

JNA Hosts Virtual Livestream Event on Jamaica Diaspora Legacy Impact

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The Jamaican Nationals Association of the Washington DC Metropolitan Area (JNA), through the leadership of Dr. Elaine Knight, its President, and Rev. Dr. Noel Godfrey, its Vice President, has announced that JNA hosted a virtual livestream Forum on June 21, 2020, focused on the contemporary question how can Jamaica's significant diaspora maximize its contribution and effect on the island country of Jamaica. This cognitive-provocative Forum, was titled, "Jamaica: The Confounding Island - Its Strengths & Weaknesses - Can the Diaspora Make a Difference?"

JNA is well-positioned to delve into this question as its mission is to unite persons of Jamaican heritage and friends of Jamaica to promote Jamaican culture and heritage, and to offer charitable and educational support to local persons of Jamaican heritage and persons in Jamaica through partnerships with Jamaican organizations. The selection of the Forum's topic was driven by the research and writings of Dr. Orlando Patterson, a critically acclaimed Jamaican-born cultural and historical sociologist, and a John Cowles Professor of Sociology at Harvard University. Primarily, the Forum's dialogue focused on Dr. Patterson's latest book, "The Confounding Island: Jamaica and the Post-Colonial Predicament" which identifies a number of paradoxes in Jamaica's culture.

In this Forum, a panel of thought-leaders and community activists discussed some of the book's findings with Dr. Patterson, who presented these findings at the opening of the Forum. A key finding by Dr. Patterson is that the enduring effect of the extreme brutality of slavery in Jamaica provides residual shape and substance to the Jamaican people's collective psyche. This, according to Dr. Patterson, has resulted in a "destructive individualism" that provides star power to individuals but undermines the capability to collaborate. The book also points out that while many studies have been conducted on these paradoxes, there has been an implementation deficit.

Ambassador Curtis Ward, Esq., who is also an international consultant and a member of JNA's Advisory Council, served as the moderator. Panel members who were also chosen for their ability to further engage the Jamaican diaspora through the mission of their represented organizations, included Dr. Karren Dunkley,

Global Jamaica Diaspora Council (GJDC) - Northeast Representative; Dr. Joyce B. El-Ali, President, the National Association of Jamaican and Supportive Organizations (NAJASO); and Dr. Claire Nelson, Founder & President of the Institute of Caribbean Studies (ICS).

The dialogue during the Forum was dominated by a number of issues. These included the reformation of vital institutions in Jamaica, such as education, the country's social mobility engine; the creation of complex networks of mutual support with the purpose of counteracting the demise of the nuclear family; and the rise in Jamaica's moral tenor to respect its women. Comments from both the panelists and online participants concluded that the Diaspora can be helpful in addressing some of the "implementation deficits" identified by Dr. Patterson. Both the panelists and online participants also concluded that there is a need for continued discussions in developing a Diaspora plan of action. As a result of the level of interest and engagement, a second Forum is being planned with the goal of formulating a world-wide call to action that can maximize the Diaspora's contribution and effect.

Dr. Elaine Knight, in expressing her gratitude to Dr. Patterson, the panelists, the moderator and participants, said, "this discussion has mobilized individuals and organizations in the Jamaican diaspora to focus on areas, such as early childhood education and literacy, where they can make a difference." She also revealed her dream for Jamaica, by asking the question, "What if we could make Jamaica's literacy ranking match Jamaica's performance in track & field?"

For JNA, this dream could serve to rally the Jamaican diaspora in the Washington DC Metropolitan area, during Caribbean-American Heritage Month and beyond, to invest in a generational legacy of supporting education and literacy. This is consistent with JNA's history as it was established in 1969 by Jamaican college students at an inaugural meeting held on the campus of Howard University. Since this inception over fifty years ago, JNA's purposes can be summarized by three actions, "connecting, educating, and supporting", which dovetails with its hosting of the Forum. JNA's more detailed purposes include its efforts to: develop, implement, or support activities that maintain and promote Jamaican culture and heritage; provide members with a forum in which to share information and culture; assist and mentor Jamaican students and students of Jamaican heritage in the Washington DC Metropolitan Area in pursuit of their goals and objectives; educate, inform, and assist persons of Jamaican heritage in the US and in Jamaica; maintain close working relationships with both charitable and other organizations in the US serving Jamaican communities and in Jamaica; and with the Embassy of Jamaica; keep abreast of social, cultural, and economic issues in Jamaica and encourage needed support and investment in Jamaica.

JNA is an affiliate of the National Association of Jamaican and Supportive Organization (NAJASO). JNA became one of the first members of this umbrella organization which was established in 1977.

Those interested in the activities of the Jamaican Nationals Association of the Washington DC Metropolitan Area and information on Part II of the Forum, should check with JNA.

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JNA

JNA's mission is to unite persons of Jamaican heritage and friends of Jamaica in the Washington, DC Metropolitan Area,

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