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Subject: Grand Lodge Debate

As human beings, we were physically born helpless, then developing to the stage of creeping, then to the balancing stages of walking, running and jumping.

Mentally, we have developed from birth, through childhood to adolescence and into adulthood. During the initial stages of development, we were taught by parents, mentors and teachers all that was required to help us to survive in the world. Eventually, we have taken those teachings and fended for ourselves by taking on the responsibilities of marriage, the responsibilities of nurturing children and the responsibilities of managing and running businesses. At the latter stage of this development, we have thanked our parents and guardians for the nurturing provided to us and we have struck out for ourselves, knowing that they are always there to give us the moral and sometimes physical support required to keep us on even keel.

Psychologically, we have grown to have the confidence to believe that we have the ability to fend for ourselves by taking the teachings given to us by our parents and guardians and applying them to ourselves.

Politically, we as a Caribbean people have grown from the times when our foreparents were subjected to slavery, through emancipation into internal self governance and now into independence. This developmental period can be likened to the foregoing mentioned stages of human development where the colonial masters acted as our parents, nurturing us through the developmental stages up to independence. Although these Caribbean islands are all politically independent nations, they have, nonetheless, recognized that they are inter-dependent and it can be seen at this present stage of our development that efforts are in train to form the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME) further recognizing the seemingly dire consequences for each of the nation states, from a global perspective, if we fail to form such an association. We, as a distinct grouping, must each combine our small resources so that, as a whole, we can make an impact on the global scene in order to survive in this competitive world, bearing in mind that not one of the larger nations outside of our region is interested in the continued survival of any of our small island states.

During these periods of political developments, there have been other institutions which have been formed and some whose maturity and development have paralleled those on the macro political scale. For example, The University College of the West Indies has evolved into a vibrant University of the West Indies and this particular institution has played a significant role in hatching, developing and maturing the thinking of its graduates, who have, in turn, transmitted their ideas and thinking to the wider populace. The mind of the

Caribbean man is now at that matured state where he exudes confidence in his abilities and has a sense of his own self worth.

There are, however, other such formed institutions which, although having been able to survive the testing periods of father time, have lagged behind in the developmental process . Freemasonry in this section of the globe is one such institution. The District Grand Lodge of Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean was formed in 1741, at a period in history when Britain controlled every aspect of political life in the islands. Needless to say, The United Grand Lodge of England, in the context of the times, controlled every aspect of life masonically also. Whilst District Grand Masters may have then been selected by the local brethren, and recommendations made for worthy brethren to the level of Grand Rank, nothing much administratively has changed since then. Ironically, the membership of Freemasonry boasts the presence of many of those matured thinkers alluded to earlier. Why, in spite of their presence in the fraternity, our District Grand Lodge has remained anchored in the safe harbour of the United Grand Lodge of England for such a long period of time and has not developed at a faster rate, is an indication of the deep psychological and sociological trauma to which the mind of the Caribbean man had been subjected. The present ground swell of emotion within the fraternity is evidence enough that the natives are becoming restless.

Indeed, if the question must be asked whether we are ready to form our own Grand Lodge, it must be asked with tongue in cheek and must surely be a rhetorical question. Let us break down a Lodge into its finest components. It is composed of individual men who possess particular skills and qualities. Many of these persons have distinguished themselves locally, regionally and internationally and therefore can consider themselves on par with their peers who come from the physically larger developed countries. The esteem in which a person holds himself is not directly proportional to the size of the country from which he originates. That esteem comes from within and can propel the person from Culpepper Island to great heights. The human resources are therefore available within our ranks to set up and administer a Grand Lodge. What is note worthy in the formation of our own Grand Lodge is that our Scottish brethren are more than willing to join with us in this worthy quest. They have their own District Grand Lodge of Barbados and a big plus for the proposed institution is their positive attitude towards this proposal. This attitude is exemplified by one of their decision makers, who, when asked his opinion with respect to the formation of a regional Grand Lodge, stated “ We have no choice”.

Whilst there is a feeling among many brethren that the United Grand Lodge of England is cutting us adrift, I would not let their actions determine the route that we should go. The formation of a regional Grand Lodge is a natural progression in the development of the Caribbean man’s psyche. We thank the United Grand Lodge of England for the role that they have played in our development to date, but must now inform them that the time has now arrived for us to strike out on our

own and chart our own course. We are not cutting ties with them because we will all be part of one Masonic family. We are simply saying that we have now reached a stage in our maturity when it is prudent for the adult to leave the parents and set up his own home. It may be stated that, since being formed in 1741, this adult, the District Grand Lodge of Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean, has become quite long in the tooth and has spent an inordinately long time in the parent's house. There is a saying, "Nothing before its time". That time has arrived.

We are aware that there will be challenges in the setting up of a Grand Lodge, challenges in the use of ritual, challenges in regalia, challenges in the constitution and the list goes on. Being the eternal optimist, I consider these challenges as being just that.....challenges. Once there is the will to move onward, then the way to surmount these challenges will be revealed.

The setting up of a Grand Lodge is absolutely necessary as a step forward in the development of ourselves as Caribbean people in general and to our Masonic development in particular. The development and progress of the main river in our lives will be enhanced only by the development and progress of the contributing tributaries which connect into it. Freemasonry is one of the tributaries feeding into the self esteem, self assurance and confidence so necessary for us as Caribbean people to take our place in the main stream of life in this global village. Setting up of this Grand lodge is about sovereignty, about having the ability and confidence to manage our affairs and taking responsibility for our Masonic lives. We cannot be satisfied to allow others, far remote from our shores, to dictate to us the direction in which we should go masonically without us having any input in the decision making process. We have never been offered that distinction and chances are, two hundred and sixty six years after the formation of our District Grand Lodge, it will never be offered.

The initiative must now be grasped with both hands, for us to make our contribution to the shaping and moulding of the psyche of the Caribbean man by the formation of the Grand Lodge of the Eastern Caribbean, feeling fully assured of its success. We owe it to our children and our grand children. Petty differences and minor issues will always arise, but we must be mature enough to recognize them for what they are and move on to a higher plane. Failure to form this institution will be a failure to ourselves and to future generations. We must keep the developmental ball rolling and not leave it to our children and grand children to initiate. Give them a head start, Let us not fail them.