

B/N SEAGA EDWARDS

Seaga takes look at J'can cultural identity in first lecture

BY PETRE WILLIAMS
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FORMER Opposition Leader Edward Seaga last Thursday took his rapt audience through the folk roots of Jamaican cultural identity, as he delivered his inaugural lecture as a distinguished fellow with the University of the West Indies School for Graduate Studies and Research.

Seaga explained the dynamism of the Jamaican culture that combines a unique mix of the "uptown" with its largely Euro-centric lifestyle and the "downtown" with its tradition of African retention.

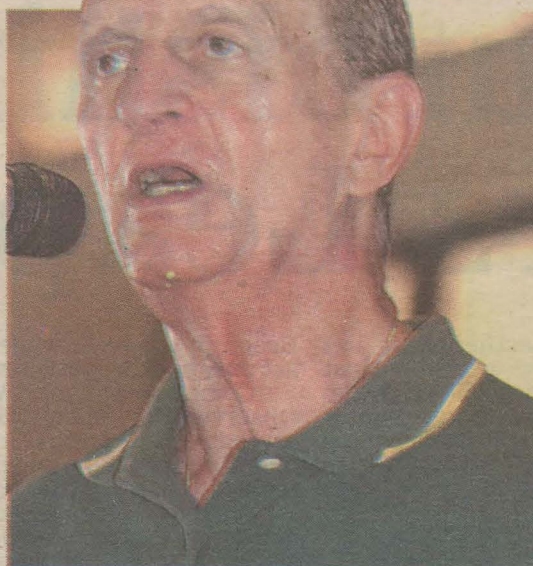
According to Seaga, Jamaica's history is such that it constitutes "a mixture of cultures, which have been stratified in layers of a society shaped by the experiences of folk life and modern society, moulded by metropolitan influences.

His lecture gave insight into a range of topics regarding the power of culture including:

- early childhood nutrition and aggression, where he explored the impact of breast feeding practices, for example, on a child's behaviour;
- care and discipline, which impacts a child's self confidence and sense of security;
- scarcity and struggle, where limited household space and a scarcity of food impacts a child's well-being and development;
- impulse and individualism where he looked at the dynamism of Jamaicans in music, sports and dance and how these areas were impacted by the other elements of culture;
- pride and prejudice, where he spoke on ideas of respect and justice; and
- faith and order, which saw him looking at, among other things, religion and the role of women.

"Nothing, save the omnipresence of Jehovah, is more all-embracing than the definition of culture (which is) the totality of beliefs, behaviour and values which shapes and is shaped by humanity. Based on this all-encompassing perspective, we should expect the influence of culture to be dominant," Seaga said. "But so taken are we by the forces which impact on our economic lives, affect our social order and determine the cultural psyche, that we have mostly failed to recognise the powerful underlying dynamics of culture."

According to Seaga, Jamaica's folk culture, for a long time, has been one wherein the creativity of a people is seen and where there



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are strong, positive values are everywhere in evidence.

"The traditional society is a cultural well-spring of historic wisdom, a cradle of heritage, the crucible of an entrapment of poverty out of which has emerged the artistic and athletic giants and the rewarding achievements of those who were forged by determination to overcome the hardships of life's experiences," he said. "Others seek respect from learning and earning, despite the shortcomings of a society which has never succeeded in educating the poor."

But Seaga lamented that there was an emerging counter culture, which is threatening to undermine the traditional Jamaica.

"It is composed of those who have abandoned the faith of their fathers. They have become rootless and therefore, ruthless, relying on their upbringing to guide them in the use of might to secure respect and right at any cost because in their isolation they see themselves as 'done de'd a'ready'," said the former West Kingston Member of Parliament.

This group of people, he said, were located among the young who possess little religious roots even as they are detached from civil society and from the tradition of family.

"They translate this into a way of life honouring respect, power, money, sex and, where necessary, the retribution of violence. They exist in a counter-culture which has broad support without theology, ideology, or even social commitment," he said. "It is individualistic and impulsive, deeply grounded in an expressive and creative self."

"The indicators of success emphasise material success. This culture allows those with few resources to access the 'bling-bling' indicators of material success, ensuring that they can never be ignored," said Seaga.

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