

Celebrating the life of Hugh Desmond Hoyte An Incomparable Leader, Eminent Statesman and Guyanese Legend!

Tribute by Rickford Burke Memorial Service in New York, January 5, 2003.

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At 9:30 A.M. on Sunday, December 22, I was awakened by a telephone call from a journalist from Guyana. He was seeking my reaction to the bad news. What news I inquired? I don't know if you have heard, but Mr. Hoyte died this morning at about 8:30, was his stunning reply. Overcome with disbelief, I immediately called the Hoyte's home in Georgetown. A dark day had befallen Guyana. The Chief, as we called him, was dead. Speechlessness and melancholy consumed me -- and the inner hollowness felt like a dagger in my sole. I had lost my father figure, a dear friend, role model, trusted counselor and personal hero.

I instantly reflected on the countless golden moments of my years of association with him, as a leader in the PNC Youth Arm - the YSM, and during my tenure as his Special Assistant. The 9:00A.M, briefings in his office, the midnight to early morning strategy meetings at Congress Place, the midnight conferences at his North Road Home, our long travels throughout the length and breath of Guyana, and the numerous breath taking jokes and stories he told me, as well as his many experiences in politics and early practice at the bar, which he related, flashed across my mind.

I then summoned up the precious memories of when I saw him last. He had traveled to New York last Father's Day to attend my wedding, where, not to be outdone, the Chief charmed our guests with his awesome humor and wit. Then he counseled me on being a good husband. And I will always remember our last conversation, a week before his death. Our discussion centered on, among things, the December 14, Washington D.C., academic conference on the Crisis in Guyana, as well as the party's white paper on "sheared governance.

Desmond Hoyte was a multifaceted and complex personality. A man extraordinary, of a high calling and no mean order. He had a profound presence. When he stepped into a room, everyone felt the company of "President" Hoyte. He bore the awesome responsibility of leading his people and his country. A task he clearly understood, took seriously and sometimes even bore on his shoulder. He was intolerant of ineptitude, tardiness, indiscipline, corruption and negligence. He was a disciplinarian and a stickler for sound reasoning, critical thinking, precision, thorough planning and good management. Desmond Hoyte was a man of complete integrity and of virtue. Courteousness, honesty, meticulousness and immeasurable patience rounded out his disposition. These qualities, together with his ability to be resolute and cutting, at times, caused him to be loved by the masses, misunderstood, mischaracterized or even feared by some, and underestimated by others.

But beyond this public façade of a serious, intimidating statesman and intense personality, as some people conjured up, Hugh Desmond Hoyte was a compassionate and caring human being. He valued other people's well-being, opinion, service and plight. To his death he cared deeply for his constituents. He always sends you a thank you note, a birthday, get well or sympathy card. At Christmas, he gave a gift to every member of his staff, as well as to his colleagues.

The chief was steadfast and of enormous courage. He always rose to the occasion. To the end of his life, he pressed forward conqueringly, in spite of obstacles, tragedy or crisis - never losing focus. His very life in politics was an embodiment of rapid elevation, personal tragedy, awesome responsibilities, many successes and setbacks, and political ingenuity.

Providence and destiny guided his live and he relied on his faith to see him through. With Obligation to family and duty to country paramount in his mind, Desmond Hoyte, then Prime Minister, masterfully navigated a personal and emotional mind field in May 1985. His entire family, traveling in advance to hear him deliver the May Day address in the town of Linden, was dealt a fatal blow.

Their vehicle crashed killing his only two children: Amanda and Maxine, his sister-in-law and his driver. Only his wife, Joyce, survived. (And by God's grace made a complete recovery). But Desmond Hoyte, fraught with grief attended to his family misfortune and simultaneously mustered the strength to discharge his ministerial duty. He went on to deliver the May Day address in Linden. He reached out to his God and received courage to fulfill his family obligations, honor his commitment to country and rest his destiny in faith. This was the essence of the man.

Three months later, national tragedy struck again. On August 6, 1985, the founder leader and President of Guyana, Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham, died suddenly. Again, the nation's attention focused on a man of valor - Hugh Desmond Hoyte, who was entrusted with the Presidency. Tragedy and triumph met at a cross road - and a new era dawned in Guyana.

Hugh Desmond Hoyte was a visionary who brought to the Presidency of Guyana a myriad of prudent economic, political and social policies that drastically transformed national life. He conceptualized and implemented the modeled economic blueprint (the ERP) that spurred the renaissance of the economy in the late 80's and early 90's. He restored Guyana's creditworthiness in the international community. He created a free market economy, which attracted record foreign investment to Guyana, including, OMAI Gold Mines, the largest of such mines in the Hemisphere. These measures stimulated unparalleled economic growth, causing Multilateral Financial Institutions to project the restructured Guyanese economy as a model for economic development. They also led the people to restore confidence in their government.

Desmond Hoyte's vision for a philosophical, political and economic rebirth predated the global wind of change that swept through Eastern Europe and other parts of the world in recent history. Guyana's economic revitalization, social rejuvenation and political renewal, which occurred under his presidency, won him and our country international acclaim. He espoused a foreign policy hinged on economic and environmental diplomacy, enhanced regional integration, preservation of national sovereignty and the resolution of frontier disputes through the United Nations process, that was unmatched in the Caribbean region.

Desmond Hoyte's pragmatic agenda, coupled with adept leadership and shrewd management, propelled Guyana firmly to the threshold of economic prosperity and modernization. He got Guyana moving again. Indeed, he touched the life of every Guyanese and gave us a sense of belonging. His Presidency and leadership enthused the Diaspora to invoke a sense of national pride.

Our leader has also left his footprints imbedded in the political life of the nation. He was a political craftsman and who executed his strategies with exactitude and dexterity. His political philosophy was determined by personal conviction and the national interest on the one hand -- and the ever-changing trends and dynamics of the global environment on the other. Demonstrating immense courage, soon after he became President, he moved to fortify the democratic process.

He significantly strengthened our democratic institutions and arrested the political decay that permeated the society. He inspired political regeneration by introducing constructive changes to the political culture and by transforming the role of political society in government. He fashioned a national ethos of discipline, inclusiveness, mutual respect and harmonious co-existence of all peoples. Through his reform initiatives, he cultivated a free, open, cohesive and progressive society. Indeed he single-handedly charted a new course for Guyana.

Henry Kissinger once said that "The task of the leader is to get his people from where they are to where they have not been." This was Desmond Hoyte's ultimate vision for Guyana, as he articulated in his Address to his Party's Congress last August.

He said: *"For far too long our people have been bereft of happiness. The culmination of our efforts must be to return the smile to their faces, the spring to their steps and the joy to their hearts. Ours must be the task to fashion a vibrant and wholesome society, at peace with it self and at peace with its neighbors. We must fashion an economy that creates wealth, spurs development and provides continually expanding conditions for all of our people to live comfortable fulfilling lives. Then we*

must fashion a state resting squarely on foundations of democracy and social justice where, within ever enlarging bounds of human freedom, the rule of law reigns unchallenged."

The Chief has indeed lived. He was a truly learned man, versed in every field; law, politics, education, economics, philosophy, religion, history, geography, language, literature and the arts, among others. He influenced every sphere of Guyanese life. His passing has left a sprawling void in our nation. Who can fill the void of that introvert who emerged as one of Guyana's greatest political minds? There will never be another Desmond Hoyte! But the struggle for the ideals he espoused must go on!

Hugh Desmond Hoyte's contribution to the development of Guyana is supreme. His legacy is indelibly etched into the annals of history. And when this chapter of our national life is written, he will be acknowledged as one of Guyana's greatest Presidents. We will revere him as a legal scholar, foremost member of our class of literati, ultimate politician, eminent statesman, noble patriot, distinguished gentleman and a national hero! Today we celebrate his life, and we say goodbye. But his legacy and memory will live on forever - and we will never forget!

To his wife, Joyce, a mother to me, I say; our hearts are broken too. We grieve with you. You remain in our prayers. You will never be alone!

It was Walter Lippmann who advanced that "The final test of a leader is that he leaves behind him in other men, the conviction and the will to carry on."

I KNOW THAT DESMOND HOYTE IS AT PEACE WITH HIS GOD. FARE YE WELL CHIEF! REST WELL! WE WILL CARRY ON!