

# **Jamalco's Black History Month Celebration Hails Black Innovators**

Some 300 students and teachers from 23 secondary and primary schools in Clarendon and Manchester, representatives from government and other organizations participated in Jamalco's 7th annual Black History Month celebrations which was designed to raise awareness and highlight how people of African descent have contributed to the development of civilization.

The event, which was hosted at the Halse Hall Great House recently, was held under the theme 'Black Innovators Advancing Civilization'. The day's activities included the opening ceremony, two debates among high schools, an exhibition and the Bob Marley One Love Concert.

Jamalco's Managing Director Antonio Melo in his address implored the students not to be detained by the colour of their skin as that does not determine who they are. "It is your ambitions so it is up to you to determine what it is you want to achieve and how you want to impact society," he said.

Mr. Melo urged the students to be inspired by the work of their fore fathers. "Let their work motivate you to reach for the stars and be the next Black Innovator who positively impacts your world."

In his remarks, Corporate Services and Gov't Affairs Manager Leo Lambert says many among us question the relevance of us celebrating Black History but he says it is necessary because of the opportunity it presents us to pause, re-engage and reflect on a history that is like no other. He said, there is no other race that has had to endure the indignity of the Middle Passage, "and any race that has endured that ordeal can stand proudly today and proclaim their place in the history of man and that race is indeed mighty," he said.

Mr. Lambert asserted that we live in a world of polarized minds where there are those who still believe that our place is in the back, "but what a historical contradiction," he said. "Today we stand here not as victims but as people on a mission and as survivors."

Special guest judge, Professor of Social History and Director, Institute of Gender Development Studies, UWI, Mona Verene Shepherd urged the students not to focus on celebrating black inventors only from the USA but to focus also on those from Jamaica.

She encouraged the students to stay in school and not to become drop outs. "Stay in school and become innovators of things we can use in our society. We have to create, we have to innovate, we have to develop those skills among you and stop being a society of

consumers of overseas products. You need to change that trajectory. You have to ground yourself in the history of the black past,” Professor Shepherd stated.

Principal of Mitchell Town Primary School Orville Mitchell commended Jamalco for continuing to fulfill its role as a corporate entity and for the part it is playing in educating children about the achievements of black people.

Bob Marley Foundation Public Relations Manager Alicia Williams saluted Jamalco for continuing the legacy of Black History and Bob Marley. She said the celebration is in line with Bob Marley’s vision for education and a better tomorrow by uniting the world through acts of love and unity.

The two sets of debates were centred around the moot: ‘Being Black is a Deterrent to Progress’. Winston Jones High and Foga Road High School walked away with the top prizes. The students viewed the exhibits displayed by high and primary schools which depicted contribution of black innovators to civilization. These displays were judged and Foga Road High School copped the top prize in the high school category while Brixton Hill Primary emerged the winner in the primary school category.

The day’s event culminated with a concert which featured cultural performances by the students and runner up in the 2007 Digicel Rising Stars competition Jodian Pantry.