

REMARKS BY FRED MITCHELL MP

ON JOHN DEAN FORMERLY BONAVENTURE DEAN O.S.B. (DECEASED)

He was the headmaster of my school St. Augustine's when I left there in 1970, a much better and different person than when I came there in 1965.

I was a public school kid who met him by happenstance. My headmaster at Eastern Junior Dawson Conliffe took a liking to me and when it was time to take the application forms for the St. Augustine's exams up to the school so we could take the exam, he took me out of class and we drove in his Chevy II up to SAC.

The school had not yet moved down the hill. I walked into St. Mary's Hall and went to the office and there looking out the western window, with his back to me was this tall man, phenotypically black man who turned around to face me as a tentative 11 year old entered the room to give him the papers.

My parents wanted me to go to the Government High School but that chance meeting with Bonaventure Dean and whatever he said I don't remember but I was sold on SAC that day. The Catholic Church provided the money for me to go, and that is now my life's story.

I need to say again that this was a black man. This was an African man. He was unapologetic about it. And today it may be hard for people to understand how the headmaster of a high school and the prior of a monastery could loom so large in the public imagination. He was a dominant intellectual presence. We boys wanted to be like him: well spoken, exact, hard working, respectful, no nonsense, principled.

His first wife Ann was my English teacher and influenced my choice of college when I left Nassau. I used to go out with them as a fifteen year older night clubbing: the priest and the English teacher. Silly me. Never thought anything about it.

Then while in university, I heard in rapid succession: he was out of the priesthood, given up the school, married my English teacher, given up The Bahamas and he was gone. A death in the family.

James Baldwin says in the Amen Corner that men and women come together and change each other's lives.

The late Etienne Dupuch, who was the arch enemy of Afro centricity in The Bahamas, used to call Bonaventure Dean "the apostle of black power". Bonaventure Dean in turn said that Etienne Dupuch wanted the black man to apologise for coming to The Bahamas."

It's a sentiment that resonates with me in so many aspects of our national life even today.

I ended up being the President of the Student Council in 1969 to 1970. Today after 41 years, there is still that role to play, representing the expressions of the 120 people some now sadly gone on who fate cast together for a few short years on the campus of St. Augustine's College. Perhaps memory dims the

difficulties or sentiment in death makes you say things that you would not ordinarily. I take the risk and say, we have enormous admiration and affection for all that Fr. Bonaventure did for us when it was his time at the plate. He hit the home runs. He touched all the bases. We are better men and women today because of what he did and our country owes him a debt of gratitude.

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