

Tout Moun

Caribbean Journal of Cultural Studies

*Creating a Caribbean Sense of Place:
Calypso, Spoken Word and the Oral Tradition*

Vol 6: No. 1 ▪ August 2021

<http://www.mainlib.uwi.tt/epubs/toutmoun/index1.htm>

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BRIAN HONORÉ

THE MIDNIGHT ROBBER –

A RETROSPECTIVE



Fédon Honoré

Brian Anthony Honoré (1955 – 2005) was a cultural practitioner, performer and labour activist in Trinidad and Tobago. He spent his early childhood in Tunapuna. Later, he moved to Cascade, St. Ann's. He participated in grassroots sports organisations, the trade union movement and calypso events. He first worked as a dock worker before becoming a library assistant at the Barataria Junior Secondary School. He was later involved with the Carnival Development Committee Calypso Tent (CDC Calypso Tent) as “Commentor” reaching the national semi-finals in 1985 as well as the Extempo finals in 1988.

Honoré's interest in the traditional carnival masquerades blossomed into a full-fledged vocation. He played Bat, Dragon and Midnight Robber initially. He finally settled on the Midnight Robber as the core identity of his carnival masquerade and performance. He joined the Mystery Raiders Midnight Robbers with Andrew “Puggy” Joseph, a veteran of the art form.

In 1981, Honoré penned and performed a calypso, the *Opera of the Midnight Robber*, using an extended Midnight Robber metaphor to comment on the politics of the day. In 1988, in collaboration with the People's Cultural Association, he launched the LP, *Satellite Robber*. The *Satellite Robber* music was also used as a backing track for *Robber Talk*. *Robber Talk* was a recorded Midnight Robber duel between himself and Andrew “Puggy” Joseph. Almost one decade later, he wrote and performed the first Midnight Robber eulogy for Andrew “Puggy” Joseph in tribute to his memory and as a send-off to the great Carnival route in the sky.

“THE REINCARNATION OF O’ CANGACEIRO”

Halt !

Drop your keys

and bow your knees

and call me the Prince of Darkness, criminal master!

For when I snap my teeth and stamp my feet

I can cause a great disaster.

I am the Reincarnation of *O Cangaceiro*,

the most devious bandido

ever to terrorise the Brazilian sertão.

But tell me, who

authorise you

to put on dem clothes

and call yourself Midnight Robber?

It was a grave mistake in Nature’s plan

when your parents first pitched you forth upon this land.

I will tell you plainly that you may understand

that you are nothing but a nuisance to mortal man.

For the day I was born the sun refused to shine,

hurricanes smashed the citadels of the city,

atomic eruptions raged in the mountains.

Philosophers and scientists said

the world has come to an end!

But no!

It was me the *Cangaceiro* who had come forth.

But what manner of man are you who would stare your own death in the face?

What is your name, your claim to fame and from whence you came?

Talk! Robber Man!

Have you arranged an insurance policy against your impending doom?

My only regret is that I displayed an uncharacteristic hint of compassion
by not feeding your bloody carcass to the *corbeaux*.

It is clear to me that your burning ambition
is to follow in this midnight marauder's footsteps.

You must reply now, lucidly and candidly
and express your intentions alphabetically.

Have you heard of my Hill of Forgotten Men?

Tucked away behind the city,
beyond the avenue of desolation,
turning left around the roundabout of destruction
is my Hill of Forgotten Men.

It is a hill on which men like you are buried -
men like yourself who once knew temporary fame from stealing bus passes from old ladies,
robbing lunch kits from infants
but who dare to challenge my supremacy and to extirpate my equilibrium.

Truly bad men die and live on this hill, but I live at the top.

Talk! Robber Man!

BRIAN HONORÉ 1988



Brian Honoré portraying “Black Banker, White Banker” at the Queen’s Park Savannah Stage – Carnival 1997. Photography by Noel Norton

MIDNIGHT ROBBER EULOGY

I come, I come, see I have come

From the valley of the shadow

From the mountain of the drum

I come as an axe to a bending tree

To relate to you my awesome genealogy.

Most men know not my name

My claim to fame

Nor from whence I came

Whether from wind, storm or hurricane

Some say I am a blast volcano

Some say the wicked siege of Troy

Some even mistake me for the notorious Jesse

Or my mentor, the legendary

Agent of Death Valley.

From the day my mother gave birth to me

The Carnival heroes in heaven started to smile

The audience on earth started to tremble

As I hit the city streets...

At the age of one

My life journey had just begun.

At the age of two

I found the numbers of Midnight Robbers much too few.

At the age of three my anxiety was to elevate and make you surrender your treasure -

My only weapon...poetic bombast and laughter.

At the age of four

Great impresarios came knocking at my door.

At the age of five

I was wanted by the National Carnival Commission, Ambakaila, Viev La Cou, Best Village,
Tobago Heritage, Talk Tent

For the great deeds I have done

And the wondrous speeches I have performed.

My name and photograph appeared in local dailies in the New Orleans Museum of Natural History, throughout the universe...and many other places

At the age of six, I was known as Midnight Robber number one, two and three

At the age of seven

My physical structure was of steel ribs, iron jaws, copper bowels

In order for a man to fight with me

He must be a radio and TV controller

Strangling my oral tradition

and promoting the Prime Time

wastes of a cabled Sahara

At the age of eight I was chained in a deep dark dungeon

by the dreaded monster known as cultural amnesia...

guarded every hour by the notorious satellite robber.

At the age of nine I decided to revitalise the ancestral line

of my great ancestors The Griots from Africa

I staged a dangerous escape and

remained to the end of my days

A fugitive from cultural injustice

I gathered around me a small band of Mystery Raiders,

in rebellion against cultural imperialism,

these most notable warriors and I, then walked like dragons

throughout the land for decades,

spreading the
message of Carnival patriotism for all
who would learn and listen...

I stand on this high hill of my impending departure

I gaze into the skies
hearing the welcoming cries
of those who have conquered
and gone before.

I hear Hamilton, Badal and Bailey
calling my name.

I hear Wilfred Strasser and Caniff call it again

I hear Harold Saldenah and
Charles Peace saying "Talk Robber Man"

For I will take two steps backward

And three steps forward

To claim my place among

The lords of lyric and warriors of the word

For I too have cried mankind's joys and sorrows every hour.

It is getting late, it is getting late

And the heroes will no longer wait.

I blow my ancestral whistle
And my speech shall distil
As the dew and the small rain upon the tender herb...
and as the showers upon the grass.

BRIAN HONORÉ 1997



Brian Honoré portraying the Speaker of the House of Robber Talk -Carnival 2002.