



**Fifty Years of Independence: Jamaica's impact  
and development as a sovereign state  
10<sup>th</sup> February 2012**



## **A Time For Renewed Nationalism**

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### *(Salutations)*

“Jamaica, Land we love...Jamaica, Jamaica, Jamaica, Land we love” ...These sacred words of our national anthem must have been repeated countless in the minds of those who selflessly gave the sweat of their brow and the labour of their hands, for the independence movement of our great nation, Jamaica land we love.

In fact, today, Jamaicans can take pride in a Land that shines as a beacon of hope in a world increasingly ravaged by disastrous waves of economic crises, discontent, distress and desperation.

While Jamaica has by no means escaped these symptoms of modernity, our people have stood shoulder to shoulder, weathering storm after storm, never losing sight of constructing a Jamaica that is triumphant, proud and free. Indeed, we have enchanted the world with our music, stunned them with our athleticism and captured them with a vitality that I am proud to say continues to burn 50 years after our independence.

The leaders of our homeland throughout the ages, from Alexander Bustamante, to Norman Manley, Michael Manley and up to contemporary times dreamt of a Jamaica that would ignite the embers of progress and prosperity nationally, regionally and internationally.

Norman Manley, and his band of patriots, envisaged a nation founded on socialist principles. His generation was instrumental in calculating what Jamaica urgently required as a new politically-independent nation. Figuratively speaking, his generation could be likened to a Gauge.

The Michael Manley generation that followed was to lead Jamaica to greater economic independence. Again figuratively speaking, the powerful imagery of the Compass represents this generation. They modified and gave new direction to Norman Manley's somewhat purist socialist ideologies.

Therefore, in light of what I have already said:

There is no doubt that the journey to greatness has been charted by the Gauge;

There is no doubt that the coordinates of our success have been configured by the Compass.

Yet, it is also undeniable that the world we inhabit has become a tangled web of unintended consequences where certainties are now rarities. Given these vagaries, is it time to dream again??

It is my unwavering belief that the current and future generations must unite in forming, figuratively speaking, the SQUARE. We must embody a new nationalism, one that is renewed and free of the shackles of small mindedness, corruption, falsity and lack of consideration for what Jamaicans need to live dignified lives: what Jamaicans need to construct a Good Society.

I am an unapologetic believer in the values of Social Democratic Existentialism in leading the way to this renewed sense of nationalism. I say Social Democratic as I reject purist forms of socialism and capitalism but support a mixture in so far as the people and the environment are protected from the tyranny of both the free market and an overbearing government, allowing their creativity and innovation to flourish in a free and fair environment.

I say Existentialist as I recognise that there must be a range of flexibility in our thinking to deal with different situations as they arise in a wide context of rapidly changing circumstances.

Yes it is unquestionable that we have made great strides as a nation. We can boast of an employment rate of 87.2%, a literacy rate of 87.9%, and despite the crushing setbacks of the current recession, growths in GDP of about 0.6%. Yet, there is more to be done and I believe that a renewed nationalism holds the key to unlocking the incredible, daresay inexhaustible, talents of our people.

How do I define “renewed nationalism”?

In essence, it is a time for Jamaicans to sit up and ask “who are we and what do we value”, in other words “what does it mean to be Jamaican”. I believe that renewed nationalism encompasses, but is not limited to our patois, our infectious reggae music or our exquisite culinary palate. It must also focus on the actions that must be taken to create:

An environment which is healthy;

An environment which is dignified;

An environment which is safe and secure;

An environment which is inspiring;

An environment in which patriotic sentiments continue to develop and abound;

An environment which promotes the politics of ideas and not of fear;

It is a society where a greater percentage of the population plays a greater role in decision-making. For instance, in the most recent general election last December, only 53% of those eligible to vote actually voted; a sign that urgent change is required in our system of political organisation.

We cannot claim to belong to a nation where “the will of the people” reigns supreme, if the people do not take an active interest in politics, as they become more and more disenchanted with a system that they perceive as being corrupt, self-focused and unrelenting.

A new Jamaican society should constitute one where decision-making processes are brought closer to the people;

A society where politicians will always act in a manner consistent with the true strength of their convictions, rather than remain paralysed by the vested interests of undeserving others.

In our national pledge, each Jamaican dedicates him or herself to playing his or her part so that Jamaica may “increase in beauty, fellowship and prosperity”. Renewed nationalism, within this context, means fostering a climate where service to the development of the nation is more coveted than the newest Vybz Kartel album or a pair of Clarks, where the best and the brightest are encouraged to stay and serve their country to the greatest of their capabilities.

Furthermore, as a regionalist myself, I believe that Jamaican-ness is inextricably linked to Caribbean-ness, that sense that Jamaicans have an immense and irreplaceable role in forging a regional identity. Thus, renewed nationalism is not only an interior-looking policy, but also an exterior-looking one, seeking pathways through which Jamaicans can fulfil their pledge of “advancing the welfare of the whole human race”. In simple terms, renewed nationalism signifies rekindling that unquenchable fire that helped us to fight for independence, that helped us attack social injustice, that propelled us to see Jamaica not merely from the seats of Kingston as constricted by geographic realities but as a full unique participant in the regional and global arena.

These are by no means grandiose objectives. Indeed, undaunted by the many challenges that will undoubtedly emerge, I believe that the action plan must be one which employs as the main weapon in its arsenal the ideology of pluralism.

The fact of the matter is that the answers to solving our nation’s problems do not lie solely with those at Belmont Road nor with those at Old Hope Road, nor with the few that gather at Gordon House. Pluralism involves generating a marketplace of ideas, where every Jamaican, regardless of age, sex, income or social status is encouraged to participate in the decision-making process. Differences are not converted into points of contention, but rather are cherished as they promote a dialogue which is more reflective of social needs. Beyond the local stage, a Herculean effort must be made to engage with all who possess an abiding and vested interest in Jamaica. We must harness the intellectual and technical capabilities of the widest range of people possible.

In closing, I cannot find the words to adequately express how proud I am of my country’s achievement of 50 years of independence and of the progress we have made over the decades.

However, pride has not drawn curtains over my eyes, neither has it inevitably covered my eyes with rose coloured glasses.

The generations represented figuratively by the Gauge and Compass have fulfilled their role. It is high time for the current and future generations to pick up the mantel of the Square, laying the foundations for the next 50 years, guided by a renewed sense of nationalism.

Why make the possibilities of despair seem convincing, when the possibilities of hope and action are endless?

We as Jamaicans pride ourselves as a unique diverse blend of talented, diligent, loyal, visionary peoples as repeated in both our national anthem and our national pledge. The legendary Bob Marley demands that we put our visions to reality, that we wake up and live.

We must be captains of our destiny and authors of our soul. This is what renewed nationalism means to me and if we are willing, by the sweat of our brow and the labour of our hands, to work as our forefathers did we have a sure or the promise of greater voter participation, greater opportunities for all, and greater linkages with the wider world.

These aspirations are not mere fleeting illusions; not mere dreams to be pursued and never attained....

Are Jamaicans ready for a change in national attitude? Yes we are. Are we capable of making that change? Yes we are.

Are we equipped with the personnel to make this change possible? Yes we are.

Are we convinced that a better Jamaica is possible? Yes we are. Surely then, it is time to dream again. Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you.