



PEOPLE'S NATIONAL PARTY

CULTURE IS — INFRASTRUCTURE

A VISION FOR A CREATIVE, INNOVATIVE
AND INFORMED JAMAICA.



SECTORAL CONTRIBUTION
Culture, Creative Industries and Information

PRESENTED BY

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MANIFESTO

HERITAGE THAT INSPIRES | CREATIVITY THAT TRANSFORMS | INFORMATION THAT EMPOWERS

Madam Speaka, mi git up dis aftanoon fi mek mi fuss sectoral speech pon mi portfolo of Kulcha, Creativ Industry an infrastruc-cha, unda di teem: 'Kulcha a nuh Deckarashan, it a infrastruc-cha.' An if Jamaica ago buil wid purpus an wid peepl, den wi haffi stop treat kulcha and creativity lacka side bizniz but lacka seerus infrastructure fi develop di nation.

Madam Speaker, perhaps I should pause there voluntarily before I am reminded of the linguistic conventions of this Honourable House because maybe there is no more fitting way to begin a presentation on culture than to briefly speak in the language understood by the overwhelming majority of Jamaican people, even if that language still struggles for full acceptance in some of our most formal national spaces, including our Parliament.

Madam Speaker, at the outset, permit me first to thank the Leader of the Opposition, the Most Honourable Mark Golding, for the confidence he has placed in me through this portfolio assignment. I also thank my parliamentary colleagues, my councillors, my constituency team, and the many people who support the difficult work of representation and public service every single day. Public life is never carried by one person alone.

I especially want to thank my parents, Miss Fay and Pastor Burchell, for instilling in me from very early a deep love for Jamaica, a deep respect for people, and a deep pride in our culture, particularly through faith, religion, community and service. Much of what I understand today about identity, resilience, storytelling and the spirit of Jamaican people began long before politics. It began in church. It began in the community. It began in school. It began in the yard.

Permit me also to especially to acknowledge the people of South St. James who travelled all the way from home to Kingston to sit in this chamber today to hear their MP deliver this maiden sectoral contribution. From Cambridge to Catadupa, from Maroon Town to Welcome Hall, from Springfield to Mount Carey, thank you for making the journey. Thank you for believing in me. And thank you for entrusting me with the responsibility of representing some of the proudest descendants of Sam Sharpe and some of the truest living custodians of Jamaican culture anywhere in this country.

The people of South St. James are not merely observers of Jamaican culture. We are carriers of it, protectors of it, builders of it. And I want them to know that every single day I walk into this Honourable House, I never forget what it means to

represent them. I never forget where I come from. And I will fight every single day for the people of South St. James and for the dignity, potential and future of rural Jamaica.

Before I proceed to the substance of this presentation, permit me briefly to make an observation about the structure of our sectoral debates themselves. It would perhaps be far more useful to the country if the sequencing of these presentations allowed Jamaicans first to hear from the sitting portfolio minister outlining the Government's priorities, achievements and proposed direction, and then shortly thereafter hear from the Opposition spokesperson engaging those ideas directly, identifying gaps, strengthening proposals where necessary and advancing alternative visions where appropriate. Because the purpose of these debates should not merely be performance or political ritual. They should also function as a developmental dialogue.

And so, in this instance, I speak before the country has yet heard from Minister Olivia Grange herself. Permit me nonetheless to acknowledge her longstanding commitment to this ministry and the tremendous energy she has invested over many years in Jamaica's cultural and entertainment sectors.

However, in the absence of that sequencing structure, I will use this opportunity not merely to critique, but to place on the table a broader national vision. Because culture, creativity, entertainment and information cannot continue to exist at the margins of national development policy. They are not ornamental sectors. They are not side conversations. They are not ceremonial add-ons. They are infrastructure. Economic infrastructure. Tourism infrastructure. Employment infrastructure. Identity infrastructure. Digital infrastructure. Soft power infrastructure. Democratic infrastructure. And perhaps no country on earth proves that more clearly than Jamaica.

Long before many countries knew our GDP, they knew our music. Before they knew our exports, they knew our athletes. Before they knew our population size, they knew our sound, our language, our creativity and our spirit. Jamaica is a cultural superpower with a developing economy. That reality demands that we begin treating culture, creativity and information not as peripheral concerns of government, but as strategic pillars of economic development and global influence.

CULTURE AS INFRASTRUCTURE

For some people, culture is an event. For people like me, culture is how we survive. I come to this portfolio not only as a parliamentarian, but as a daughter of rural Jamaica, a daughter of South St. James, raised in communities where culture was not something carefully packaged and occasionally consumed, but something lived every single day.

We heard it in the churches. We heard it in our music. We heard it in the marketplaces. We heard it in the sound systems drifting across districts in the evening. In the cadence of our elders' storytelling. In revival meetings. In zinc-fence conversations. In the humour and resilience of ordinary Jamaican people.

Before I ever studied communication academically at the London School of Economics and Political Science, I experienced communication culturally. Before I ever understood branding professionally, I understood identity instinctively. Perhaps that is why I approach this portfolio with a deep conviction that culture is far more than entertainment.

Culture shapes how our people see themselves. Culture determines whether a nation walks with confidence or insecurity. Culture influences how the world sees us and how we see ourselves. Culture carries memory, resistance, aspiration, and it creates opportunity. Yet too often in Jamaica, culture is still treated as ornamental, as though it is merely something to entertain us after the serious business of nation-building is complete.

But culture, Madam Speaker, is not separate from development. It is development. Culture does the work of infrastructure. It builds economies. It builds tourism. It builds social cohesion. It builds confidence. It builds diplomacy and global influence. And just like roads, schools, ports and digital systems, culture requires investment, maintenance, systems and vision.

A country that neglects its cultural infrastructure eventually weakens its national confidence. And a country that exports culture globally while underinvesting in the people who create it leaves enormous economic and human potential unrealised.

Too often in Jamaica, culture remains concentrated in Kingston, within isolated institutions, or within occasional annual events. But culture must live where the people live. And the economic benefits of culture must reach the communities that created it in the first place. That means rural communities, inner-city communities, artisans, musicians, storytellers, craft vendors, food vendors, young

digital creators, small business operators, and ordinary everyday Jamaicans whose lived experiences shaped the Jamaican identity the world now consumes.

Jamaica's culture was not manufactured in a boardroom. It was born in communities. Born in the districts. Born in churches, dancehall spaces, school compounds, marketplaces and community squares. If culture is to truly become infrastructure, then we must democratise cultural ownership and economic participation. What do I mean?

The people who create Jamaican culture must also meaningfully benefit from its economic value. At present, too much of our cultural economy remains informal, fragmented, undercapitalised, and understructured. Too many creatives still struggle with financing, licensing, distribution, intellectual property protection, institutional support, and long-term sustainability. Too often, we speak about culture emotionally while failing to structure it economically. However, culture is not merely performance. It's not an item on a programme, it is value chains.

A properly developed cultural product activates entire ecosystems. The seamstress benefits. The farmer benefits. The chef benefits. The transportation provider benefits. The videographer benefits. The makeup artist benefits. The hotel worker benefits. The tour operator benefits. Entire communities benefit. Perhaps one of the clearest examples of untapped cultural potential sits deep in the hills of St. James: the story of our National Hero, Sam Sharpe. Too often, we reduce Sam Sharpe to a portrait on a mural on a wall somewhere, a face on a currency note, or a once-a-year ceremony attended by a sprinkling of people in Catadupa Square. But Sam Sharpe was visionary, intellectual, spiritually grounded, charismatic, and revolutionary. And what he ignited through the Christmas War of 1831 helped accelerate the collapse of slavery across the British Empire itself. Not merely Jamaican history. World history. The audacity of that young Baptist preacher from deep rural St. James lit flames of freedom far beyond Jamaica's shores.

So the question becomes: How do we move from memorialising our heroes to mobilising their stories as living cultural infrastructure? Imagine immersive heritage journeys beginning in Croydon, moving through Lapland, Bird Track, Mocho and Kensington, tracking their way down into Montego Bay. Imagine sections of the old railway system reimagined into experiential heritage journeys retracing the pathways through which Sam Sharpe and his fellow freedom fighters moved during the Christmas War of 1831.

Imagine visitors travelling through history itself, with actors, storytellers, drummers, artisans, food vendors, costume designers, tour guides, historians, filmmakers and photographers participating in a living cultural economy rooted in Jamaican history. Not abstract history. Living history. Immersive history. Community-rooted history.

That is how rural economies remain alive. That is how tourism moves beyond resort walls. That is how educational tourism develops. That is how communities participate directly in the monetisation of their own heritage and identity. Jamaica must move beyond limiting cultural tourism to occasional performances and resort entertainment.

The modern visitor increasingly seeks authenticity, immersion, storytelling, food experiences, music experiences, local interaction and identity. People no longer simply want to observe culture. They want to experience it, and Jamaica possesses one of the richest cultural experiences anywhere in the world. But too often, we fail to organise it intentionally.

Just last week, Jamaica witnessed something deeply revealing. International digital influencer IShowSpeed visited Jamaica briefly, and within hours, millions globally were immersed in Jamaican culture through livestreams and social media. What captured global attention was not polished advertising; it was authenticity. People experienced Jamaican humour, our music, language, dance, food, energy and our big personalities.

What we witnessed was digital tourism marketing, real-time soft power projection and cultural immersion on a global scale. It reminded us that Jamaica's greatest marketing asset is the authentic Jamaican experience. Not slogans alone. Not sun, sand and sea alone. Experience. So why should cultural activation feel seasonal in the cultural capital of the Caribbean?

Why should tourists struggle to find recurring immersive Jamaican cultural experiences every single week? Why should our town squares, amphitheatres and public spaces not regularly host live performances from our major artists, showcases for emerging artists, dramatisations, storytelling activations, folk performances, dance showcases, artisan markets and curated cultural experiences continuously across Jamaica?

The land of reggae should sound like reggae. The birthplace of dancehall should move with dancehall. Culture cannot only exist as an event, it must also exist as an environment. This extends into storytelling itself.

Other countries have built billion-dollar industries around fictional heroes such as Spider-Man, Batman and Superman and entire cinematic universes. Yet Jamaica possesses real heroes whose courage changed history itself.

Why should Jamaican children know more about fictional superheroes than about Sam Sharpe, Nanny of the Maroons or Paul Bogle? We should dramatise Sam Sharpe. Animate him. Write novels about him. Produce a streaming series about him. Make him emotionally accessible to younger generations. Show him as human: young, brilliant, charismatic, in love and alive because storytelling itself is an economic infrastructure.

CREATIVE INDUSTRIES, ENTERTAINMENT & ECONOMIC MODERNIZATION

This brings me naturally into the Creative Industries. The global creative economy is now valued at over US\$3 trillion. It is time for Jamaica to claim a larger share. Today, the global economy is increasingly shaped by streaming, digital media, artificial intelligence, influencer economies, creator platforms and direct-to-audience monetisation and Jamaican influence is deeply embedded across many of these spaces.

Our music shapes international sounds. Our slang travels globally. Our dance styles are replicated internationally. Our aesthetics influence fashion and entertainment worldwide. Yet too often, Jamaica remains at the edge of the value chain rather than at the centre of ownership. We export influence, but we undercapture value. That is one of the great economic questions of our time. How do we ensure that the people creating cultural value also retain economic value?

Because intellectual property is no longer a secondary issue. It is economic infrastructure and Jamaica must position itself aggressively around copyright protection, licensing, royalties, creator education, digital monetisation, and ownership rights. Too many Jamaican creatives remain culturally celebrated while economically vulnerable. That contradiction must change.

This is why investment in creative industries cannot be treated as charity or cultural goodwill. It is economic strategy. It is youth employment strategy. It is export strategy. It is digital economy strategy.

This is why the People's National Party had already proposed from as early as 2025 a \$1 billion Creative Economy Support Fund, regional creative hubs, content studios, audiovisual training and structured support for young creators and creative entrepreneurs, because talent without structure cannot fully scale.

We must also move beyond being merely a scenic backdrop for other people's productions. I speak as the proud MP for an area in South St. James called Flat Johnson, where one of the earliest James Bond films utilised the beautiful White Witch mountain backdrop in our constituency. So I understand the value of Jamaica's scenery and cinematic appeal.

As a country, we must move beyond being merely a backdrop for other people's stories. We must become owners of stories ourselves, exporters of stories and controllers of intellectual property because storytelling is one of the most powerful economic tools in the modern world, and this conversation must also include entertainment itself as Jamaica's marketed identity versus Jamaica's regulatory reality remains deeply contradictory.

We market Jamaica globally through music, nightlife, dancehall, festivals and cultural energy, while simultaneously placing many of the very practitioners who produce that value into recurring conflict with fragmented regulatory systems. Jamaica profits symbolically from entertainment culture while structurally constraining many of the people who create it and those lived contradictions within Jamaican entertainment policy must now be confronted honestly.

That is why the PNP proposed Special Entertainment Zones, streamlined licensing systems and more coherent entertainment frameworks. Entertainment is economy, employment, tourism, youth opportunity and national identity. And yes, residents deserve peace and communities deserve safety, but regulation cannot continue functioning primarily as suppression.

We cannot continue celebrating dancehall globally while criminalising many of its economic spaces locally and even the Government itself has acknowledged the need for structured entertainment infrastructure through discussions surrounding entertainment development zones in areas such as Negril.

But the people are now entitled to ask: Is this merely another announcement, or is this a real national strategy that will move from announcement to implementation? Jamaica has become too accustomed to launching without

follow-through. The issue is no longer whether Jamaica recognises the need, but whether we are approaching it comprehensively, intentionally and nationally.

This also brings us to Rastafari and ganja. Jamaica's response to Saint Kitts' formal recognition of Rastafari exposed something uncomfortable. Yes, Jamaica pointed to broad constitutional protections around freedom of religion, but perhaps the deeper issue is that we were not sufficiently intentional. We did not go far enough.

By failing to fully structure, codify and affirm something so deeply Jamaican, another country was able to claim leadership in formally recognizing what the world already associates most powerfully with Jamaica itself: Rastafari.

Full recognition of Rastafari as an indigenous religion with associated rights therefore, matters profoundly, and indeed this was reflected in the PNP's own manifesto commitments. Rastafari is not merely an aesthetic exported through reggae music and tourism imagery. It is a philosophy, a spiritual tradition, a political history and a way of life born from resistance, African consciousness and liberation.

Jamaica profits symbolically from Rastafarian culture globally while still understructuring the people and institutions connected to that culture locally. That contradiction, too, must be addressed honestly.

We must also confront the unresolved contradictions surrounding ganja itself. The 2015 amendments to the Dangerous Drugs Act under the PNP administration represented an important step toward reducing the criminalisation of ordinary Jamaicans, particularly poor youth, entertainers and Rastafarians whose lives were permanently damaged by criminal records connected to small quantities of marijuana.

That reform mattered, and the PNP did that.

But over a decade later, Jamaica must honestly ask: what comes next? While global cannabis industries continue expanding medically, commercially and economically, Jamaica still appears uncertain about how strategically it intends to position itself within that future.

Too often, those now economically positioned to benefit from the emerging cannabis industry are not the same communities that endured decades of

criminalisation and exclusion under the old system. That contradiction too, must be confronted honestly.

INFORMATION, MEDIA & DEMOCRATIC COMMUNICATION

Madam Speaker, let me now turn briefly to the Information portfolio. Information itself is now infrastructure. The architecture of public communication is changing rapidly across the world. Traditional media institutions are under severe economic pressure. Advertising revenues are shrinking. Digital disruption is accelerating. Audience habits are changing. Newsrooms are shrinking. Media houses are restructuring.

Increasingly, government itself has become one of the largest advertising clients, sustaining portions of the traditional media ecosystem. Strangely too, the government now appears to be attracting many of the very workers traditional media houses are struggling to retain. I am told that JIS itself is reportedly engaging one of the country's more recognisable media personalities to head the organisation.

Just this week, we witnessed the announcement surrounding the sale of the longstanding RJR Communications Group property on North Street, symbolising how dramatically the media landscape itself is shifting.

At the same time, concerns continue to emerge surrounding media sustainability, government advertising concentration, transparency and the broader politicisation of state communication. This raises important questions about public communication governance.

Across government today, communication spending has become increasingly fragmented and decentralised. Virtually every ministry, department and agency now operates its own communications unit, its own consultants, its own production arrangements, its own social media teams and its own PR budget.

Yet Jamaica already maintains state communication institutions such as the Jamaica Information Service and the Public Broadcasting Corporation of Jamaica, whose very mandate is public communication. Parliament and the public are therefore entitled to ask: who has eyes on the total national communication spend across government?

I raised that very question to the Information Minister during the Standing Finance Committee, and even there, no clear consolidated figure could be provided.

Where does duplication exist? What value-for-money oversight exists? Are taxpayers receiving maximum public benefit from these expenditures?

If JIS exists, PBCJ exists, and communication line items already exist across government, then we must honestly ask whether Jamaica is operating a coherent national communication framework or an increasingly fragmented parallel communications architecture.

This matters because communication spending is not insignificant in a government heavily focused on public relations and branding. We see it even here in Parliament. Ministers increasingly utilise external production agencies and communication teams surrounding sectoral presentations and major announcements rather than building and strengthening the institutional capacity of PBCJ itself.

The issue is not whether the government should communicate. Of course, the government must communicate. The issue is whether state communication is being strategically coordinated, transparently managed and institutionally grounded.

Government communication must outlive governments. Public information belongs to the people, not to personal algorithms or individual political branding ecosystems of ministers themselves.

Jamaica, therefore, urgently needs a modern digital communication policy, a social media governance framework, an artificial intelligence policy and stronger information management systems across government.

Ministers change. Governments change. But public institutions remain. Public communication systems should never become overly dependent on the personal social media platforms of individual officeholders rather than a durable government communication infrastructure.

The same concerns arise regarding access to information itself. What access is a heavily redacted document? What access is a response saying government contracts are protected by non-disclosure agreements? Transparency delayed too often becomes transparency denied.

Ordinary Jamaicans continue to experience communication breakdowns in real life through poorly coordinated government systems. We saw this recently in programmes such as ROOFS, where many citizens struggled to access clear information, proper updates, functioning help desks and coherent communication pathways.

That is not merely a public relations issue. That is governance infrastructure.

Madam Speaker, ultimately, this entire presentation comes down to one central idea: Jamaica possesses extraordinary cultural power. But power without structure becomes leakage. Influence without ownership becomes exploitation. Talent without policy becomes vulnerability.

If Jamaica is serious about the future, then culture, creativity, entertainment and information can no longer remain side conversations in national development. They must become central pillars of economic modernisation itself. Culture is not decoration; culture is infrastructure and if we build it seriously, intentionally and inclusively, then perhaps Jamaica will finally begin capturing the full value of the genius its people have always possessed.