

## Heritage Month 2016 Report

During October 2016 the Jamaica National Heritage Trust (JNHT) staged a series of Heritage Month activities and events. These included displays at various schools and lectures across the country.

The first series of lectures were entitled *Reggae –down Babylon: The Impact of Jamaican Music on African Liberation Struggles* and were held at the Institute of Jamaica in Kingston, Sam Sharpe Teachers College in St James and Northern Caribbean University in Manchester. These were delivered by Dr Clinton Hutton, Mutabaruka and Herbie Miller at the respective venues. Each presenter ably informed the audience of the development of Jamaican music and how it addressed various issues of Justice, rights and freedoms which were applicable to Jamaica and Africans in their struggles for liberty. These lectures were well received as the audience who were given critical insights into the historical and global impact of Jamaican culture, particularly in the area of music

To culminate the activities, the JNHT hosted a final lecture entitled *Alexander Bustamante- Champion of the Working Classes* on Monday October 31, 2016. The Presenter was the Hon. Parnell Charles, Speaker of the House of Representatives, Trade Unionist and author. In attendance were approximately 155 students from Alpha Academy, Kingston Technical, St Hugh's, Gaynstead, Mona High Schools and EXED Community College.

The lecture was held at Headquarters House, offices of the JNHT (79 Duke Street). Students and guests were informed of the work and function of the JNHT and that the building in which it is headquartered is a heritage site because of its significance to Jamaica's history and heritage. Mrs. Georgia Rookwood, Research officer of the JNHT, highlighted the following relating Headquarters House

*-It was built and owned in 1755 by Thomas Hibbert, an English merchant, during which it was used as his residence*

*-in 1814 it became the headquarters of the military in Jamaica and got the name Headquarters House. From this house several army officers lived and worked: Governor Eyre and the military officials planned the suppression of the Morant Bay Rebellion in 1865 from this building*

*-George William Gordon was arrested at this building and was taken to Morant Bay by boat where he was tried and hanged*

*-in 1872 when Kingston became the capital of Jamaica Headquarters House was used as the legislature of Jamaica until 1960.*

*Other interesting facts about the building were that it was among the few buildings which survived the 1907 earthquake which devastated most building in Kingston. Headquarters house also has several interesting pieces of artefacts such as a piano that was used in the composition of the National Anthem, a first house speaker's chair which was a gift to Jamaica after Independence in 1962, a statue of Paul Bogle which was removed from its pedestal in Morant Bay.*



*Heritage House*

Shortly after a moving introduction of by Colin Virgo of the Bustamante Trade Union (BITU) Mr Charles gave a thorough lecture about the life and greatness of Sir Alexander Bustamante. He spoke passionately about the fact that Bustamante returned from overseas to Jamaica and made a lasting contribution to Jamaica, making it a better place. Mr Charles gave critical insights into Bustamante's unquestioned integrity when negotiating on behalf of the workers, his fearless nature in the face of adversity, his charm and wit when dealing with various persons of varying social and political backgrounds. He highlighted the public offices Bustamante held and how he formed institutions such as the Jamaica Labour Party and the Bustamante Industrial Trade Union intended to make Jamaica a better place. In return for his unfailing support of the Jamaican worker and the improvement of their conditions Sir Alexander Bustamante received numerous awards from various sources including a knighthood from Britain, award of Order of National Hero from Jamaica as well as the undying love and adoration of the Jamaican people.

It was made very plain to all in attendance that Bustamante inspired Mr. Charles to a life career in the Bustamante Industrial Trade Union and eventually representational politics. Mr. Charles used the opportunity to point out to the students that he came from a very humble background and that through hard work, sacrifice, sound parenting and proper values instilled by his religious background he has been able to achieve many things including being a trade unionist, senator, member of parliament, minister of government among other things. His life, however, had not been without challenges and like

Bustamante he too was detained by the government. Mr. Charles sought to earnestly impress on the minds of the students that they too should seek to make their own contribution to Jamaica as did The Rt. Excellent Sir Alexander Bustamante and others before. He spoke of his confidence in their abilities in making Jamaica a prosperous and happy nation.

At the end of the presentation Mr Charles entertained a few questions, none of which related to Sir Alexander Bustamante. Instead, the questions were all about politics ranging from the subject of corruption, the age that politicians should retire, the extent to which life was better in Jamaica before Independence to whether or not if things are better now than before Jamaica's Independence. Each question was carefully and frankly addressed by Mr Charles.

All in attendance had a full day. They had learned of the life, times and excellence of National Hero Sir Alexander Bustamante, the work and dreams of Speaker Parnel Charles, the significance of the Headquarters House and the role of the Jamaica National Heritage Trust in promoting and preserving Jamaica's rich heritage all in one day.

The staff of the JNHT were very encouraged by how receptive the students and teachers were of the whole presentation and as such there are plans to have more lectures and presentations at Headquarters House on significant personalities and matters relating to our heritage.



Students listening attentively to Mr. Charles's presentation and Bustamante's portrait in the background



Mr Charles, Speaker to the House of Representatives, seated in the Speaker's Chair that was given to Jamaica by Britain to Jamaica in 1962. The chair is on display at the Jamaica National Heritage Trust



Mr Charles delivering his address entitled *Alexander Bustamante: Champion of the Working Classes*

Submitted by

**Duane Harris**  
**Public Education Officer**