



Report on
Technology and Society in the Caribbean
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Caribbean Students' Conference
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YOUTH ISSUES SUMMARY

Executive Summary

Caribbean students meet on a regular basis and discussions are commonly held to cover regional issues among students at institutions such as Concordia University, Princeton University, Howard University, and many others in North America. In light of this, one may ask what about the 1st MIT Caribbean Students' Conference on Technology and Society in the Caribbean was different or even important. I can conclusively highlight four major features that made it a unique and necessary expression:

Involvement of a Head of Government:

When a Head of Government meets with students on issues they are all passionate about, it is empowering. Moreover, when a Head of Government formally responds to a student-run initiative (and in this case even changes his national-level schedule to accommodate the conference), it adds to the potency of the interaction to effect change.

The theme of empowering emergent leaders

The term "emergent leaders" was coined at a Global Leadership Interlink seminar at UWI St. Augustine campus in spring 2002. Many participants at the 1st MIT Caribbean Students' Conference heard the term for the first time, and readily responded to it. In the closing plenary, there was a moment of epiphany as participants' were asked to picture themselves as emergent leaders, sitting among future Patrick Manning's and Portia Simpson-Miller's in the auditorium. Workshops such as those on diversifying entrepreneurship in the region vividly illustrated tangible change agents to these emergent leaders.

Parallel thinking

People recognized, in our parallel thinking exercises that it was possible to encounter novel approaches to problems by simply reaching beyond things they always say and think, and exploring untouched areas of fact and truth.

National leaders need to understand technology:

In the keynote address, the picture of accelerated development in Trinidad and Tobago as a result of the government's understanding of the power of technology was a key element that resounded in both the Q&A and the workshop-discussions which followed.

As a result, the twelve workshops based on the idea of effecting human, social and national transformation through the propagation of values-based development principles, patterns and approaches, were imbued with positive energy.

Youth Issues Covered

As a product of young people, this conference, considering societal issues as a whole, approached many issues from the perspective of young people. As you read on, you will discover how a group of brilliant young people addressed the leadership issues of their own generation, in looking through the lenses of twelve Caribbean socio-economic areas.

However, I'll first make some overarching general comments on the Caribbean Diaspora's youth, in light of what was achieved at the conference.

In most cases, MIT students planned and moderated the conference workshop sessions, in order that all the participants would see MIT leading by example in bringing students (Emergent Leaders) to the table. For a weekend, these students took leadership roles in the determination of their future. Presiding in each workshop was a "Knowledge Base" or an expert from the field who was not allowed to moderate, but was present solely to assist when the student moderators found participants' questions were beyond their own scope. Each Knowledge Base was asked to give his/her educated assessment of the students' discussion at the very end.

This method was quite effective in allowing students to think and speak on youth issues like AIDS, Crime, Ethnicity in identity, Music and even those beyond typical "youth issues" such as merging Caribbean Currencies and importing aspects of the Aerospace Industry to the Caribbean.

The take-home message from these discussions is that leaders encourage more leadership and empowerment among Caribbean Youth when they make decisive actions towards incorporating them into the leadership process of their region. Commonly within Caribbean culture, the older are regarded as wiser, and in their presence, young people are typically not expected to contribute verbally, as much as they are asked simply to listen and learn. These workshop exercises expressed a healthy, balanced breaking away

from such a norm, as our highly respected, older experts sat mostly silently as Knowledge Bases in the room and listened to young people speak.

Beyond just the workshops, the Prime Minister's keynote Address also spoke volumes into the issue of Caribbean Youth. As mentioned above, when a Head of Government meets with students on issues they are all passionate about, it is empowering.

Socio-Economic Issues Covered in workshops Directly Approaching Youth-Related Issues:

In terms of workshop topics that were directly tied into the issues faced by Caribbean youth, the following workshops covered areas such as sexuality, education and career advancement, leadership examples for young people, crime among Caribbean youth, race and identity, and the influences and effect of music.

- AIDS Workshop
 - HIV/AIDS: the youth-related problems:
 - In Trinidad AIDS is prevalent in marginalized populations among the young people: prostitutes, gays, and illegal drug users. Therefore Caribbean Youth commonly see the disease as less “*medicalized*” and more moralized: i.e. if you have it it’s because you did something wrong. In fact, among Caribbean youth, HIV/AIDS is universally seen as a “gay” disease (so others have a false sense of invincibility).
 - An issue particularly prevalent in Haiti and perhaps other islands is promiscuity among males – which is not necessarily seen as an issue of immorality
 - HIV/AIDS: Workable answers, as identified by youth:
 - Young people generally identify that morals are very important in solving the problem of the spread of HIV/AIDS i.e. the safest sex is no sex. Many turn to the institution of the church (Christianity is very prevalent in Caribbean cultures) and other religious institutions, for moral frameworks in which to steward their sexuality
 - Removing inaccurate stigmas among young people (via educational outreach) helps in projecting facts about safe social interactions with HIV/AIDS patients.

- Brain Drain or "Brain Gain"?
 - Young people expressed the need for pull factors to return to the Caribbean.
 - At present many Caribbean governments have not engaged this generation of Emergent Caribbean Leaders to return home, or even informed them of opportunities for them to contribute to the region's needs from where they are in the United States.
 - Although people constantly look at the negative impact of the migration of young people as students and professionals leaving Caribbean nations, this workshop was a step towards looking at this very same phenomenon as *brain gain* instead of Brain Drain. The students discussed ways in which their presence away from home (as Caribbean students in the US) can actually help the region.

- Caribbean Examples of Good Leadership
 - Henri Christophe, Shirley Chisholm, Marcus Garvey, V. S. Naipaul and Alexander Hamilton were used as examples of the high quality of leadership that stems out of the Caribbean.
 - Young people examined what these people had at their disposal and the nature of the impact they made.
 - They compared these leaders' opportunities with their own and looked at how their own lives were lining up, or not.
 - A major point that came out of the workshop was this: Leadership is not only necessary in famous leaders like the ones listed, but it is a question of individuals making daily decisions to lead by example or not. Too much emphasis on famous leaders removes the importance of each individual young person's responsibility to lead in his/ her own walk of life.

- Crime
 - The main material of this workshop was a Crime-Reform case study from Trinidad and Tobago, in which a clergyman worked with a group of juvenile delinquents in Port-Of-Spain.
 - The main finding was that crime among young people can only be stopped and prevented by teaching respect and social responsibility among youth predisposed to crime. Many young criminals choose such a path in a quest to gain respect, and if they are respected and shown love by elders in their community, they are less likely to turn to lives wrongly empowered by criminal activity.
- The Legacy of Race
 - Caribbean born students from different universities around Boston were asked to present how their cultural identity has impacted their experience of living away from home. It was amazing to witness the embracing of ‘Caribbean-ness’ that occurred during these presentations.
 - There was some debate and discussion about which group a Caribbean student should identify with while in the United States, especially with respect to African Americans. Many people expressed a preference to identify with other Caribbean students rather than a person of similar external ethnicity – for example, a Caribbean girl with an East Indian father was more willing to identify with other Caribbean young people rather than a person from India. This was an indication of the strong impact that culture, rather than race, has on the people of our generation.

- The Music Industry in the Caribbean
 - Visible Problems:
 - Young people listen to often sensual and/or violent rap, soca, reggae music, openly admitting that many youth's issues are associated with the poor values perpetrated in music.
 - New musical artistes write lyrics to make money, despite the fact that it is to the detriment of a generation of young black men (referring to the pervasive violence seen among black youth throughout the western hemisphere and the fact that they all listen to similar kinds of musical lyrics)
 - Lord Kitchener (Trinidadian Calypsonian, Aldwyn Roberts) once said that no artist makes a hit, it is the audience. Along these lines, the students in this workshop acknowledged that the audience has to embrace a recording / performance for it to become popular. They also admitted that there exists positive music but it is not heard because it is less sensual and therefore less appealing to the majority of youth
 - Workable Solutions:
 - On one side, artiste-driven Youth Campaigns/ Community effort to stop listening to vulgar songs under the understanding that society influences music, which in turn largely influences society (for e.g. Music desensitizes young people of Caribbean society to crime)
 - On the other side, perhaps music is being given too much credit as some young people are able to filter, (more than likely because of nurturing and other positive experiences they have with their parents and leaders). For example, in St. Vincent, young black men listen to the same music as their counterparts in other CARICOM countries, but do not display the level of violence seen among young criminals in other islands like Trinidad and Jamaica.

Socio-Economic Issues Covered in workshops *Beyond Youth-Related Issues*:

Young people who can lead are less likely to be led astray by negative social stigmas and misaligned ideals. A large part of society's youth-related problems can be solved when young people are incorporated into wider society as valuable people who are able to contribute. In the following workshops, rich discussions produced stellar, novel discussions about Caribbean regional advance, beyond simply youth-related issues. Such deliberations reinforced to the youth that they too, can lead.

- Aerospace Technology in the Caribbean
- Diversifying Entrepreneurship in the Caribbean
- Drinking Water in Haiti
- Solar Power in the Caribbean
- The "Caribbean Euro" debate session
- The Caribbean in the World – G8 Summit 2006

Workshops & Knowledge Bases

Aerospace Technology in the Caribbean

Miss Ayanna Samuels, Jamaica

AIDS

Miss Nameeta Dookeran, Trinidad and Tobago

Mrs. Solange Baptiste, Trinidad and Tobago

Brain Drain or "Brain Gain"?

Dr Claire Nelson, Jamaica

Mr. Nigel Henry, Trinidad and Tobago

Caribbean Examples of Good Leadership

Miss Nicole Stark, Barbados, USA

Dr Claire Nelson, Jamaica

Crime

Dr Patricia Zamor, Trinidad and Tobago, Haiti

Diversifying Entrepreneurship in the Caribbean

Mr. Ronald Lammy, Guyana

Drinking Water in Haiti

Miss Sarah Bird, USA

Solar Power in the Caribbean

Mr. Shaheer Hussam, USA

The "Caribbean Euro" debate session

Dr. George Irish, Montserrat

The Caribbean in the World – G8 Summit 2006

Dr George Irish, Montserrat

The Legacy of Race

Dr Patricia Zamor, Trinidad and Tobago, Haiti

The Music Industry in the Caribbean

Mr. Ronald Lammy, Guyana

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