

**PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY!**

SPEECH FOR HM ROBERT MONTAGUE  
ABSOLVING NATIONAL HEROES  
FROM CRIMINAL LIABILITY

Throughout our history, we the people have endured some of the worst oppression known to mankind. Despite this, we have shown with tenacity that we will stand tall and we can and have overcome. Throughout our history we have watched our heroes and unsung heroes make the ultimate sacrifice to allow us to live a life of freedom.

It is only right and only just that we fight for them now as they fought for us then. As a son of St. Mary, Jamaica and the Caribbean, I must express my gratitude to the many persons who made this bill a reality. I commend Senator Tom Tavares Finson for conceptualising this twelve years ago, Member of Parliament, Ronald Thwaites who first brought the resolution to Parliament, Minister Grange for tabling this bill in Parliament, the Chief Parliamentary Counsel, the lawyers, Miss Facey and other parliamentary staff who gave us sound advice as we now choose to right the wrongs that were done to our freedom fighters, our saviours, our heroes.

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I fully endorse and support this bill “to absolve certain National Heroes, namely, The Right Excellent Samuel Sharpe, The Right Excellent George William Gordon, The Right Excellent Paul Bogle, The Right Excellent Marcus Mosiah Garvey, their supporters, sympathizers and participants by association, and other freedom fighters, from criminal liability arising from participation in the 1760 Tacky or St. Mary Rebellion, the 1831 to 1832 Christmas Rebellion, the 1865 Morant Bay Rebellion and the 1929 campaign of the People’s Political Party, respectively, and to provide for connected matters”.

The Right Excellent Samuel Sharpe, George William Gordon, Paul Bogle, Marcus Mosiah Garvey were all sons of Jamaica. It is their blood that runs through our veins. It is their descendants who live on our soil. We have their strength, we have their courage. It is from them that we get our, “Vim, Vigour and Vitality”

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Oppression, slavery, the right to choose, the right to be free, the right to make own decisions were all underlying factors which caused the Tacky rebellion in 1760, the Christmas Rebellion in 1832, the Morant Bay rebellion in 1865 and the 1929 campaign of the PPP. Our heroes gave their lives so we could not only be free in body but as Marcus Garvey advocated, emancipated in our minds. How can we say that we are truly emancipated yet on our books, still hold our heroes criminally liable? There is something evidently wrong with that!

Marcus Garvey said that “A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots”. We cannot let what our forefathers did be in vain. As a people and as a nation, we must learn and honour their fight. If as a nation we decide to end this criminality that has caused us great suffering and permeated every aspect of our society, it will be done. We have to decide, just as our forefathers did, that enough is enough. We need to show our tenacity, our determination, our will to overcome.

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The policy makers, the security forces and the Courts cannot do it on their own. The people of Jamaica have to decide, as one, that they are going to take back their country, our country. They need to draw on the inspiration of our heroes and stand up for what is right, just and true. As the late Bob Marley and Peter Tosh wrote, “Get up, stand up, stand up for your rights”.

A freedom fighter by the name of Tacky is still remembered in Jamaica and in particular the parish of St Mary. His name was given to the rebellion that took place 257 years ago. I want us all to take inspiration from the life of Chief Tacky, Tacky was enslaved but never a slave. He could read and write, was highly intelligent and was King of his village before he was brought to Jamaica. He was by no means an average man. What does that mean for you? What does it mean for us?

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From Tacky and our heroes we can be inspired to be the change we wish to see. Let us not be content to sit and criticise the issues that we face but like Tacky move ourselves from criticism to action. It was an ordinary day like yesterday, a Monday that Tacky and his followers marched to Fort Haldane in Port Maria. Without a cell phone and without Internet, he organised and inspired the freedom of eight plantations in St Mary and many others across the island.

Our heroes of yesterday were the change agents; we must remember what they taught us and become the change agents of today. They inspire us to tackle current challenges in our individual and national sphere. It only takes one person to stand up and say something is wrong for others to follow. The actions of Tacky inspired many other men and women across the island to free themselves from a life of oppression.

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The actions of Tacky inspire us to be visionaries in shaping the future of our nation. Tacky was not content to go down in the annals of history as an ordinary man. He was not content with the existing *modus operandi* so he started a revolution in the form of a rebellion. What will you do to change this nation's future for the better? I encourage the youth to get involved in politics and volunteerism. If you do not do it then who will?

Many are today shying away from political leadership opportunities but that is not the approach you should take. Our youth should all see themselves as possessing the capacity to lead, even at the highest level because if you, the youth, do not do it, then nature has a way of filling the vacuum and who may lead may not be ideal but may lead because you did not seize the opportunity. I urge you to get involved today. You can volunteer to be a presiding officer, poll clerk, liaison officer, an indoor agent or become a leader in your community.

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Honour the sacrifice that has been made by our forefathers by carrying on their legacy in leadership.

Tacky's actions have taught us that we should not be fearful about what is being done when it is right. He reminds us that we never have to lay down and play possum when it comes to the life of our fellow men, protecting these rights and making the ultimate sacrifice. He along with our national heroes demonstrate to us that it is always within our power to make Jamaica a safer and more prosperous place, a place to live, work, raise families and do business. You can start by changing the '*informa fi dead*' culture. If you see something, you need to stand up and say something and take it a step further, if you see something that you can actively change, then do something.

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Our police and soldiers live up to this daily. They are our every day heroes who place their lives on the line and sacrifice, as our heroes did, so that you and I can be safe. Their efforts must be commended because it is not easy. Already they have taken 674 illegal weapons off the streets since the start of the year.

I congratulate them and I pause to applaud all the members of the Police Force who were recently promoted and other members of the security architecture, including those from the Defence Force and Correctional Services who were honoured on the lawns of King's House yesterday. Thank you for serving our nation with pride and dignity. You are a testament to the legacy of our National Heroes.



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One historical account spoke to the organisation of Tacky's revolt through a network of Akan speakers. I want to bring attention to the fact that the people spoke a common language, not only physically but they were of one mind and one heart as they advocated for freedom.

We too can adopt this approach as a nation. In a society marred by loss of the notion of the village raising the child, we need to start speaking again the common language of mutual respect, honesty and integrity, care and concern for children and the most vulnerable.

It is because Tacky and our heroes fought, why today the people of Jamaica have the vested authority to elect a parliamentary representative, because they fought, we can stand here today and advocate for the rights of the people, because they fought, we have been able to conceptualise and organize to achieve developed nation status by 2030. We owe it to the legacy of our heroes and to our children, the future generation, to reorient

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ourselves to the common language of respect for each other. This is necessary if we are to create a prosperous future.

What future do you want to see? How do you want to live? No one is satisfied with the current state of crime. It is up to you and me to carry on the fight in this 21st century. The battle may not be as physical but the next revolution is waiting for us to start it.

I challenge our youth and all within the sound of my voice to use Facebook, Twitter and Instagram not just for fun but for advocacy. Do not just think outside of the box, demolish the box completely.

Through the Jamaica Constabulary Force, we have already developed apps that have increased the technological capacity of the Force and are digitizing the way the Force operates. These are the kind of solutions we want more of. Get creative and use the assets available to become a catalyst for change.

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Use the Stay Alert App to anonymously report what you know. Crime is fuelled by our silence. For those of you with smart phones, all you need to do is go to the Google Play or App Store, search for Stay Alert and install. This is the latest mobile tool in the fight against crime. As you travel on campus or wherever you young people go, use the app to report any suspicious activities. You can send a text message, video, photo or recording to the police. You can also use the app in an emergency once you have entered your cell number. When you use the app, it is a small way in which you can make a big difference in the fight against crime.

Today we are righting the wrong. In doing this we are saying to future generations that our great forefathers did what was necessary, right and true, we are teaching our children to have the same resilience to fight for what is right, we are saying to our great grandchildren to cost it what it will. This is what it means to be a true hero.

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At this point, I want to call on the Universities to write the history of Tacky from a Caribbean perspective. Records indicate that Tacky's head was taken to Spanish Town and displayed on a pole, but I am challenging this. I challenge our historians to uncover the truth about the life and death of Chief Tacky. Immediately after the Bill is passed, we the people of St. Mary intend to start the process of having Tacky declared a National Hero but as a start, we want Tacky to be given a national honour.

We are changing the course of history, no longer will our forefathers be regarded as criminals but this move will set the context for future generations to understand what sacrifice means, the results of which are sometimes not immediately felt but is felt for generations to come.

This bill has reminded us that as a nation, as a country, we need to stand up for what is right, what is just and what is true.

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We have learnt to introduce accountability, through our Courts and through organizations such as INDECOM. We have our watchdog groups which advocate and scream loudly when they perceive a violation of human rights.

We have trained over 400 police personnel for our security personnel in conflict resolution and how to treat with domestic violence and the reestablishment of District/Parish Consultative Committees. We have a signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Churches to lay out the protocol regarding steps a Minister of Religion, must take, to deal with wanted persons, contraband or illegal guns. We have finally made the District Constables pensionable as of April 2016.

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We are working with the unattached youth in our society to get them off the streets through projects like the Youth Empowerment and Mentorship Camps and “HOPE”.

Through these programmes every day we see the struggles of our society but we also see the resilience.

None of the progress that we have made in these areas is to be taken lightly for without the sacrifice made, it would not be possible. It would therefore be hypocritical of us as a nation to allow these great and noble men’s names to remain on the books.

The high level of criminal activity in our nation did not happen overnight, just as slavery and its effects did not happen overnight. I call on us as citizens to stand up against the criminals and work with our security forces to secure our nation.

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The Ministry of National Security's Five Pillar Crime Strategy unequivocally speaks to this through the strategy of Effective Policing. A key element to Effective Policing is a community approach. The community must work together with the police to reduce and eliminate crime.

It took a movement to effect change and a will and determination of the people to overcome. Let us remember our many heroes who sacrificed their lives for us and remember what they fought for; so that we could be free; free from harm, free from oppression, free to walk the street day and night without fear.

We all must join together and honour these brave men and women by fighting against crime. Marcus Garvey taught us that we are the masters of our own destiny. Paul Bogle taught us that justice and fair treatment must be for all. George William Gordon taught us how to live not only for ourselves but for each other; he was a self-educated landowner who elevated his fellow men by

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sharing his wealth. Sam Sharpe taught us that if we do not stand for what we believe in, we will fall for anything.

We are proud and hold our heads high when we honour National Heroes, namely, The Right Excellent Samuel Sharpe, The Right Excellent George William Gordon, The Right Excellent Paul Bogle, The Right Excellent Marcus Mosiah Garvey, their supporters, sympathizers and participants by association, and other freedom fighters. They are our heroes, our inspiration and a reminder that we can all be heroes.

This bill is an honour to the work and sacrifice of all our heroes, including the unsung ones, to the contribution they have made to not only Jamaica but to the world.

We therefore must use this bill as a point of departure. We the people of St. Mary will, as we move aspects of our history from shame to fame. Mr. Speaker, I commend this Bill to the house and ask for full support.