



ADDRESS

By

The Honourable Maxie Cuffie, MP

Minister of Public Administration & Communication

Funeral Service of Makandal Daaga

August 13th, 2016

Queen's Park Savannah

- Sister Liseli Daaga, and members of the Daaga families especially Karomana Daaga, one of our Librarians at the Port of Spain Adult Library which falls under my Ministry
- The Honourable Jennifer Baptiste-Primus, Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development and husband
- The Honourable Fitzgerald Hinds, Minister of Works and Transport
- Mr. David Lee, Chairman of UNC and MP for Pointe a Pierre
- Other Members of Parliament
- Mrs. Joan Yuille Williams, Deputy Political Leader of the PNM and Former Minister of Culture
- Mr. Kwesi Mutema, Head of the National Joint Action Committee
- Other members of NJAC's executive
- My Cabinet Colleagues and other members of Government
- Representatives of religious denominations
- Representatives of the media
- Distinguished ladies and gentlemen

On behalf of the Prime Minister and Government of Trinidad and Tobago please accept my sincerest condolences on the passing of Makandal Daaga, husband, father, mentor, political leader, social activist, but perhaps more importantly, a true patriot of Trinidad and Tobago.

If Dr Eric Williams gave us political Independence and gave us a new appreciation of the reasons behind the abolition of slavery, Makandal Daaga's true contribution to Trinidad and Tobago is his leadership of the movement to emancipate us from mental slavery.

Even before Bob Marley sang the words of Marcus Garvey, Makandal Daaga understood that "none but ourselves can free our minds." Trinidad and Tobago, the Caribbean and the African diaspora owe him a tremendous debt of gratitude for helping us emancipate our minds.

I am here to express gratitude to Brother Daaga on behalf of the government, as I mentioned earlier, but also on behalf of my family, especially my nephews Akeem, Gyasi, Chike, and my niece Zakiya and a new generation of Trinidad and Tobagonians citizens who have benefitted from his legacy.

Having attended St Mary's College and the University of the West Indies, Geddes Granger could easily have settled for a life of relative comfort amongst the middle class, black educated elite in Trinidad and Tobago, many of whom joined the public service after their sojourn at the various campuses of the University of the West Indies.

Instead he opted for the road less travelled. Perhaps more accurately though, rather than follow a road already worn by the travelling feet of many before him, Makandal Daaga created his own path and in so doing, changed the fate and fortunes of thousands of Trinbagonians forever.

It will be the task of the Chief Servant's biographers to delve into the historical background of his personality, the clarity of his moral tranquillity, the humility of his intelligence, the spontaneous pleasure of his friendship to find there – if they can – an explanation for his conversion and transformation into the prophetic voice of his era, a voice coarsened by suffering, yet full of hope.

Those who saw his transformation have spoken of the change in his rhetoric, from ideologue at the campus to a voice raised in denunciation of the injustices that brought death to the hopes and aspirations of so many young black families. His voice, which had hitherto reflected generalities and abstractions, took on the harsh realism of daily life in Trinidad and Tobago. His voice took over the cry of a crushed people and, in a country where colour and class had made a prostitute of words, he gave them back their true meaning.

And to quote Calypsonian "Lord Fluke" with his arms raised in the air like a tower, he shouted "Power, Power, Power."

Black Power meant the power of a united black people. It rekindled the latent strength of a people accustomed to being told their aspirations were too grand.

It evoked memories of a people who, rather than be subjugated by others, were prepared to lay down their lives. Power and black were no longer antonyms.

To the delight of the downtrodden, the fury of the powerful economic elite, to the amazement of the Government, the discomfiture of the upper-class black community, and the disquiet of regional governments.

Makandal Daaga's quest for economic, political and social equality in Trinidad and Tobago found rich soil in the smouldering discontent of the masses who felt, with some degree of justification, that the legitimate expectations of social change occasioned by our attainment of constitutional Independence in 1962, were not being met with the alacrity it demanded.

But how far have we come? While Daaga traded the traditional wear of the north for that of the south, our young blacks today are trading the traditional wear of their parents for that of the North American jails, their pants sagging below their waists, their clothing no longer a symbol of strength, but rather of submission. While Geddes Granger traded his birth name for another that spoke of resilience and destiny, our young black males are trading theirs for the names of animals, like “dawg” and “hoss”.

While his clenched fist came to symbolise the power held by each one of us, his open mind saw beyond the accidents of geography and the antecedents of our birth that caused us to be born with varying levels of melanin.

For him, black power never meant black triumphalism, it meant the reversal of decades of institutionalised colonial oppression. For him black power was never to be equated with black domination, it meant all of Trinidad and Tobago, irrespective of race, colour, creed, or class being afforded the opportunity to compete on a level playing field.

Today, there are many of us who sit in the shade of trees planted by Makandal Daaga, and for this we are eternally grateful. Today, our political culture is richer for the involvement of the National Joint Action Committee.

Our culture has been enriched by competitions introduced by the Cultural Arm of NJAC, and our history has been made more diverse by its social philosophies.

In his latter years, Makandal Daaga's action of becoming a member of People's Partnership, earned for him simultaneously the anger and the praise of many. But even in that move, one saw the expanse of his thinking and the breadth of his vision of uniting Trinidad and Tobago.

The fact that he was willing to publicly dissociate himself from the corruption that attended many of the projects, was in fact, evidence enough for me, that the principles for which he stood in the 1970's had not been sacrificed on the altar of political expediency.

Today our nation is poorer for the passing of Makandal Daaga, but we are richer for his contribution to the growth and development of our political culture. We thank his parents for the gift that they bestowed upon Trinidad and Tobago.

We thank sister Liseli and the Daaga family for the tremendous sacrifices they would have been called upon to make in loaning their patriarch to us for a while. And we thank NJAC for staying the political course as they have, over the years.

As we reflect today on a life well-lived and pray for the repose of his soul, and his union with the ancestors, we beg that God will grant Makandal Daaga eternal rest from his labours, and reward for his many sacrifices.

To those whom he has left behind, we pray that you will find comfort in the fact that he has touched thousands of lives, he has enriched our society, and he has left his mark, indelibly etched on the landscape of his beloved Trinidad and Tobago.