
In Memoriam

Gladstone Holder: A World Citizen With a Passion for Classical Culture

by Timothy Rush

Gladstone Holder, dean of Barbados journalists and a dear friend of *EIR* and the LaRouche movement, died after unsuccessful surgery on Aug. 7. He was 81 years old.

Holder was trained in a British colonial education system, turning the best of that education, especially rooted in the study of Shakespeare, against the ingrained habits of that colonialism, especially within the minds of his fellow Barbadians and others in the British Caribbean.

Although Holder rose to be Chief Information Officer of the Barbadian government at the time of Barbados' independence in 1966, his first and greatest love was teaching. His second career was journalism. Psychologically operating "behind enemy lines," in a British Commonwealth country where the ideology of colonialism remains strong, he kept up his beautifully written and conceived weekly columns in the Barbados press to the last. Although he wrote with passion and discernment on everything from Classical music (members of the Barbados Chamber Symphony played at his funeral) to the game of cricket, his abiding theme was the erosion of *agapē* in international affairs, and the destruction of cognitive powers in educational policy.

A Lifelong Passion for Real Knowledge

He came from a family poor in money terms, but rich in dignity and the love of reading. He once recounted, "On my ninth birthday, when my father could not have afforded a gift for 60¢, he enrolled me at the Public Library, our first free university, giving me the most enduring gift of all." Throughout his school years, he bridled at grammar or vocabulary taught isolated from content. His most beloved teacher, Frank Collymore, once asked him with puzzlement, why he had scored 92 out of 100 in an essay exam, but only 22 out of 100 in the accompanying grammar exam. "There's

not a single grammatical error in your composition and it's a lively piece of writing!" Collymore exclaimed. "That's just the point," replied Holder. "In the grammar, I cannot tell the difference between a gerund and a verbal noun. . . . Don't you think the meaning is more important than the names given them?"

"In the public system the goal of genuine literacy is undermined by acceptance of an adulteration called functional literacy," Holder would write years later. "It is like putting water in the milk, or sand in the sugar. This linguistic depreciation has its burgeoning offshoot in what we now hear of as education for jobs. . . . Some of the methods I've seen fill me with agony. I've seen prescriptions for words that ought to be known at certain ages—as if language were divorced from . . . experiences, actual or vicarious, of life. . . . I may have been able to withstand the barren and illusory strategy of learning words in isolation because my parents and grandfather, before I went to school, expanded my vocabulary contextually, before the experts had reduced reading to a pseudo science."

In his 35 years as Barbados' journalistic public conscience, he wielded his pen with ceaseless ferocity against any effort to deviate curriculum from reading original Classics of literature. He had no use for "role models," "Basic English," "Ebonics," "critical thinking," "problem solving," "information society" (which he denounced as a "scam"), or related humbug. Nor could he abide "teaching to the test" or "learning skills," as a substitute for the living qualities of irony and insight from a Shakespeare, a Jonathan Swift, or a Joseph Conrad. In one of his most searing columns, he asked, if some consider abortion of a fetus a crime, is it any less an abortion of the student's mind, to deny the student access to the greatest minds of human history? He despised



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the use of computers in any classroom before secondary school.

Confronting Racism

Like anyone growing up in a British colony, “Mr. G.,” as he came to be called affectionately by most who knew him, had to grapple with racism. He developed a sense of his own dignity which had something of the sublime. As a youth, he had at first refused an invitation from his teacher to see a movie of *Romeo and Juliet*, being shown at the Aquatic Club. “The Aquatic was a racially exclusive club and I would not wish to go there by special permission. Had the word apartheid then been invented, I would have used it.” His teacher persuaded him to go, for the sake of the Shakespeare. “I left the Aquatic walking on air . . . within weeks I discovered that I knew all of Romeo’s lines by heart, many of Juliet’s and Tybalt’s, and Mercutio’s Queen Mab speech, without setting out to learn them.” But on the issue of the Aquatic Club, Gladstone later reflected, “I would discover that anger and retaliation or even withdrawal were crude and silly responses to other people’s racism. . . . I recall an instance when a white man called my young nephew ‘boy.’ He flew into a rage. It took some time to cool him down. I told him that a white man who hates or despises a black merely because of his own colour lived imprisoned in a pit that dehumanizes him. Similarly for a black. Both being victims of their own ignorance and spiritual blindness, deserve pity. If a white man called me a nigger, I’d first look to see if he meant it and if I thought he did, I’d smile at the idiot in pity. I have no doubt about who I am. . . .”

“Men who chose [the] dangerous and lonely path” of a Martin Luther King, a Thomas à Becket, a Sir Thomas More, wrote Gladstone in a tribute to the sublime, “are not role models. They are exceptional men with exceptional resolution to be themselves, to take a stand against principalities and powers, and to endure, whatever the cost. They are ideals. But by bearing witness to the human potential they are beacons of hope and promise to a world wedded to the pinchbeck wisdom of ‘going along to get along.’ They remind us of what we might be if we could defeat our little selves.”

One of Gladstone’s most intense polemics was against those who wanted to suppress the teaching of Shakespeare, whether to promote a “Caribbean identity,” or simply to “dumb down.” “Language,” Gladstone insisted, “is not just a means of communication. It is the food that nourishes the brain and heart to their full human potential and beyond. Hence the quality of the language environment is vital. . . . You taught me language, snarled Caliban at Prospero [in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*], and my profit on it is I know how to curse. Out of that resentment comes a host of societal ills. But *how well Shakespeare understood the potential of language and the interest of the government class in ensuring that their minions are not emancipated by it.*”

Gladstone’s revenge was to use Shakespeare as his con-

stant refrain, in exposing the hypocrisy of those espousing “democracy” and “rule of law” in international affairs—while obliterating real justice and *agapē*. If he was making the point that Malaysia and a few other countries have resisted “New Age Imperialism,” it was to “bring me back to Hamlet:

“*Sure He that made us with such large discourse, Looking before and after, gave us not the capability and god-like reason to fust in us unus’d.*”

Collaboration with LaRouche

Gladstone was ever in battle. His column for several years in one of Barbados’ two dailies, the *Advocate*, was named “From the Masthead”; his column more recently in the other, *The Nation*, was simply “Eye in the Storm.” From the first moment of acquaintance with *EIR*, some 14 years ago, he was outspoken in his identification with Lyndon LaRouche and his work. “The weekly news magazine, *Executive Intelligence Review (EIR)*, with its greater freedom of expression than exists in Britain, backgrounds every story, naming names. Which makes it at once the most informative and the most hated magazine in the world,” he wrote over a decade ago. In a column just a few months before his death, he joined his voice to that of “*EIR*’s publisher, Lyndon LaRouche, Jr.,” in denouncing Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s crimes in Palestine as a copy of Nazi operations against the Jews of the Warsaw Ghetto.

Holder’s constant citing of *EIR* over more than a decade, won for him the high honor of getting on the U.S. Embassy’s enemies list, as *EIR* learned from a Freedom of Information Act release.

In early 2002, Gladstone got a telephone call from a reader, who challenged him as to why he had written an article “showing concern for prisoners from the war in Afghanistan now transferred to the United States’ naval base at Guantanamo, Cuba. You live in Barbados. What America does has nothing to do with you.”

Gladstone responded: “I’ve become accustomed to that kind of blindness. I’ll give you three reasons, two of which, from your remarks, you will almost certainly reject. 1) Regardless of race, colour or station in life, we are all God’s children. 2) All of us are therefore eligible to be treated with love, compassion, and even forgiveness. For the third, I’ll quote John Donne: Ask not for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

“My guess was wrong; he rejected all three.”

Gladstone himself provided the appropriate words to summarize his life, at the conclusion of his 1985 return to the beloved Combermere School where he had studied and first taught:

“If what philosophers say of the kinship of God and Man be true, what remains for Man to do, but as Socrates did: Never, when asked one’s country, to answer ‘I am an Athenian or a Corinthian,’ but ‘I am a citizen of the world.’”

The world has lost one of its finest citizens.