

THE JAMAICA TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION'S 60TH ANNIVERSARY LECTURE

PRESERVING LEGACIES, REMAINING ENGAGED IN THE FUTURE

INTRODUCTION

The Jamaica Teachers Association (JTA), like most organisations and institutions, continues to grapple with the past as it contends with the present and contemplates the future. The theme of the annual conference in August 2012, when Jamaica marked 50 years as a sovereign country, was 'Celebrating the Past and Building on the Legacy'. Two years later when the association celebrated its 50th anniversary, the imperative was to inspire future direction by evaluating and assessing the achievement of the JTA since its founding. The theme was 'Finding it Within Ourselves'. Today, ten years later, in celebrating our 60th Anniversary the Theme is 'Preserving the Legacy: Remaining Relevant for the Future'.

Succeeding leadership of the JTA has conferred on me the superlative honour and privilege of inviting me to address these three themes. The downside of this exceptional honour and privilege is the obligation to remain faithful to the theme of each anniversary, be patently aware of subtle differences between themes, take account of what has been said previously to minimize repetition but seek to ensure continuity and bring fresh insight and understanding to this diamond anniversary theme.

GOOD FORTUNE AND SHAMELESS PLUG

Fortunately, between 2016 and 2022, I undertook and wrote a 359-year factual story of elections and governance in Jamaica as a British colony and sovereign nation by connecting the works of eminent historians of succeeding eras, filling in a few gaps through delving into public records of the colonial period ending in 1962. For the period since 1962, I relied on published data, public records and was a participant observer on a few occasions. This story

employed a broad view of elections and governance; hence it includes all ethnicities, public administrators, the military, militias, large and small settlers, the press, schooling, religion and gender. Novel features of this factual 359-year connected Jamaican story are: looking from inside localities in Jamaica to the colony or country, then out to other Caribbean colonies or countries and to global rivalry between West European Empires; reporting the perspective of Jamaican people directly involved, that is those who were eligible to vote, those excluded from being voters, those who voted, those who were eligible to offer themselves as candidates, those who were excluded from being candidates but included as voters and documenting the Governance systems of Britain, West Africa, and West Central Africa when peoples from England, Scotland and Ireland collided West Africans on Jamaican soil.

To refer explicitly to one's own work is labelled a shameless plug so let us get that out the way. *Elections and Governance: Jamaica on the Global Frontier, the Colonial Years: 1663 to 1962* and *Elections and Governance: Jamaica on the Global Frontier, the Independent Years 1962 to 2016*, published by Ian Randle Publishers, the Caribbean's largest publishers, are the products of this effort and are currently widely available. To say that I have no interest in their purchase would not be honest. However, most germane to this Lecture is that it includes what I have learned from this six-year exercise which is more than any reader will.

THE FIFTH TIME OF LOOKING AT THE JAMAICAN SOCIETY HISTORICALLY

This is the fifth time that I have tried to improve my understanding of Jamaican society by studying an enduring aspect of the society from a historical perspective. First was body image and physical beauty, that is, ideas of the beautiful girl and handsome boy and how individuals or groups critiqued themselves within these images. Second was race/ethnicity/colour and social class in the colour/class system, that is, 'Jamaican pigmentocracy'. Third was who owned and provided schooling in succeeding eras and on what terms. Fourth was gender and

the shift in the gender structure of upward social mobility over the last 300 years. Fifth is politics and power as it has been exercised. Power is not what power says but what power does. I cannot say like Jimmy Cliff 'I can see clearly now the rain is gone'. There is still blurred vision even in hindsight. Rather, I can say that even though rain continues, the obstacles in our way are less blurred, patterns that have shaped our past are more discernible, contradictions that continue to plague our existence are more understandable and epiphanies that offer hope of a different future are less vague.

At 61 ½ years old Jamaica is a young nation. It is totally unrealistic to expect that in this short time this new nation could reverse and change most of the untoward features of nearly 300 years of colonial domination and socialization premised on inferiority. A post-colonial conception of present Jamaica locks the society into its past. The perspective of a young nation highlights struggles with the past in constructing a future destiny including changed mentalities and mindset. The pitfall to avoid is to construe that there is almost nothing from the colonial past that is worth preserving. This is particularly pertinent to teachers whose role in society is to transmit knowledge, consolidate societal change and mobilize the construction of the future. Another danger is to underestimate the continuous, persistent and diligent effort as well as energy required across succeeding generations to effect real and meaningful transformation.

Education is about conservation and change across succeeding generations. It does not fit neatly into the political manifestos leading to elections and interpretation of mandates following victory at the polls. Four or five-year policies are almost never enough time, 20 or 40 years are more realistic. It is with this frame of mind that this aging student of the great profession of teaching embarks upon the JTA 60th anniversary theme.

THE THEME AMENDED AND LINKED TO ‘FINDING IT WITHIN OURSELVES’

With permission, I have replaced one word plus one phrase in this 60th anniversary theme. ‘Relevance’ is replaced by ‘engaged’ and ‘the legacy’ is replaced by legacies. Hence the title of the 60th anniversary lecture becomes ‘*Preserving Legacies, Remaining Engaged in the Future.*’ Teachers and the JTA will only be irrelevant in ‘preserving legacies’ or to the future if the association and its members neglect being integrally engaged with both. Further, in this information/machine revolution age the word ‘legacy’, or ‘legacy system’ has a new meaning; something to discard. Legacy is baggage from the past that is no longer needed. Some hold and express the view that schoolteachers and teachers’ organisations are in the legacy category. Indeed, that view has gathered adherents and pace over the last 70 years. However, once schools and teachers remain engaged in mastering new technologies, including AI, the teacher/technology tool dyad will prove superior to either alone.

Tonight’s 60th anniversary lecture on ‘*Preserving Legacies and Remaining Engaged in the Future*’ is ringfenced within a three-day conference whose theme is ‘Going Full Steam Ahead with Digital and Future Skills’. Therefore, there is no necessity for inclusion of the subject of the information/machine age revolution except to say that possible uses of technology for good or ill are almost limitless. Hence, preserving legacies and remaining engaged in the future need to ring fence going full steam ahead with digital and future skills as principal factors in conserving JTA’s identity, the teacher’s role in society, and the emerging destiny of Jamaica and the Caribbean.

The JTA 50th anniversary lecture, ‘Finding it Within Ourselves’ is directly related to this JTA 60th anniversary lecture on preserving legacies and remaining engaged. In the last ten years - 2014 to 2024 - the pace of change has quickened creating an avalanche, but several persistent and perennial patterns remain unchanged or have become worse.

That lecture made the point that both regionalization and globalization are important vectors of future direction. Specifically, in this hemisphere the Caribbean is an addendum to North, Central, and South America. We are neither North American nor Latin American. The Caribbean, composed mainly of islands, does not fit neatly into continental America. Most of our peoples of the islands originated either from Africa, India or both. Furthermore historically, high degrees of racism have marred the intercourse of Caribbean peoples who have ventured into North America and Latin America. The issue here is not isolationism but about being clear and confident in our identity and how that interacts in the hemisphere, especially within its organisations and institutions.

Additionally, in current global geopolitics, 14 countries constitute the Caribbean, the 12 of which are politically independent commonwealth Caribbean countries plus Haiti and Suriname. They are not represented in any geopolitical power conclave up to the G-20. The Caribbean finds some relief in the United Nations, the Group of 77, The Commonwealth, and a nebulous grouping called 'Small States'. Moreover, most Caribbean countries are classified as middle income. Globally, the middle-class is being hollowed out, as well as middle income countries, toward a future two-tier world of rich and poor/celebrities and nonentities. Education, schooling, and choices of conservation and change must address the agency of Caribbean peoples and nations in navigating this hemisphere and the world.

One of the greatest falsehoods of our colonial heritage was the mindset that the mother country of the British Empire was an external power and source that guaranteed our well-being. To mix the metaphor, the mother country was a benevolent godfather who would rescue us from wayward ways. Nationhood demands that this legacy mindset be abandoned. Carrying it forward would lead to the thinking that Britain, the United States, European Union, Russia, China, India, Nigeria, Middle Eastern states, Mexico, Brazil, Columbia, the IMF, World Bank, UN Agencies or any other entity puts Jamaica first. Jamaica and the Commonwealth Caribbean

are on our own. We must find our way ourselves. To use Biblical language; this is a message for all including princes of power, priests of the temple; prophets of the palace and the people. If we mess in our nest our fate is to live in the mess. 'Finding it Within Ourselves' has been reprinted and included in the files of delegates and the media. For those online it is available on the JTA Website. Following this lecture, it will also be available on *errolmiller.com*

LESSONS FROM THE PAST THAT TEACHERS SHOULD REMEMBER

Before delving into the theme let us identify lessons from the past that every teacher in Jamaica should know. These are lessons and understandings not legacies.

- a. Jamaica and the Caribbean, since becoming British colonies, have always been on the global frontier in several dimensions, especially elementary and high school education. Caribbean colonies were fully integrated into the West from the time the English ventured into the sub-region in the early 17th century. Accordingly, Caribbean nations are modern states of modest means. Before the end of the 17th century, Jamaican and Caribbean students who began their education at schools in the region have continued their education in grammar schools and matriculated to universities in Western Europe. For example, Francis Williams - who became the first Black graduate of Cambridge University in 1721 - received his elementary education at a school in Spanish Town over three hundred years ago. Jamaican and Caribbean teachers have mastered the best pedagogy of succeeding centuries and in each era have produced students that are equal to the best in the Anglophone world as confirmed by weekly reports at the present time. The perennial issue has always been and remains policy equity and access to this quality education. Jamaican and Caribbean teachers have every reason to face the future with confidence.

- b. The original providers of schooling in Jamaica were vestries of parishes, that is, Church of England priests, male and female middle-class entrepreneurs in towns such as Port Royal, Spanish Town and Kingston, men of conscience who left endowments in trusts to provide schooling for children of poor parents and missionaries of dissenting Protestant denominations. Put bluntly, it was priests saddled with extra duties, middle-class parents who desired better for their children, white female and Jewish male entrepreneurs, wealthy men of conscience leaving bequests to establish schools, and dissenting Protestant missionaries who first made schooling happen in Jamaica.
- c. Public-private partnerships in education in Jamaica dates to 1835 when the Imperial Government, Protestant missionaries and teachers from local communities created the public schools for infants and children of soon-to-be-freed people. Public-private partnerships in the provision of public schooling have formed and fractured repeatedly over the last 180 years. Imperial powers and foreign agencies have been fickle partners. Invariably they do not sustain commitments. Public private partnership is now a buzz phrase but those using it seem to ignore or are ignorant of proven, dependable and stable local partners. The major lesson from Jamaican history is that no single partner, or partnership, has been able to provide all the input needed to sustain good quality education for the majority.
- d. The Colonial state was consistently delinquent in providing public school except for the 30-year period following the Morant Bay Uprising and its aftermath from 1867 to 1896. Delinquency in providing quality education is embedded deep in the fabric of the colonial state. Put bluntly, repeating delinquency of the colonial state occurs effortlessly by simply uncritically continuing, and even automating, the fine print of the past. Its modus was eloquent rhetoric in pronouncing followed by quietly scaling what was implemented. Giving with one hand and taking back with the other.

- e. Constitutional change in 1944 instituting universal adult suffrage and implementing general elections conducted on that basis marked the transfer of governance of the state from British officials to the elected representatives. It is the Jamaican people exercising their franchise who have mobilized the Jamaican state to dramatically expand access quantitatively and to improve the quality of public education. The first manifestation was the 1957 educational reforms marked by expanded access to high schools based on merit measured by the Common Entrance Examination, the free place system in high schools, building of primary schools and expanding teacher training to achieve universal primary education, and the creation of the College of Arts Science and Education.
- f. The 21 years between 1957 and 1978 marked halcyon years in the provision and financing of public schooling in Jamaica that exceeded any other era in our history, including that between 1867 and 1896. Nationalism fired the era when flag, pledge, anthem, motto and nation building were the visible symbols of the motive force.
- g. The 'Crawling Peg' devaluation of the Jamaican Dollar of 1978 is a convenient marker of the general policy of succeeding governments to give priority to fixing the economy and relegating continued transformation of the education system, to at best, second place. The mantra over these 45 years has been that foreign capital and the private sector are the engine of growth and wealth creation. In May 1979, the exchange rate was \$1.78(JMD) to \$1.00(USD) followed by draconian IMF measures. Bank of Jamaica data shows that by 1984 the debt-to-GDP ratio reached the all-time high of 214.4% resulting in drastic cuts in expenditure on health, education and housing. It was during this time that the JTA proposed the education tax to bolster education and took the heat of public resentment. It was also during this time that the JTA became most militant in

resisting the firing of teachers and closure of schools and colleges. The education tax was absorbed in the Consolidated Fund and used for debt repayment despite protest.

- h. In the early 1990s just as capitalism and communism seem to be on life support, Moscow bought into the market. Neoliberalism became the only game in town for countries like Jamaica. Under IMF and World Bank pressure, the Jamaican government complied with the deregulation of the economy as the path to prosperity. In January 1990 the exchange rate was \$6.50 (JMD) to \$1.00 (USD). By June 2000 it was \$100.08 (JMD) to \$1.00(USD). Again, it was the middle classes, including teachers, civil servants, police, nurses and the working poor that bore the brunt of this massive devaluation that resulted from these hair-brained economic and fiscal theories and measures. Far from creating wealth in 1996 and 1997, there was a major crash of the financial system as several banks, insurance companies and other financial institutions collapsed. This is commonly referred to as FINSAC, for which up to now there has not been an official explanation. What is sure is that there was no external crisis, act of God, or political instability that could be cited as the cause. Bank of Jamaica data shows that in 1996 Jamaica's debt-to-GDP Ratio was at an all-time low of 70.5%. Ironically, it was the much maligned so called inefficient and unproductive Jamaican state, with low debt, that bailed out the exalted wealth-creating and productive but debt-ridden banks, insurance and private companies that did not go under.
- i. Barely had the Jamaican economy started to show signs of recovery, when in 2008 there was the Wall Street/Housing market meltdown in the United States which had global repercussions, including in Jamaica. Again, Jamaica was subjected to IMF manners when Jamaica was subjected to quarterly tests, most of which Jamaica failed. The IMF and World Bank were merciless in the harsh measures imposed on Jamaica which sharply contrasted with US actions without consequences. Note, like FINSAC, the

prime actors at the core Wall Street meltdown were not illiterate, unskilled, incompetent secondary school leavers, but held multiple degrees from some of the most prestigious universities in the so-called first world. The middle-classes and working poor in Jamaica had again nothing to do with the meltdown, but we too suffered its consequences. Jamaica's debt-to-GDP ratio oscillated to a high of 137.93% in 2012.

- j. Between 2012 and 2019, to great credit of the political leadership of both PNP and JLP governments and Oppositions, the country emerged from the downward economic and financial trajectory that started in 1978. This was not by conspiracy, but the shared experience of the harsh measures, highly selective reasoning and contrasting measures imposed on Jamaica compared to governments of the industrial world that had also failed by these very fiscal theories. The difference was geopolitical power, not the efficacy of theory.
- k. In a nutshell, the transformation of public education from its colonial past - embarked upon in the late 1950s and followed through by succeeding governments until the late 1970s to address the imperative of nationhood - has slowed and limped over the last 45 years. This is not to say that nothing happened during this period. Rather, it is to say that public investment in education had been sacrificed for debt repayment, substantial tax breaks, guaranteed profits to foreign investment, waivers and incentives to private capital the returns of which has not justified the sacrifices imposed on the broad mass of the people; including teachers, civil servants and other public sector employees. Foreign and local investors should tax risks, earn profits by virtue of the quality of goods and services, and be regulated for moral and ethical conduct. Public revenue should provide and invest in public services. It is time for the education tax, the National Insurance Scheme, Housing Trust levy and HEART/NTA income to be used exclusively for the purpose for which they have been established.

1. Some means by which we successfully resisted and overcame slavery and colonization will undermine Jamaica as a place and as people. While it is important to be shrewd and even cunning, it is dangerous to trick your own families and be treacherous dealers, especially with friends and allies. Beware of an uncritical embrace of Anancy. While mastering the master's culture and being even better than them in their high culture – (becoming an Afro-Saxon) it is folly to think that this endows us with personal superiority in our families and communities. While riot, rebellion, burning down and mashing up things may be revered as heroic, it takes decades to rebuild yet days to tear down. Alternating between building and mashing up what is already built makes no sense. Living in Jamaica as Babylon assumes we can return to where we came from. We have been changed by Jamaica and from whence we came has also changed over these last three hundred years. Yes, there is nostalgia on both sides, but our goal must be to make Jamaica the promised land. The Jamaican State cannot be a 'bups' that we milk for everything while giving nothing. We are the State. 'Bupsing' ourselves is the sure path to mendicancy in the world, thereby continuing external exploitation and extraction of assets and labour.

THE JTA AT 60 AND LEGACIES TO PRESERVE

In beginning to delve into the heart of the theme, allow me to observe a birthday party ritual, especially of a diamond birthday. This is to recite beginnings that are well known and oft repeated. JTA had five, not two parents. JTA is not biological. Let us remember the organisations from which the JTA sprang. In 1961, anticipating that nationhood was on the horizon, the Jamaica Union of Teachers (JUT), the Assistant Masters and Mistress Association, the Headmasters and Headmistresses Association, the Association of Teachers in Technical Institutions and the Association of Teacher Training Staff formed the Joint Executive of

Teachers' Association (JETA). In December 1963 JETA held a general meeting in the auditorium of Excelsior High School which took the decision to merge into a single Jamaica Teachers' Association which came into being on April 3, 1964. In a nutshell, five bargaining units envisaged unity as increased bargaining power with the government.

However, the roots of teacher unity included more than bargaining rights. Beginning in the 1880s, elementary school teachers began to form associations to improve their pedagogy and professionalism. They formed 22 associations, 14 parish associations - which matched the reduction in administrative units decreed by Governor John Peter Grant in 1867 - and eight called districts, which were former parishes. These were Port Royal that had been merged with Kingston, St David that had been merged with St Thomas in the East to form St Thomas, St Georges that had been merged into Portland, Metcalfe into St Mary, Vere into Clarendon, and St John, St Dorothy and St Thomas Ye Vale that had been merged into St Catherine. Note that elementary school teachers respected but did not walk in lockstep with Governor Grant, revered though he may have been. They preserved abolished parishes as districts so they could continue their pedagogic and professional purpose, although from the government's administrative perspective they were legacy units.

The major impetus for these 22 parish and district associations to form a single union 90 years ago on March 30, 1894, was not increased bargaining power. Rather, it was for the defense of the rights of teachers from the state and church and in the process established bargaining rights. The Code of Regulations of 1892 left the power to hire and fire teachers with denominational managers of schools, which allowed the latter to require teachers to do church work as part of their school duties. Although most teachers were members of churches, they adhered to the separation of church and state with respect to their conditions of teaching service. As grievous was that shortly after the introduction of free elementary education funded by the state in 1892, in exchange for policy control by denominations Governor Henry Blake, the first Irish

Governor, lambasted elementary school teachers for incompetence. The government was contemplating dispensing with payment by results and establishing salary scales for teachers. Bargaining rights became especially important in circumstances where those setting salaries and wages disparaged the competence of those paid. Governor Blake presided over the switch of the Imperial Government from the concerns of smaller settlers to facilitating big business.

The 140-year odd history of teacher activism in Jamaica has bequeathed to the JTA a three-fold nature: professionalism and self-improvement desired and demanded by teachers, defence of the rights of teachers from owner/manager of schools, bargaining rights in negotiating teacher remuneration and compensation with the government. This legacy is being and must continue to be preserved. No further elaboration is necessary here.

The district association structure within parishes was expanded and rationalized by the JUT after its founding. JTA inherited, restructured and augmented the district structure within parish to include teachers in all types of public educational institutions operating in a contiguous geographic area. This structure takes account of Jamaica's varied topography, distinct subcultures and philosophical diversity which impinges upon the lives of teachers, students and parents in communities in which schools are located. The district provides a forum that brings those who live and work in relative proximity into dynamic and constructive relationships. The district and parish structure has enabled the JTA in effectively executing its three functions. Enhanced by contact teachers in each public school, the parish/district structure is a little understood, secret strength of JTA in its union and professional functions.

The pedagogic potential of the district, and communities that comprise it, is largely untapped. Districts are where teaching as a craft reaches its zenith. Many teachers and principals have become legends of the profession by recognizing and tapping into this potential in multiple ways. Recently the Caribbean Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training (CCETT)

mandated teaching students to read by the end of Grade 3, tapped into the district structure modified as 'cluster'. The project unit and research capacity of UWI were linked to the teacher education capacity of a national college near the Ministry-selected, poor performing primary schools in their vicinity. The college implemented the project in the schools under the supervision of the project unit, and with real time support from university researchers. The results were outstanding and the success widely acclaimed. All the personnel were Caribbean: teachers, teacher educators, managers and researchers. Jamaica is probably the only Caribbean country that has not built on the CCETT model and success under a different name.

THE PUZZLE POSED BY BOYS AND GIRLS CHAMPS: A PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL BY-PRODUCT OF TWO JTA PARENTS

Allow me a pertinent digression. A persistent pattern in Jamaica dating back to the 1850s is for teachers of past generations to be iconised and lionised and for teachers currently in schools to be disparaged and denigrated. The 113th Boys and Girls Athletic Championship concluded on Saturday March 22, 2024, with the usual high and widespread interest within the country and acclaim as being consistently the best organized, run and supported high school athletic event in the world. Almost totally missing from accolades is reference to the fact that this is an accomplishment of sustained private-public partnership maintained by the public secondary school system. At the pinnacle of the organization are principals of public secondary schools and the 161 professional successors of the Association of Headmasters and Headmistresses. Boys Champs started in June 1910 when headmasters of five trust high schools and one church boys' school - St. George's College - decided to hold their sports day jointly. It expanded in 1920 when the high school system, which previously consisted only of trust schools, was reformed to include grant-aided church schools. Girls Champs started in 1957 by the Games Mistresses Association - an association of physical education teachers - which was a body

within the Association of Assistant Masters and Mistresses. Note that public school principals and teachers are better qualified academically and professionally than at any previous time in our history. Moreover, students have continued to consistently perform at levels that match the best in the world in running, jumping, throwing, and sportsmanship.

At Independence in 1962, the public high system consisted of seven boys' schools, 15 girls' schools, and 23 co-educational schools which were collectively called 'traditional high schools.' There were five state-owned technical high schools whose students were incorporated in the Boys and Girls Championships. Both championships merged in 1999. State-owned junior secondary schools created in 1966, later upgraded to new secondary schools in 1974, held a separate athletic championship. Beginning in the latter half of the 1980s, new secondary schools began integration into the public high school system and thereby participants in Boys and Girls Champs.

In addition to secondary school principals and teachers, central to athletic championships have been coaches, judges, officials, medical personnel and a host of assistants who invariably have been past students, parents and former teachers at public high schools who come from every stratum of society. Moreover, many who have been stars on the world athletics stage have returned and participated in one or other categories and have contributed to what the event has become. Boys and Girls Champs has become a self-reproducing phenomenon replete with its own recurring generations of celebrities and young prodigies.

Interestingly, the success of Champs in attracting international acclaim resulting in students from the region and elsewhere attending public high schools has become a problem for some. Yes, the hook has been athletics but becoming students involves academics, socialization and greater links with Jamaican education. That this trend is growing suggests that recruitment to

score points at Champs may not be the only factor at work. Students and their parents must consider value beyond track and field.

While the Ministry of Education does not play any visible role in the event, state, trust, church and community owners' investment in public secondary education provides the infrastructure that makes the event possible. Also almost invisible is the fact that JTA provides security of tenure for principals and teachers involved in the event from reprisal from any source aggrieved by its processes and outcomes. Yes, in more recent times sponsorships from private sector companies have helped but they did not originate this wonderful by-product, nor can money pay for what these championships have become. The voluntary component has always been considerable.

Champs is a considerable indirect benefit to public secondary schools, the public secondary system and to the country. It presents a major puzzle, especially to those who continually denounce and denigrate public secondary schools, their principals, teachers and students and justify this judgment on the lack of capacity, competence and commitment of the principals, teachers, parents and students. Such inverse outcomes of product and by-product imply bipolarity rarely found in nature. Obviously, the resolution of this conundrum and dissonance requires rejecting conventional wisdom consistently expressed since the 1850s.

It would be remiss not to mention that while it was the JTA that lobbied the Minister of Education in the latter half of the 1980s to implement the policy of a single high school system by integrating new secondary schools with traditional and technical high schools. It was the late Hon Dr. Neville Gallimore followed by the late Hon. Carlyle Dunkley and succeeding ministers who adopted and sustained this policy. From the outset, based on the history of Jamaican high schooling, it was expected that increased excellence in sports would be among the first fruits of the integrated high school system. Indeed, so-called non-traditional high

schools since 1990 have won football, cricket, netball, athletics and other competitions contested across the country at different age levels. A few have begun to surpass traditional high schools in academic performance. The root of this puzzle resides in biases typical of privileged social classes. Its confounding aspect rests in equality of endowment irrespective of social class and its appeal to the sheer love and enjoyment of athletics by all social classes.

PRESERVE THE LEGACY OF HOLDING ELECTIONS ACCORDING TO LAW

While the English and British can be justly faulted for many things, holding general and local government elections according to constitution and law is not one of them. Indeed, this is a legacy that must be preserved. General elections have been held in Jamaica continuously since December 1663 to the present except for 18 years - between 1866 and 1884 - in the period of pure Crown colony. Local government followed the same path from 1677. Elections are deeply entrenched in Jamaican culture.

The franchise to vote and run as candidate falls into two distinct eras: December 1663 to December 1943 and December 1944 to the present. The defining difference is that for 280 years the criteria for voting and for nomination as candidates included ownership of property or paying taxes or earning income while in the last 80 years the criteria for both are being a citizen, being a resident and reaching the age of majority. Universal adult suffrage in 1944 is the dividing line.

Beginning with the general elections of December 1944 and every general election since, the overall results have reflected the collective will of electors expressed individually in polling stations. No general election has been perfect without flaws or without fraud, even to the minimum of a single occurrence. Having not reviewed the data and records for local government elections to the same extent, I will not make a similar judgment. However, what cannot be disputed is that since the General Election of 1997 and all subsequent, general and

local elections have been conducted and have reached a standard comparable to the best internationally, with the General Election of 2016 exceeding the gold standard. This has been a great accomplishment of this young Jamaican nation.

It is within this context that the Local Government Election of February 26, 2024, needs to be assessed. By every criteria that applies to elections - from preparing the voters' list, nominating candidates, apprising candidates of their rights and responsibilities, conducting the poll, facilitating the Election Centre, tallying the statements of polls on election night such that the preliminary results were known and counting the voters to produce the final count - the Director of Elections and the Electoral Office of Jamaica (EOJ) conducted the recent local government election according to law and to the standard that has obtained for the last 27 years.

Confirmation comes from the fact that while there were a few magisterial recounts, none have been challenged in the Supreme Court. Further, no electoral petitions were lodged to the Constituted Authority. As explained in 50th Anniversary Lecture, one of the unique features of Jamaica's electoral law is that up to ten days after election day any candidate, and the Director of Elections, can lodge a petition to the Constituted Authority for any malpractice alleged to have been committed in any polling station. The Constituted Authority is obliged to investigate the substance of each petition within 14 days, and if merit is found, to apply to the Election Court to void the elections in those polling divisions. If the Election Court so determines, the elections will be rerun in that or those polling stations within 30 days. The cost of this swift and decisive process is borne by the state and not candidates. In a nutshell, Jamaica's electoral laws, systems and practices over the last 27 years make it extremely difficult for any candidate to win an election by fraud and malpractice.

Yet, there can be no gainsaying that there was significant disquiet among JLP and PNP supporters and those without any strong partisan allegiance. Personally, I received inquiries

from family members, friends, acquaintances and even strangers. A common complaint was why the final count took so long. The media and some pundits were almost caught up in a frenzy in expressing this concern. However, the final count was issued by the Director of Elections for all 228 electoral divisions in three and a half days, which compares favourably with the past.

Apparently, not generally known is the fact that it inherently takes longer to count local than general elections. At the close of the poll on election day, the Presiding Officer in each polling station counts and accounts for every ballot and prepares a Statement of Poll signed by all present. On election night, the Returning Officer for each constituency tallies the Statements of Poll from each polling station and announces the preliminary results without opening ballot boxes. Beginning the following morning, at a time agreed, the Returning Officer opens each ballot box in the presence of candidates and their agents, mostly attorneys at law, and counts each ballot from all the polling stations. In a general election, this proceeds unstopped until all ballots are counted. In a local government election, ballots are counted by electoral division. The Returning Officer halts counting to declare the winning candidate of each electoral division and continues in a similar manner until ballots in all electoral divisions are counted and the winning candidates declared.

In addition to concerns about the time taken to complete the final count, conspiracy theories, allegations of fraud, skullduggery, dishonesty, distrust of the electoral process and recitation of alleged malpractices going back to the 1960s and 1970s were resurrected and recited in sundry places. Even after the final counts were declared, suspicions were voiced concerning authenticity. Yet looking at results they could not be contrived within three and half days and with the high degree of scrutiny obtained even by artificial intelligence.

The contrast between the public perception and reaction to the results of the February 2016 General Election and the reality of the conduct and results of the February 2024 Local Government Election could not be more stark. In 2016, no losing or winning candidate expressed disagreement with the results. The Director of Elections acknowledged that a few mistakes were made and corrected. Candidates and the public accepted these as honest errors. Moreover, the government changed by one seat. There was no dispute. The question that shouts from this stark contrast is what has changed over the last eight years? Why the loss of trust in the electoral process? The two elections were conducted to the same general election high standard.

JTA possesses among its ranks some of the most knowledgeable and experienced practitioners in the conduct of elections in Jamaica. A significant number of teachers are Returning Officers and close to half are Presiding Officers and Poll Clerks, separate from members who are active supporters of both major political parties. JTA would do well to have a conversation within itself on these questions before participating in wider dialogue. Going forward requires reflection, analysis and soul searching. One of the greatest challenges in any society is to reduce the gap between perception and falsehoods on the one hand and reality on the other. Alternative facts, post-truth and spin that puts a righteous face on wrong create a descending spiral of moral decadence. Teachers have the responsibility to help students routinely establish facts, test falsehoods and discern right from wrong.

PRESERVING JAMAICA'S DEMOCRACY

Just prior to the local government election, Parliament passed an amendment to the Electoral Commission Interim Act of 2006 that subsumed the functions of the Political Ombudsman into the Electoral Commission and made all Electoral Commissioners Ombudsmen and women. This is by far the worst legislation affecting electoral laws passed by the Jamaican Parliament

since becoming a nation in 1962. It has no close equal. I apologize to those who may think that this matter should not be addressed at the Association's Diamond Anniversary. However, after serious and careful reflection on the involvement of our five parent associations that were so involved in the nationalist movement that brought us to political independence, and the role played by JTA and teachers in all aspects of nation-building, the occasion is appropriate and personally silence is not an option. Here is why:

1. Subsuming the functions of the Political Ombudsman into the Electoral Commission and making each Electoral Commissioner a Political Ombudsman or woman fundamentally alters the Electoral Commission and brings all Commissioners into direct engagement with the minutiae and even trivia of partisan politics. Adjudicating complaints of intemperate speech, silly public behaviour, disputes about party colours, posters, paraphernalia and graffiti in a period of heightened partisan bravado and emotions in political campaigning - and without sanctions likely to dissuade deviants - is likely to diminish respect for both the Electoral Commission and its Commissioners. In the past, the Political Ombudsman, while doing some good, was ignored by some candidates and their agents who defied rulings, disregarded reached agreements and violated codes of conduct all without consequence. There are consequences for not adhering to electoral law. To bring impunity into the Electoral Commission is grossly unwise.
2. World-wide, ombudsmen and women of numerous types are individuals supported by an office. Making the eight Commissioners a collective, the Ombuds Massive - four of whom can be removed by Prime Minister or Opposition Leader at any time - is an innovation with little or no precedent and very high risk, despite good intentions of all.
3. The four selected members of the Commission could easily be compromised in their role as members of the Constituted Authority in also performing the role of Political

Ombudsman or woman during elections. The Constituted Authority comes into being on the day following the announcement of Nomination Day and Election Day and remains in place for six months. Should a political incident occur, especially before Nomination Day and Election Day, that materially affected the processes of elections, Selected Commissioners would become embroiled in ‘conflict of office’ which is no less than Cabinet, if a minister is involved in social disturbance or open violence.

4. The Election Centre will be weakened. The Election Centre comes into being between Nomination Day and Election Day. It functions as the official space for immediate communication, conflict resolution, problem solving, coordinating events, and issuing authentic information between the major stakeholders and actors in elections. The Election Centre is comprised of one representative each from the JLP, PNP, the security forces, the Jamaica Umbrella Group of Churches, CAFFE, international observers, the Political Ombudsman and the Director of Elections. Previously, the Election Centre was chaired by the Political Ombudsman where political matters came on the agenda and by the Director of Elections when elections matters came on the agenda. Without the Political Ombudsman as an individual either the four Selected Commissioners would be triply compromised or abstain from being involved in the Election Centre. Should Nominated Commissioners serve, the balance of representation in the Centre would be skewed. In the absence of Selected and Nominated Commissioners, the Director of Election would by default be saddled with both political and elections matters, which is most undesirable.
5. There are at least two other alternatives that are better. The first is retaining the Political Ombudsman as an individual and adding a commission or board of similar composition to the ECJ to this function. Second, retaining the Political Ombudsman and office and placing them under the Electoral Commission, with specific legal remit, and with

comparable relations to the Commission as the Director of Elections and Registrar of Political Parties.

However, it gets even worse than ill-considered and confused legislation.

Breaking the Convention, the Cornerstone of Electoral Transformation since 1979

Both the House of Representatives and the Senate broke the convention that has been the cornerstone of transformation of the electoral system since Independence, the latter being generally acknowledged as one of the great achievements of the Jamaican people. Although debates in the House and Senate were spirited and heated, there was no mention of the convention by either JLP or PNP members in either House or Senate. My bewildered response was, is this for real? Is this wilful forgetfulness? Is it collective amnesia? Are we watching what is happening in the United States but do not comprehend its implications for democracy in Jamaica? Or is this 1993 repeated? Whatever it is, as explained in the 50th Anniversary Lecture, the following are important:

1. The convention referred to and honoured by both JLP and PNP governments since 1979, is a voluntary agreement that the party that forms the government will not use its majority in Parliament, that is, House and Senate, to pass any law concerning elections and boundaries of constituencies against the objection of the minority that form the Opposition. While some factions in both political parties had never agreed with the convention until Feb 6, 2024, their leaderships prevailed.
2. Those factions wanted to continue the winner-takes-all tradition inherited from the British, and practiced by the United States, where the party in government controls all aspects of the electoral process and determines constituency boundaries as permitted by the Constitution and statutes.

3. The circumstances in which this voluntary convention arose was virtual civil war in the latter half of the 1970s when political parties divided violently on the ideologies of capitalism and socialism. Civil society shouted vociferously in disagreement and the leaders of the two political parties listened and acted patriotically. In 1979, the Electoral Advisory Committee (EAC) was created - later replaced by the ECJ - where major political parties are represented equally and selected members - jointly agreed by the Prime Minister and Leader of Opposition - hold the chairmanship, equality in numbers and majority by the original and casting vote of the Chairman.
4. Since 1979, the convention spawned several other conventions that both political parties have observed and civil society has supported, and in the process has together created Jamaica's unique and authentic version of democratic governance.
5. Leading up to the 1993 General Election both political parties, the EAC and the Director of Elections exhibited overconfidence and took these processes for granted. The result was a self-inflicted setback on Election Day. The upside was that decisive actions were taken that led to the continued improvement beginning with the 1997 General Election.
6. Since 2005, the convention has survived several attempts to break it. The PNP came the closest when in 2015 the Leader of Government Business in the House wrote to the Electoral Commission on behalf of Cabinet indicating that the Government intended to break the convention over a matter related to funding of political parties which had been recommended by the ECJ. The expectation was that the ECJ would withdraw its Report to Parliament. The ECJ Chairman Dorothy Pine-McLarty, based on the unanimous agreement of Commissioners, responded in writing that the Commission did not take instructions from Cabinet but would only act upon instructions of Parliament. Prior to the matter coming to Parliament, the JLP Opposition and several civil society organisations voiced strong objection to the intention of the government to break the

convention. When the matter came to Parliament the Leader of Government Business introduced that Bill based on the ECJ's report and recommendations, indicating that the Government would not break the convention.

When the Bill to subsume the Office of the Political Ombudsman was passed in the House on February 7, 2024, and the Senate on February 9, 2024, no Government member or senator acknowledged that the convention was being broken. While objecting to the legislation, no member of the Opposition in the House or Senate objected on grounds that the convention was being broken. Given the longevity in Parliament of several members of the House and Senate on both sides, it is impossible that it was not known that the convention was being broken. Bluntly put, the Government and the Opposition were complicit in breaking the voluntary agreement that previous governments and opposition parties have honoured and did not tell the country what they had done.

Ironically, the convention may be saved by the ill-considered, absurd, impractical, unworkable, and potentially destructive Amendment of the Electoral Commission Interim Act, 2024. If there was ever an idea that contained the seeds of its own demise, this Amendment is one. Uncertainty is when. Every general, local and by-election conducted going forward, with this amendment in place, will reveal its defects. Further, if this precedent is applied to determining constituency boundaries, Jamaica will slide back to the disgraceful past. This new generation of political leaders will be rightfully held responsible for such travesty that occurred on their watch. If they are not to be so charged, the only recourse is to jointly and openly repeal this Amendment before any other election is held with it in place, except the Local Government Elections of February 26, 2024. For those who will attack this assessment, a full defence is written in *Elections and Government: Jamaica on the Global Frontier, the Independence Years*, published in November 2022, which deals extensively with the convention and its importance to Jamaica's unique and authentic version of democratic governance, a great

achievement of the Jamaican people since Independence. Democracy is not a destination, even for countries touted as its standard bearers. Democracy is the continued adherence to the rule of law undergirded by voluntary oaths, codes, conventions, norms and agreements honoured as sacred obligations - the spirit of the law.

HONOUR THE PROFESSION FOR AS LONG AS YOU SERVE AS A TEACHER

We come into this great and noble profession for a multiplicity of reasons and remain for varied lengths of time, including entire careers. Times in which we come into teaching also vary. Looking back, I am certain that young people entering teaching now face a stiffer challenge than when I started to teach, first as a pre-trained undergraduate and then as an untrained graduate. Permanent posts were the norm. The pay was not great but in seven years we mustered the down payment for a three-bedroom house and were able to meet the mortgage. The system expanded and opportunities for rapid promotion opened. The situation today is different. I therefore respect and applaud young people who opt for teaching careers and wish to encourage you.

Teaching as an occupation began over 4500 years ago. To think that any individual teacher or group of teachers can preserve the legacy of teaching is no more than fantasy and delusion. The obligation is to honour our profession and the societal roles and functions it performs for as long as we stay in it. Legacies are preserved by honouring roles and ethics practiced by succeeding generations.

Moreover, there is a clear divide between before and after the Covid-19 Pandemic. The pandemic caused a serious and unique setback, with some schools being closed for almost two years. While classes continued online, the disruption of the normal conduct of school was general and most adversely affected schools located in disadvantaged communities. Most importantly, the lives of students and teachers were disrupted. Interestingly it appears that

classes more than schools are the units that better survived the adversity of the pandemic. Subsequently, a shortage of teachers in rich countries led to teachers being recruited from countries like Jamaica. However, most recently, the Government and the JTA negotiated substantial salary increases that show signs of stemming this outward flow.

In these circumstances only general reminders about characteristics of teaching and teachers seem appropriate:

1. Teaching and learning achieve their best outcomes where shared vision, agreed values and the virtues that support them are collectively affirmed between teachers, students, parents and communities. This requires substantial investment and cultivation of relationships and direct communication channels.
2. Who the teacher is in character matters as much as academic and professional qualifications. When measured in the scale of life, teachers must be good human beings, although no one is perfect. Teachers are rightfully held to a higher standard given their engagement in the formative years of students and in the formation of society. Most of all, students should come to discover that their teachers are trustworthy. Gaining and keeping the trust of students are the most challenging aspects of teaching.
3. Students are more important than subjects, grades in examinations, performance in sports and the like, which are but starting points of common interest and contact in the wider processes of personal/societal formation and socialization.
4. Teachers impact students through their personalities, talents, gifts and idiosyncrasies, and above all through their care for student well-being and future, irrespective of the homes and communities from which students come. These can only be faked for a short time. If this happens, exit is the best recourse.

These characteristics translate into a few simple ways of thinking, acting and sources of joy:

- a. Dismiss any thought that equates your efforts and work as a teacher with monthly pay. Fully support the JTA in negotiating compensation that provides for decent living. Teaching is not driven by pay but do not accept genteel poverty.
- b. Prepare to teach your students, go to classes on time, engage students fully in the content to be covered in the allotted time, and be involved in extracurricular activities because it is there that you get to know students best. Teaching is not a 7:30 am to 3:00 pm occupation.
- c. Give extra lessons for pay only to students not in your class. Find extra time and ways to enhance learning for students of your class who did not grasp the concepts and content during regular class time. Your students' failure to learn should not be an extra source of income.
- d. Lay foundations for your students' further learning and build on foundations laid by colleagues. Teaching is a social profession. Teaching is not 'what is in it for me?' - individualism.
- e. Take joy in the talents, achievements and successes of your students, fellow teachers and school. Schools are among the most diverse and idealist working environments. Parents you meet, what students say and do and how they change are anecdotes for life. Some are best kept to yourself with no explanation for smiles.
- f. Be gracious and humble when students and past students return gratitude for words and acts that you cannot recall if your life depends on it. This confirms that you did your job as a teacher.

- g. Take pleasure in working with your students to inspire them to defy negative stereotypes and expectations that others have of them. When this succeeds it becomes a source of deep inner satisfaction.

God Bless you all.

Errol Miller,

April 3, 2024

The Ocean Coral Spring Hotel, Duncans, Trelawny.