

**SPEAKING NOTES  
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MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE**

**MANCHESTER HIGH SCHOOL  
GRADUATING CLASS OF 1988 REUNION GALA  
SATURDAY, JULY 12, 2008**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is indeed an honour for me to return to my *alma mater* to address this Reunion Gala, on the occasion of the launch of the school's Mentorship Programme.

I have been asked to speak to the issues of mentorship, social responsibility and their impact on nation building. Within this context, I wish to highlight the importance of rekindling in young people, an appreciation of local culture and a sense of their history, as a means of fostering national pride and informing their personal development.

To borrow a phrase from Marcus Mosiah Garvey: “*A people without the knowledge of their... past, origin and culture are like trees without roots.*”

Culture has been broadly defined as “*the dynamic reservoir of ways of thinking and doing, accumulated over time, which has come to be agreed upon and transmitted across generations...*” If we accept this

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definition, our country's culture, as the author suggests, is fundamental to all aspects of our being and must, therefore, be seen as one of the critical "*determinants of attitudes to work*", and by extension, to economic development.

The Ministry of Education, Youth & Culture, in developing its National Cultural Policy, underscored the fact that "*our cultural heritage is our connection to our past, and as such, is an important component in our identity and critical self-worth. How we understand and perceive our past, will be directly related to how we act in the present, and what efforts we place towards building for progress in the future.*"

As such, culture and history emerge as being intrinsically intertwined - thereby making an understanding of both, fundamental to any programme aimed at inspiring young people.

In his legendary treatise on the "underdevelopment" of the post-colonial economies of the Caribbean, the late Professor Emeritus, George Beckford, posited that "*in every society, the institutional environment is a legacy of historical forces...*" Based on this, he asserted that primary among the "*list of concrete social requirements for development [was] an educational system designed to promote national consciousness*".<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *PERSISTENT POVERTY - Underdevelopment In Plantation Economies Of The Third World*

As one of the island's foremost educational institutions, I challenge Manchester High to take the lead in this regard, by intensifying its efforts to expose the student body on a regular basis, to our national heritage sites, museums and historical artifacts, through structured visits as part of the school programme. Initiatives of this kind will serve to stimulate discussion on our heritage, and to balance the cultural penetration from neighbouring North America, with which the students are bombarded on the television screens, at the fast-food outlets and indeed, at every step.

Against this background, the juxtaposition of this Reunion Gala, and the launch of the school's Mentorship Programme is instructive, as the Gala is showcasing to the current school population, two decades of alumni contributions to all aspects of nation building. Indeed, the Mentorship Programme must concretize this initiative by ensuring that the students are exposed to the achievements of our musical icons, Olympians, our national heroes and the issues for which they struggled, so as to foster in them, a sense of identity and national pride.

In the words of Marcus Garvey: *“the time has come to create and emulate [our own] heroes ...we must canonize our own martyrs and elevate to positions of fame and honour, [Jamaican] men and women who have made their distinct contribution to our ...history”*.

Too many of our young people are disaffected; and with no sense of their roots, they look outward to find salvation in the acquisition of Green Cards and the perceived panacea of the United States. All too often, however, they are forcibly returned, abandoned and disillusioned. It is, therefore, critical to sensitize this generation to the fact that self-reliance and success are within their power to achieve, and to inspire in them from an early age, a belief in the value of our own unique cultural experience.

As recently as Thursday of this week, the Daily Gleaner published a supplement, highlighting the success story of a Jamaican entrepreneur of humble beginnings, who started out selling egg sandwiches to fishermen in Alligator Pond, as they made their way home after days at sea. Today - 10 years later his restaurant - the legendary 'Little Ochi' in St. Elizabeth, is endorsed by the Jamaica Tourist Board, and occupies pride of place as one of the Caribbean's "most rustic restaurants". The owner, popularly know as 'Blackie Christian', has succeeded without stepping outside of his culture. He identified a niche market with the potential for expansion and marketed his indigenous product under the 'Jamaica Brand' to both locals and foreigners alike.

This is the kind of example that our Mentorship Programme should exhort our young people to follow.

The message here is that not everyone can be a lawyer, a doctor or an engineer. Nor can everyone find employment in an office in the capital city. There are other pathways to success. What is necessary is a vision, and the willingness to work towards achieving it.

In keeping with the examples extolled by our visionary leaders, it is appropriate on an occasion such as this, to highlight the achievements of those among our own alumni who have made significant contributions to nation building. To revisit a premise articulated by Professor George Beckford ...*“in order to describe today accurately, today’s picture must also reveal the story of the past”*. And so ladies and gentlemen, here I crave your indulgence in congratulating a few of these persons:

- Dr. Carl Bruce, one of Jamaica’s top Neurosurgeons, and an avid footballer in his time;
- The Hon. Grantley Stephenson, Managing Director of the Shipping Association of Jamaica;
- Dr. Ronald Robinson, Minister of State in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and
- Mr. Edgar Walter, former Manager of Alcan, now Windalco; and Boys’ Championship 100-meter runner-up.

**In the field of sports, allow me to recognize:**

- Mrs. Ouida Walker, Manchester High's first Olympian;
- Mrs. Loraine Graham Fenton, Gold medal 4x400 relay winner, World Championship & Olympic Silver Medalist in 400 meters;
- Miss Sheri-Ann Brooks - Commonwealth Championship Gold Medalist 100-meter and 4x100 meter relay, and Silver medalist at World Championships;
- Miss Beverley Grant - Olympian and Gold Medal relay winner at the World Championships;
- Mr. Lionel Scott, National Steeple Chase record holder;
- Mr. John Livingston - who beat Olympian Dr. Lennox Miller in Class 2 Boys' Championships;
- Miss Kaydeann Holness - who represented the National Under 20 teams at 2 World Championships in Toronto and London - currently a teacher at Manchester High.

**Our Present Olympians**

- Miss Sherone Simpson
- Mr. Nesta Carter; and
- Miss Sherri-Ann Brooks

## **Present Track & Field Champion**

- Natoya Goule - who was our 2007 Champion at the joint National Boys' & Girls' Championships, is also the Champion Female Athlete and Top Female Middle-Long Distance Athlete in her age group in Jamaica.

## **Conclusion**

Dr. Tufton ...