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Dear Editor, Confusion Over Carnival Was Created by Government Officials, Not the V.I. Carnival Committee

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Jouvert Morning festivities in St. Thomas. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM

Dear Editor:

Recently, there has been a great deal of public discussion regarding some confusion created by multiple postings of schedules for Carnival on St. Thomas next month. Some individuals have been condemning the Virgin Islands Carnival Committee, Inc., without knowledge of the facts. I agree that there is confusion, but know that it was created by V.I. Government officials.

The VICC is a duly registered Non Profit, which was incorporated in 1976 for the purpose of organizing carnival in St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, and continues to be an active entity. In spite of what some may think, only the members of the V.I. Carnival Committee are authorized to dissolve this committee.

By passing Act No. 8153, the 32nd Legislature of the Virgin Islands, decided it could arbitrarily confiscate the business of the VICC and place it under the V.I. Tourism Department- as can only be done in an authoritarian society. While this might be pleasing to some, it was a breach of our democracy and a potentially dangerous precedent-setting measure.

Additionally, the VICC has legally trademarked the names, “Virgin Islands Carnival” and “St. Thomas Carnival.” Consequently, any usage of these trademarks, or any variation of said trademarks, used with the intention of duplicating the services outlined in the Trademark approved certificates, is an infringement of the VICC’s trademarks.

Further, all applications, posters, booklets, logos, themes, etc., developed by the VICC, is the intellectual property of the VICC and cannot be legally used by any other entity, according to Federal Law.

During the hearing in which Bill No. 32-0308 was passed, Sen. Janelle Sarauw, a former VICC queen, in an effort to solicit support for passage of said Bill stated, “come on colleagues, you all know they have been thieving all the time.” This was extremely disingenuous, as she did not provide information regarding who she was referring to, when the “thieving” occurred, or how much was taken - no evidence whatsoever was provided. Nothing could be done about the libelous phrase, however, as members of the V.I. Legislature are exempt from prosecution for whatever they say or do on the floor of the Legislature.

Another reason pointed out was the fact that Carnival is extremely important to the economy. Long before the phrase “cultural tourism” became popular, the VICC tried, unsuccessfully, to convince administrations that we could develop St. Thomas Carnival into an economic gold mine for the territory. Governor Schneider was the first official to acknowledge that our approach was sound and achievable. To hear the 32nd Legislature discussing how important Carnival is to the economy, at the time, was hilarious.

During an earlier attempt to seize St. Thomas Carnival organizing from the VICC, I wrote an article titled “The Rise and Fall of St. Thomas Carnival,” which was published in the 2005 Carnival booklet. Many of the initiatives undertaken by the VICC in order to provide a world renowned event, are included in that article, which, for obvious reasons, cannot be shared in this limited space.

Most people would agree that of the three major festivals, the St. Thomas Carnival was the most popular and drew more visitors. This culminated in millions of dollars for the V.I. treasury. Still, there was this island vs. island mentality and this prevented the VICC from receiving the necessary support, if St. Croix Festival Committee could not receive the same level of support- whether or not it was needed.

Another issue, which soured the relationship between the V.I. Legislature and the VICC, was the fact that most members of the committee refused to allow themselves to be used as pawns, acquiescing to their political demands. Although I've been retired - and enjoying it - from the VICC since December 2015, it has been my hope that V.I. Carnival could continue to be a successful venture. While some of you may not approve of the committee's approach, I applaud the VICC for standing up for what is right and fighting to maintain the democratic system we are accustomed to. Of course, V.I. government officials can create impediments to hamper the progress of VICC, and I feel that they will not hesitate to do just that.

For those who care only about the opportunity to "jump up," I implore you to have fun, but to also think about your future and your off-springs' futures as V.I. government officials blatantly disregard the rights of the VICC. When, and against whom, will the next politically motivated assault on our democracy be?

I hope this is received in the manner in which it was intended, "with love for my community," because, to remain silent, is to be complicit.

Submitted on Saturday by: Caswil Callender, former executive director of the V.I.C.C., Inc.