sighted the island of Tobago. He named the island Bella Forma, but its present name is most probably a corruption of “Tobacco.” This was grown by the original Indian inhabitants, and later as a crop by European settlers.

In 1608 King James I claimed sovereignty over the island and for the next 200 years Tobago changed hands many times between the Dutch, the French and the English. For most of the 17th and 18th Centuries, however, Tobago was a haven for pirates.

In 1763 the French ceded Tobago to the British. Like Trinidad, Tobago shared the fate of most islands in the West Indies and became a British sugar colony.

Slavery and Post-Emancipation

One of the most important historical factors influencing the make-up of the Caribbean was the enslavement of African peoples who replaced the First People as the prime source of labour for European plantations in the islands. Although slavery came late to Trinidad, its impact was equally as harsh and oppressive as throughout the rest of the region. This led to a number of slave rebellions that characterized the period of slavery. There were other forms of slave rebellion, such as cultural resistance, in which the slaves resisted assimilation and secretly maintained and passed on the values and traditions from their former homes. These included such cultural retentions as their oral traditions, costuming and musical satire. The Calypso artform descends from musical practices used during this period.

The traditions of the French Grand Balls were combined with aspects of the African masking rituals, embodying forms of caricature, and sacred rituals. Permutated forms of African, French and Spanish music forms, dancing and festive merry making would also combine amongst the various citizenry of the island, drawing new elements to form completely new, island-specific entities. All of this led to the development of the unique ideals and conventions which would become some of the founding practices of Trinidad and Tobago Carnival.

Waves of Immigration

After Emancipation, the authorities and the planter classes continued to seek labourers for all around the world. On October 12, 1806, the first organized settlement of Chinese in the Americas occurred when 192 Chinese immigrants were brought to Trinidad on the ship *Fortitude*. Portuguese labourers from the island of Madeira began arriving between 1834 and 1860. On May 30, 1845, the first indentured (contract) labourers were brought from India to work on the plantations. From 1845 to 1917, it is estimated that approximately 130,000 immigrant labourers (100,000 Hindus and 30,000 Muslims) came from India. These immigrants brought many of their religious ideals and customs with them, including the festival of Divali (Hindu) and the observance of Hosay (Muslim).

Social Unrest and Cultural Progression

Between 1881 and 1884 Carnival was in danger of being stopped all together by the colonial authorities. The greatest act of resistance to this oppression became known as the *1881 Canboulay Riots*. At around the same time, in 1884, serious disturbances in and around San Fernando called the *Hosay Riots*, occurred when the authorities introduced regulations that attempted to restrict and confine the Hosay celebrations to the estates.

Riots and conflict between the 'natives' and the authorities led to the banning of the drum after the 1883 Carnival because the colonial powers feared that the passing of secret messages might become the impetus

for social unity and revolt amongst the blacks. This banning of the drum led to the use of tuned bamboo sticks, called *tamboo bamboo*, in street parades from 1900 to 1934; from 1932, biscuit tins were included as the rhythm instruments in the tamboo bamboo bands.

In 1934 the bands were banned due to street clashes between rival groups. As the musical tradition and innovations of Carnival grew, there was a gradual change to the use of steel instruments between 1935 and 1938. 1938-1939 are considered the unofficial 'birth years' of the modern steel drum and soon the tamboo bamboo bands switched over to steel pans.

The Road to Independence

If Trinidad was a sugar economy in the nineteenth century, it became an oil economy in the twentieth century. The advent of the automobile and the conversion of the British Navy from coal to oil stimulated the search for and the production of oil on the local shores. Mass deposits of oil were discovered in the Guayaguayare, Point Fortin, and Forest Reserve areas. Over the course of the following years, oil and oil related exports came to dominate the economy and transformed much of populace from a rural societal structure to a modernized, urban one.

In the twentieth century, Trinidad and Tobago was also affected by prevailing social changes, characterized by the demands of the people for self-governance and independence from colonialism. In 1903, the population demonstrated its opposition to the colonial authorities, when the Red House was burned to the ground during the Water Riots of that year. They protested the lack of a proper relationship between the government and the people, as well as the total lack of consideration for local public opinion.

The country held its first General Elections in 1925, but it was not until 1946 that there was the first election allowing universal adult franchise. During this period there was an explosive social situation arising out of the discontent of workers who had no legitimate means of expressing their grievances. There were many widespread disturbances amongst the large group of labourers in the society in 1937, leading to the attempted arrest of Union Leader Tubal Uriah Buzz Butler in Fyzabad.

This episode sparked off what has become known historically as *The Butler Riots*, a series of uprisings with ramifications that spread throughout the island, and across the Caribbean. It culminated with the *Moyne Commission Report* in 1939, which highlighted the need for major improvements in the social and welfare provisions of the colony.

Another important event was the establishment of military bases belonging to the United States of America on the island in 1941. The United Kingdom agreed to this arrangement in exchange for 50 destroyers that, at the time, were sorely needed by Britain in its fight with Germany during World War II. These bases included a large section of the Chaguaramas Peninsula and an air base at Wallerfield. The effects of this interaction would have significant and long-standing results on Trinidad, physically, socially and economically. The Americans introduced their culture and money into a stagnant economy, thus shifting the focus and major influence of the country from being Britain to the U.S. Their presence further fuelled the desire for self-determination and independence. In 1956, Trinidad and Tobago achieved self-governance; in 1962 Independence and in 1976 was made a Republic.

Post Independent Trinidad and Tobago

According to the 2004 Central Statistical Office figures in 2000, there were approximately 1.26 million people in Trinidad, the majority of who (80%) had roots that could be traced back to Africa (39.6%) and India (40.3%). The remaining 20.1% was primarily made up of mixed race people and people with roots in England, China, Portugal, Syria, and Lebanon.

With the assimilation of the various ethnic groups over the previous 150 years, almost every religion has followers in Trinidad: Catholicism (26%); Hinduism (23.8%); Anglicanism (10.9%); Islam (5.8%); and percentages of Presbyterians, Baptists, Orisha, Pentecostals, Seventh Day Adventists, and Moravians.

The country's many holidays include: religious holidays (Spiritual Baptist, Good Friday, Easter Monday, Corpus Christi, Christmas Day, Divali, Eid-ul-Fitr); ethnic holidays (Indian Arrival Day, Emancipation Day); and secular holidays such as New Year's Day, Labour Day, Independence Day, and Boxing Day.

BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF NATIONAL CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS OF TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

Pre-Independence Era (1962)

Prior to Trinidad and Tobago achieving its Independence in 1962, the **Ministry of Education and Culture** maintained responsibilities for all culturally related matters. At that time, M. P. Alladin led the Division of Culture. He was a Visual Artist and had no substantive staff assigned. The two areas which received particular attention were:

- (1) Visual Arts in the primary and secondary schools and
- (2) Dance, which was piloted by Dance Icon Beryl Mc Burnie and the Little Carib Movement.

During that period the forum for showcasing the talents of the creative sections of the communities were the National Junior Arts Festival and the bi-annual Music Festival, both organized by their respective Festival Committees. Carnival, another of our major festivals, was managed and organized by the **Carnival Development Committee (CDC)**.

There were many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or community groups that practiced the art forms of Dance, Drama and Music. They also provided opportunities for young, talented citizens to express their creative skills through performances in make-shift theatres and concert halls. Subsequently, two major theatres were constructed in the capital city of Port of Spain and the industrial capital of San Fernando. **Queens Hall** was opened in 1959 and the **Naparima Bowl** opened in 1962.

Post Independence Era

Prior to 1981 the responsibility for the entire Cultural portfolio of Trinidad and Tobago were shared by four (4) separate agencies; the **Ministry of Education and Culture**, the **Culture Unit of the Division of Community Development**, the **National Cultural Council** and the **Best Village Unit**.

The **National Cultural Council** was a small group of outstanding artists who served as an Advisory Body to the Government. Throughout its existence, until 1981, Mr. Andrew Carr, Ms. Marjorie Padmore and Dr. J. D. Elder, each served as Chairman of the Council.

Two of the major outcomes of the N.C.C. were:

- (1) The formation of the **National Drama Association** (led by Mr. James Lee Wah)
- (2) The **National Dance Association of Trinidad and Tobago**, (led by Mr. Torrance Mohammed)

Both were members of the Council at that time.

Mr. Anthony Prospect, another member of the Council, was given the responsibility to establish a similar Musical Body, but this project never reached fruition.

Many other cultural organizations mushroomed subsequently such as the **National Council for Indian Culture (N.C.I.C.)** and the **San Fernando Arts Council**. The **Cultural Unit of the Community Development Division**, led by Cultural Activist Aubrey Adams, provided training opportunities in Dance and Music in communities across the National sphere.

The **Culture Division** grew out of a combination of the **Division of Culture, Ministry of Education and Culture**, and the **Cultural Unit of the Community Development Division**; it was first located in the **Ministry of Community Development and Culture**. In the early stages it functioned mainly in the areas of Research and Training in various community based arts. During the second half of the 1980's, the focus shifted from its original function to one of Arts and Culture Management. It operated as an agency of Government that was charged with the responsibility of facilitating, promoting and preserving the culture of Trinidad and Tobago. This responsibility ensured that citizens continued to develop to the extent that, regardless of their innate differences, they will possess the qualities necessary to enable them to be empowered and live in dignity.

The Culture portfolio has been attached to a number of Ministries in the post independence era. These included:

- **Ministry of Education and Culture**
- **Ministry of Community Development and Culture**
- **Ministry of Sport, Culture and Youth Affairs**
- **Ministry of Youth, Sport, Culture and Creative Arts**
- **Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Women's Affairs**
- **Ministry of Culture and Gender Affairs**
- **Ministry of Human Development, Youth and Culture**
- **Ministry of Culture and Tourism**
- **Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs**
- **Ministry of the Arts and Multiculturalism**

In Tobago, the **Tobago House of Assembly** introduced a department for culture which had specific responsibilities for the cultural development of its local artists and groups. While the Central Government had overriding responsibilities for the National Community, this department focused on the development and preservation of its unique heritage.

The **National Museum and Art Gallery** was established originally as the **Royal Victoria Institute (RVI)** in 1982, in commemoration of the jubilee of Queen Victoria and as part of a general British Colonial policy to build cultural institutes throughout the Commonwealth. It is a general museum and has a unique mission – to foster public awareness, understanding and enjoyment of Trinidad and Tobago's Human and Natural Heritage through the collection, preservation, research, presentation and interpretation of significant and representative collections of that heritage.

The **National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago**, the repository for permanent records and archives of the government as well as historical records of national significance, was established in the aftermath of the

great fire of 1903 at the Red House, Port of Spain. This fire destroyed almost all the records in the Colony. Subsequently, provision was made in the construction of new Government buildings for fireproof strong vaults for the storage of records. Despite the provision of vaults, there was no policy or procedure for the acquisition and preservation of historical records. Over the years, the situation gradually improved and in 1960, Mr. Enos Sewlal was appointed as Government Archivist. The Archives came under the **Office of the Prime Minister** and was relocated at the basement of the **Prime Minister's Office at Whitehall**. There was an absence of support staff and appropriate accommodation; during the years 1964 - 1970 the Archives changed location several times. In 1970, the main repository was established at 105 St. Vincent Street. In 1970 the staff was increased to 20 people.

During the Post Independence era, the **Prime Minister's Best Village Trophy Competition** emerged as a cultural force. The competition evolved into a movement that provided opportunities for local communities to participate in categories of Folk Presentations, Village Olympics, Handicraft, Food Fair, La Riene Rive (Village Queen), and National Environment Competition. These categories provided a forum for the individuals and communities to showcase and develop their cultural practices, which contributed not only to their development but to the cultural development of the national community. Today, many of the nation's outstanding artists and citizens can boast of having been exposed and nurtured in the **Best Village Programme**, as well as the contributions it has made towards their all-round development and their success as citizens.

In the late 1980s the **Faculty of Humanities and Education of the St. Augustine Campus of the University of the West Indies** introduced certificate programmes in the visual, music and theatre arts at the Creative Arts Centre. Now called the **Department for Creative and the Festival Arts**, this institution currently provides baccalaureate level degree programmes in Drama, Music, Visual and Carnival Arts.

In the early 1990s, the **Carnival Development Committee (CDC)** was changed to a Statutory Body and renamed the **National Carnival Commission (NCC)** with over-all responsibility for the development of Carnival. A Board of Commissioners, led by a Chairman, managed the affairs of this body. The main carnival interest groups (**Pan Trinbago, Trinbago United Calypsonians Organization {T.U.C.O.}** and the **National Carnival Bands Association {N.C.B.A.}**) each have responsibility for the development of three of the festival's major cultural components: Pan, Calypso and Mas. Representatives from each body were instituted as Commissioners of the NCC Board of Management.

The late 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century saw the formation of the following institutions:

- **The National Trust of Trinidad and Tobago**
- **The National Steel Orchestra of Trinidad and Tobago**
- **The Entertainment Company of Trinidad and Tobago**
- **The Film Company of Trinidad and Tobago**

Since the decades of the 1970s and 1980s, civil society, in keeping with increases in social activism and cultural awareness, has been making greater demands of the state. Cultural organizations of different enlightening disciplines have rose to prominence and sought increased technical and financial support from the public and private sectors. In the Budget projections of 2002, the government introduced a 150% Tax Deduction to the Private Sector for their financial support to cultural groups and organizations. This has been a welcome gesture for the creative artists, but proper institution of the Act is yet to be finalized in order to realize the effective implementation of this policy.

In October 1999, Cabinet Minute No. 2359 established a **National Policy on the Performing and Visual Arts**, and the **Cultural Council of Trinidad and Tobago** was formed as well. But the Council was never instituted, and is currently awaiting initialization.

In 2005 the **Culture Division** of the **Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs** was given the responsibility of preparing a Draft National Cultural Policy of Trinidad and Tobago.

In July 2007 the Government of Trinidad and Tobago unveiled an innovation to the Steelpan (which was declared the National Instrument of Trinidad and Tobago in 1992) called The G-Pan. The G-Pan is a new family of Steelpans that represent continued innovation in the local pan making fraternity. The revolutionary G-Pans were developed and produced by a team of local researchers, headed by Professor Brian Copeland, Dean of the Faculty of Engineering, UWI. St. Augustine. The improvements include a consequent reduction in the minimum number of Steelpans required to effectively cover the Steelpan orchestra's musical range from eleven to four. Particular mention must be made of the fact that the playing surface of The G-Pan is made from high-grade steel. The result is an instrument that has a musical accuracy and definition, wide musical range, excellent sound projection and improved signal to noise ratio.

April 2008 saw the Launch of the **National Steel Symphony Orchestra**, a formal representative national Steelband which began its work in December 2007. The Orchestra is administered by the **Ministry of the Arts and Multiculturalism** and is composed of 37 auditioned players who represent the best combination of technique and literacy among Steelband players in Trinidad and Tobago. The choice of instruments for the NSSO is the "Genesis" Steelpans or as they are more commonly known – the G-Pans.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has ratified the following Conventions of the United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (UNESCO):

1. Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, ratified on February 16, 2005.
2. Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage, ratified on July 27, 2010
3. Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, ratified on July 22, 2010
4. Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. Paris, ratified on July 26, 2010

The implementation of these conventions is now a high propriety for the state.

In 2010, the bold step was taken to create the first stand-alone Ministry with responsibility for Culture: The Ministry of the Arts and Multiculturalism. In 2012, its presence was bolstered by the creation of the Ministry of National Diversity and Social Integration.

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