Emancipation & Carnival: A Historical Perspective of Trinidad and Tobago
In 1498 Trinidad was visited and claimed for Spain by Christopher Columbus, the colony was almost immediately abandoned for 300 years. In 1783, the Crown issued the *cedula de poblacion* (Cedula of Population) to prevent the colony from falling into the hands of the Protestant English.
Cedula de poblacion allowed foreign settlement on the island by members of friendly Catholic nations. All immigrants would swear allegiance to Spain and would follow the laws of that country.

The increasing political uncertainty in France and the existing French West Indian colonies at that time made a move to Trinidad extremely attractive.

The influx of thousands of French settlers from the islands of Grenada, St. Lucia and Martinique transformed Trinidadian society. Port-of-Spain, the benighted and neglected port city, was made the seat of the ruling city council in 1784 and gradually developed, while the countryside saw the rise of new French-owned plantations and French plantation houses.
For the next century Trinidad became a prosperous sugar colony.

And with sugar came capitalism and slavery.
For half a century the French settlers developed the Carnival: a season a gay and elegant festivals extending from Christmas to Ash Wednesday.

In addition to dinners, balls and fêtes champêtres, leading members of society, in disguise would drive about the streets in their carriages, and in the evenings would visit the houses of their friends which were thrown open for the occasion.

Letters and journals of these French settlers reveal much about the details of these celebrations. We have found that at these balls the plantocracy (the Planter Class) found it amusing to dress up and dance like their African slaves as with the Character Negre Jardin (Garden Slave) which was later played by the slaves themselves in the time old tradition of the oppressed imitating the oppressor (in this instance imitating them).
"I wish, Bagley, you had been here in the time of the Carnival; you have no idea of the gaiety of the place during the season. Ovid’s Metamorphoses were nothing compared to the changes that took place in persons of the Catholics of Trinidad. High and low, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, all found masking suits for the Carnival."

Letter of Major W-------- Trinidad, 4th May, 1827

The Son of a Military Officer. Four Years Residence in the West Indies During The Years 1826, 7, 8 and 9, London, August 18, 1831. Chapter XXV.
Historical evidence that dates back to nearly 200 years show the fascinated beginnings of the Trinidad and Tobago Mas.

The African slaves were not allowed to participate in the Carnival celebrations as it was strictly exclusive to the elite planter class and it was only after the Abolition of Slavery in 1834 that the freed-slaves began to participate in the festivities.

The costumes of the freed slaves were simple and consisted of swans down, strips of coloured cloth, alpagatas, grease, tar, burlap and assorted rags.

They used goat-skinned drums as well as tin kettle and salt box, the bangee and shack-shack. The bangee was either a banja or sanza, an African instrument consisting of a box with a steel or bamboo tongues arranged to give different tonal effects.

The freed slaves first celebrated what became their form of Carnival, the Cannes Brulées (the burning of the canes) or Canboulay on August 1st, 1834 to commemorate their Abolition from Slavery. This was the portrayal of the burning of the cane from the sugar plantations, when the slaves at the time were mustered at the call of horns and conch shells and marched off to put out the fires.
Subsequently, the *Canboulay* portrayals took place just after mid-night on Dimanche Gras, the Sunday before Carnival. The Carnival on the streets jolted the elite class who stopped participating in it altogether though they kept their mask balls and the house-to-house visiting for fêtes.

As participation by the masses increased, the criticism of the upper-class intensified.

This became especially so during the Carnivals of the 1880s when Captain Arthur Baker was in office. Captain Baker had sworn to wipe out *Canboulay* for good and he, with a contingent of policemen, had made a frontal attack on *Canboulay* masqueraders in those historic *Canboulay* riots in Port-of-Spain during the Carnival of 1881.

However, the Governor of that time, Sir Sanford Freeling, had taken the part of the masqueraders and had confined the police to barracks. He addressed the people at the Eastern Market on the following day and Carnival’s most violent incident ended in the triumph of commonsense and humanity.

Carnival therefore, continued to be a central part of the lives of the newly freed people of Trinidad and Tobago. This was the turning point, the watershed of the Mas as it moved away from the elegant courtyards of the plantocracy and to the backyards and streets of the black working class.

The immediate years of Post-Emancipation saw a shrinking participation of the white elites in the Mas.
Planter sentiments at the time were that the slaves could use the confusion of Carnival as an occasion for uprising.

Long after the slaves were emancipated by the British in 1838, the colonial administration continued to fight the now-Africanized Carnival by first banning, drums, masks and dancing in the streets; these were essentially the ways in which the freed Africans celebrated Carnival.
August 1st 1838, was the official day of the Emancipation celebration but somewhere in the mid 1840’s the Colonial administration moved the celebration from that day and tacked it onto the pre-Lenten Carnival celebrations.

*J’Ouvert* (pronounced “Jou-vay”) originates from the French Jour Ouvert which means ‘day break’ and it signals the start of the bacchanalia that is T&T Carnival. The roots of *J’Ouvert* in Trinidad go back 200 years, with the arrival of French plantation owners.

In the early days of Trinidad Carnival, the French planter class began their Carnival celebrations immediately after Christmas and continued the festivities to midnight on Shrove Tuesday.

One major elements of *J’Ouvert* is the folklore. Early Trinidad society was especially superstitious and strange creatures of folklore such as the Soucouyant, Diablesse, Phantom, Loup Garou, Papa Bois and other nocturnal characters were brought in the darkness of the pre-dawn Masquerade.

*J’Ouvert* is, therefore, highly traditional and full of symbols, culture and heritage.

Today, it can be recognised by a spectacle of devils covered in blue or red paint, oil and sometimes mud. Traditional *J’Ouvert* characters also include the Midnight Robber, Dame Lorraine, Burroquite, Pierrot Grenade and Jab Molassie.

All these characters play a pivotal role in the *J’Ouvert* celebrations as they mimic and mock social, political and even economic issues of the day. They proclaim their grandeur, question the social order and ridicule prominent figures in society both locally and abroad.

In the early years, the *J’Ouvert* celebrations were originally conceived to mimic the African slave masters and highlight the discrepancies of the system.

The dirty devils take to the streets and slightly terrorise the onlookers, threatening to spill paint on their clothes while pretending to be intoxicated and out of control. They are sometimes seen held back by a chain or rope around their necks.

Today, *J’Ouvert* traditionally begins at 4:00 a.m. on Carnival Monday and marks the official start of the two day Carnival celebrations in Trinidad & Tobago.
Post-Emancipation shows the rising of a number of demonical representations that were evolved during the 19th and 20th centuries. These characters developed slowly, often beginning as satirical reflections on people or issues in society, creatures from folklore or history or creative elaborations on French and other European Carnival figures.
The characters that emerged were Dames Lorraine, the Burrokeets, the Clowns, Bats, Bears, Red and Blue Devils, Jab Jabs, Jabs Molassi, the Wild Indian bands, the Moko Jumbies (stilt walkers), the Midnight Robbers and later the multitudes of Sailors and soldiers commandeering the streets and sidewalks from would-be onlookers.
Dame Lorraine

A traditional Carnival character that was played by the former slaves who wanted to mock the French planters wives. Formerly this character was played by cross-dressing men as well as women. But it is now primarily a female masquerade. The costume consists of an all-over floral print dress with padded posterior and breasts and sometimes a pregnant belly.
Often certain characters came out at different times of the Carnival. Some emerged during the early morning hours of **J'Ouvert** (jouvay), the explosive and ecstatic opening of Carnival, while others were better suited to the daylight hours. Many costume traditions had ritualized speeches associated with them, like the Midnight Robbers who held you up at mock gun or sword point and regaled you with terrible tales of their terrible deeds.

Left:
Picture of Midnight Robber
The materials used by Africans just before and after Emancipation, according to some writers demonstrates that Carnival was essentially African.

- Rattles or bells removed the character from normal humanity
- Body painting was sacred, linking the masker to the ancestral world
- Coloured cloth, portrayed the glory of lineage
- Appliqués and markings on the cloth were the signs of secret societies and military units, and, like decorative calabashes, commemorated victories or hunting scenes.
- Crowns were used by selected monarchs of secret masking societies to show power and authority
- Feathers were instruments that demonstrated the ability of the spirits to fly to different worlds
- Beads were used to date back to antiquity in Africa
- Umbrellas carried by many masqueraders were symbols of rank
- Sceptres', crowns, and wands are further expressions of kingships and glory
A National Celebration

The immediate years of Post-Emancipation saw a shrinking participation of the white elites in the Mas, however the end of World War I and the rise of nationalism brought the classes together on the streets in the famous Victory Carnival of 1919.
After Trinidad gained independence from Britain in 1962, Carnival and its traditions occupied a central place in the national culture of the new country. The centrality of Carnival made it imperative that the festival be something the new state and its administrators could nurture and develop.

While tourism may not have been the main focus of the local economy at the time, it has gained momentum as a potentially lucrative alternative to the petroleum and agricultural base of the country's economy.

Today Trinidad and Tobago Carnival is well-known the world over and it continues to attract international masqueraders and spectators year after year.

It is at the core of T&T's new but growing creative industry.

The second part of this presentation will explore how the creation of the Carnival is in itself a viable and sustainable business year round.
Part II

Carnival: A viable and sustainable business
Carnival 365 days a Year

Mas

- Artisans (Craftsmen) – Wire benders
- Designers
- Managers
- Marketers/Promoters
- Sponsors
Carnival 365 days a Year

Fetes

- Live Music / Performers/ Calypso
- Pan
- Sponsorship
- DJs
- Sound Systems
- Stage Design and Production
- Lighting
- Food and Beverages
- Security
- Printing of Promotional Material
Carnival 365 days a Year

Tourism
- Tours
- Transportation
- Hotels & Inns
- Restaurants
Carnival 365 days a Year

Food & Beverage
- Street Vending
- Established Restaurants

Craftsmen
- Local Arts and Crafts
- Clothing
- Souvenirs
The Mas Academy

In recognizing the potential of Carnival as a viable and sustainable industry year round, the National Carnival Bands Association of Trinidad and Tobago (NCBA) in collaboration with University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) and the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs, has embarked upon the creation of the Mas Academy.

The Academy, which was launched in July of this year, seeks to certify the Carnival Artists so their contributions can be recognized.

These Artists currently enjoy employment from the 165 Carnivals around the world which mimic our style of Carnival.
The Mas Academy

The Academy offers courses in:

- PRODUCTION OF A JUNIOR CARNIVAL BAND
- WIRE BENDING
- DRAWING FOR MAS
- PLASTIC
- TECHNOLOGY
- BAND MANAGEMENT
- METAL CRAFT
- CARNIVAL ADJUDICATION
The Mas Academy

The Aim of the Academy is to professionalise the Carnival by offering certification in the various areas involved in the Industry.

Since the launch in July, the Academy has dealt with an influx of inquires and registration.

Even more courses will be developed in the future as feedback has shown a number of other areas where the Academy can help to develop the Industry.
The NCBA looks forward to working with various countries to develop their Mas and to make it an Industry that can help support the economy,
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