

National



Cultural Policy

2.2.1. Aspirations and Limitations

This document WILL:

- o provide a description of Bahamian culture;
- o work towards delineating unique elements of Bahamian culture;
- o provide a blueprint/roadmap for the place of culture in national development.

This document WILL NOT:

- o provide a blueprint for cultural development for all time.

Culture is ever-changing. This document attempts to describe the state of Bahamian culture at a particular juncture in space and time. This document cannot and will not speak for all Bahamians in all eras. In order for it to be effective, it will need to be adopted, implemented, reviewed, re-evaluated and revised in a timely fashion.

2.2.2. Historical survey of Bahamian cultural policy documents

The development of and focus on Bahamian culture is not new. Since Independence, numerous official statements have been devised regarding national cultural development. These include:

2.2.2.1. *Shafer Report 1986*

UNESCO sponsored survey of Bahamian culture and recommendations for the creation and implementation of a policy;

2.2.2.2. *Senate Hearings on Culture 1992-3*

Compilation of documents produced by a series of hearings on Bahamian culture given to a Senate Committee headed by Sen. Fred Mitchell;

2.2.2.3. *Adderley/Lockhart policy 1995*

Draft cultural policy document prepared by Director of Culture Cleophas Adderley and Deputy Director of Culture Kayla Lockhart-Edwards.

2.2.3. Outcomes of these policy documents

None of the recommendations from any of these documents have been implemented, and the documents themselves have been shelved.

2.2.4. International precedent

Culture has been recognized by the international community as being central to nationhood, especially in the context of globalization, and central to economic development.

4.1. Strengths

The strengths of Bahamian culture are delineated below. Where there are challenges posed by the current status of specific manifestations of that culture, they are listed as such.

4.1.1. Cultural

The Bahamas is rich in cultural resources. These are primarily intangible, given the colonial past and the oral tradition of the present described above. Moreover, the preservation and promotion of tangible cultural heritage have already been addressed by legislation creating the Antiquities, Monuments and Museums Corporation and the Clifton Authority. The intangible cultural heritage of The Bahamas, however, has yet to be addressed.

This heritage is both rich and under threat from various forces, both local and global.

In making this the centre of our cultural policy, The Bahamas stands at the forefront of global cultural activity, as evidence by the 2003 adoption by UNESCO of the Convention on Intangible Cultural Policy.

Bahamian intangible cultural heritage includes the following:

4.1.1.1. *Junkanoo*

Despite the public and political tendency to administer Junkanoo as though it were a sporting event, and despite the fact that the manifestation of Junkanoo that is nationally recognized is an exclusively urban tradition, Junkanoo remains it is clearly the best-developed cultural resource in The Bahamas, and the most widespread engine of cultural productivity.

In listing Junkanoo as a cultural asset, we wish to make explicit that Junkanoo is fundamentally a creative art, and is in fact the amalgamation of all the oral creative arts. We wish further to assert that Nassauvian Junkanoo incorporates in its creation an internal critical discourse that has fuelled the development of the parade.

Junkanoo is a living cultural tradition whose vibrancy may be used as a model for national cultural rejuvenation. We wish to emphasize, however, that it is the **process** involved in the creation and maintenance of this cultural tradition that is central to national importance, and not the product.

Formally, Junkanoo incorporates most oral and performative expressions of culture. These include music, dance, theatre, and the visual arts, each of which has its unique place in the canon of Bahamian cultural expression.

"Exuma the Obeah Man" McKay, Bahamian folk music forms are not only recognized abroad, but have served as the foundation of many developments in the folk and blues music genres. These traditions are waning at home, but have not yet died out.

Unlike Junkanoo, the continuity of these indigenous musical traditions is not assured. This may be because, unlike Junkanoo, the majority of these traditions are family island and rural, and as such they are impacted by larger questions of urbanization, modernization and globalization. It may also be because the national tendency has been to focus almost exclusively on the development and funding of Junkanoo to the effective exclusion of most other Bahamian cultural forms.

This tendency to focus national cultural politics and discourse on Junkanoo has placed these traditions at great risk. The purpose of this cultural policy, therefore, is to recognize the centrality of these musical traditions and to delineate them as follows.

4.1.1.2.1. - Non-exhaustive list of Bahamian musical forms

4.1.1.2.1.1. Rake-n-scrape

4.1.1.2.1.2. Goombay

4.1.1.2.1.3. Rhyming

4.1.1.2.1.4. Anthems

4.1.1.2.1.5. Secular songs

4.1.1.2.1.6. Narrative songs

4.1.1.2.1.7. Ringplay

4.1.1.2.1.8. Junkanoo

4.1.1.2.2. Action points

4.1.1.2.2.1. Develop school curricula to familiarize schoolchildren with indigenous Bahamian musical forms

4.1.1.2.2.2. Develop programmes of widespread public education

4.1.1.2.2.3. Mandate a national percentage of Bahamian music to be played on all local radio stations, and make this a condition of broadcast licensing

matters, their role is advisory only. Cultural experts must be given the autonomy to direct the cultural affairs of the nation. Some of this has already begun on both a formal and an informal basis, but is currently vulnerable to the vicissitudes of changing administrations and political priorities. In order to ensure sustained cultural development, the proposed changes in administrative structure need to be legislated to ensure strengthening across the board.

5.2.1. Rationalization of current situation

In Appendix X, we list, as far as we are aware for the first time, most of the governmental and some of the non-governmental agencies and institutions that deal with cultural activity in The Bahamas, together with an rough estimate of funding allocations. Three things are clear from this table: first, there is no shortage of cultural organizations and activity in The Bahamas; second, there is a definite need for the consolidation and rationalization of cultural administration; and third, that there are definite inequities in the funding of these activities.

5.2.2. Priority must be given to addressing this.

5.2.3. Depoliticization of sector

Currently, the official administration of culture falls under the aegis of the Cultural Affairs Division, which has never been designated as the responsibility of any single specific government ministry. Throughout its existence, this Division has been at the mercy of successive administrations with varying priorities. Further, the continued lodging of cultural activity with the Bahamian government severely limits the ability of cultural administrators to benefit from local and international corporate funding. In order to ensure the even development of culture, there is a need for the establishment of statutory governmental bodies to oversee Bahamian cultural development.

5.2.4. Proposed Statutory Bodies

5.2.4.1. Cultural Commission/Arts Council

A Bill for the establishment of an Arts Council to begin the consolidation and rationalization process has been drafted and submitted to the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture for consideration.

5.2.4.2. Junkanoo Commission/Authority

Steps have been taken to rationalizing the administration of Junkanoo. A Bill for the establishment of a Junkanoo Commission was drafted in 1994, but never fully reviewed or implemented. The need for a revisiting of this legislation is now crucial, as the foundation of a private corporation to manage New Providence Junkanoo made evident.