

# Edward Seaga: My Life and Leadership – Volume 1

*Today we begin a special series of excerpts from the autobiography of former Jamaican Prime Minister Edward Seaga with permission from MacMillan Publishers.*

I HAD no intention of giving priority to my autobiography among the writing I wished to do after retiring from a life of 45 years of political representation.

I considered that there would be more time and more accomplishments to come. I did not intend to isolate myself from the happenings of public life and would, perhaps, find myself moving in other directions. In addition, my health was very good, so I was looking forward to many more years of deep thinking and robust activity.

The University of the West Indies (UWI) had conferred on me the rare honour of a Distinguished Fellow for Life and the venerable Institute of Jamaica had also bestowed on me its prized honour of a Fellow of the Institute of Jamaica. Later, I was invited to be Pro-Chancellor of the University of Technology. With funds raised by the chairman, UWI Development and Endowment Fund, Dennis Lalor, I accepted the invitation of the UWI Vice-Chancellor and Distinguished Fellow, Rex Nettleford, to spend five years at the University of the West Indies writing as well as lecturing on request.

The books I intended to write were all works I had already commenced: development of the child, indigenous spiritual religions, the origins of Jamaican popular music and the cultural roots of Jamaican folk society (as a part of national identity). These were all socio-cultural and anthropological works. A special project which I embarked on was a systematic collection of all the macro-economic and key social variables since the 1950s, which would provide for a data-led analysis of the economy since that period. In addition, I was also invited to write a weekly column for **The Sunday Gleaner**, the leading newspaper.

## GOOD OFFER

Yet when I was approached by MacMillan Publishers to write my autobiography, it was an offer that was difficult to refuse. I set myself a timetable of two years, from July 2006. It was completed in August 2008, but the finished work was by no means the same book as originally discussed.

It was intended to be around 150,000 words; it has expanded to 370,000, necessitating publication in two volumes. From early in the exercise, I realised that there was much more to be written than I had anticipated. But I rationalised the expansion on the basis that this was a work about 45 years of active involvement in public life, in addition to groundbreaking

research. Inevitably, it had to be a long project. Nonetheless, by working days, nights and weekends, I completed it within the originally intended time. I had fallen right back into the workaholic pattern of my years in public life, which was not how I had intended to spend my retirement.

## MORE TIME

Although I had found more time for family, I wanted still more, because there were now four grandchildren: Chloe, Marcus, Gabriel and Isa, as well as our own little one, Gabrielle, all ranging from under one year to nearly six years. Their cuteness at this age made it even more compelling that I should have time for them.

From the beginning of this project I recognised that I was carrying a unique and historic responsibility. I was the only remaining person who had been involved, in various positions of leadership at the highest levels, in the development of the country from before independence: as prime minister, leader of the Opposition, minister, member of the Legislative Council (the Senate), member of Parliament and party leader, the last-mentioned for 30 years. I participated, in one capacity or another, in all the major political initiatives which the country pursued and in those events which became turning points in

Jamaican history.

As a consequence, it has fallen to me to do what cannot be done by anyone else from an intimate perspective – to write a biography which falls as close to a presentation of the history of the period as possible. Aware of that heavy responsibility, I have tried to adhere to an objective, unbiased presentation. I am sure that the passion of certain events overtook me at times, and that on other occasions some bias has filtered in as the story unfolded, but there were times when the brutal truth demanded raw presentation because history requires an accurate record. As Harry Truman said: "I never gave anybody hell. I just told the truth, and they thought it was hell."

*Don't miss part two of this special serialisation in next week's Sunday Gleaner.*

**SECTION F**



**SEAGA**



on campus and studying hard to adapt to the rigorous workload.

"I didn't have too much of a social life, quite frankly," he admitted, though he did a lot of sports: swimming, diving, shooting and, in his third year, they developed a cricket club. "I remember the Harvard-Yale match in my last year. One of the two umpires didn't turn up. I saw a gentleman sitting across the field on a wall and something said to me, 'Go and see who he is.' It turned out to be Alistair Cooke, who was doing the programme 'Letter from America' for the BBC. So I said: 'You must know something about cricket. Come and umpire the match'. And he did. He wrote it up in one of his broadcasts, with a bit of humour, you know, drinking beer instead of tea and all that. I enjoyed my sporting career there."

#### WAYS OF WORKING

Seaga's close friends at Harvard included his third cousin, Bob Abboud, who went on to become President of the First Bank of Chicago; Herbert Levin, who joined the United States Foreign Service and served for many years in Hong Kong; and Prince Saddrudin Aga Khan, who became head of the Refugees Organisation for the United Nations. With another friend, an Indian from South Africa, Seaga remembers one summer: "We decided to hitchhike and see how far we could get. We ended up in Omaha, Nebraska. Money ran out so we had to find ways of working. I became a salesman for what they call siding. It's an aluminum sheet that you nail over the wooden lumber on the outside of a house. It's enduring and therefore it gives the house permanence in terms of how it looks. It doesn't require painting. I was there for at least a month but I didn't make enough money to survive. My uncle in an adjoining state sent me the funds for transportation back to Cambridge."

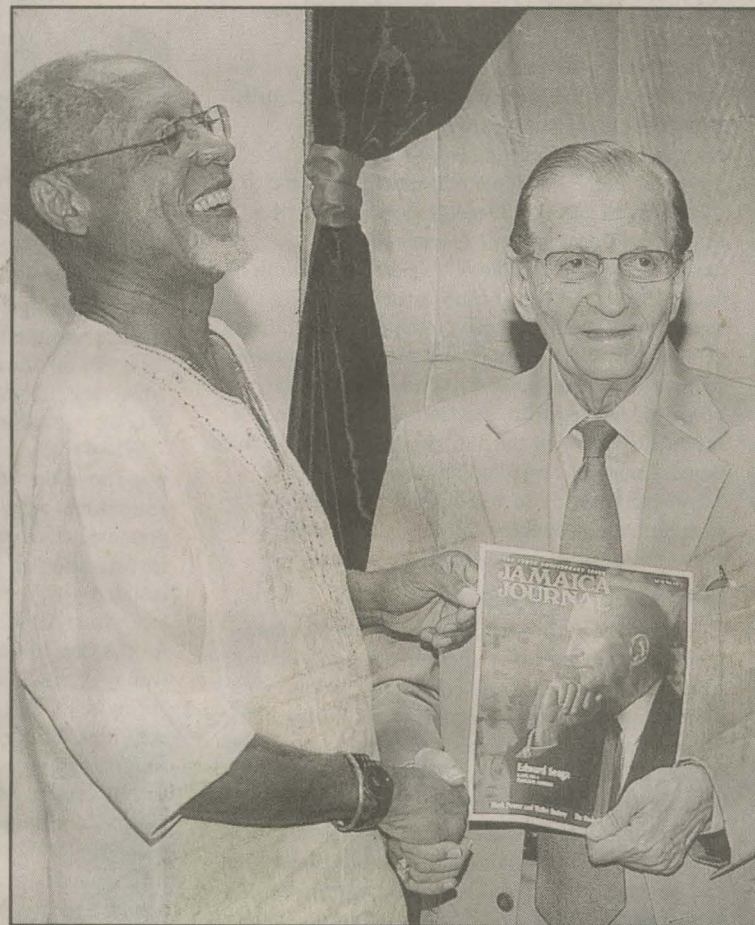
Referring to his work on Jamaican music, I wondered what he thought of dancehall, with its violent lyrics.

"Dancehall is not my favourite type of music," he agreed. "I like music that has strong melody and to the extent there are lyrics, you come to accept that lyrics are rather trite. They're not necessarily profound. Bob Marley was the huge success that he was because he provided some profound lyrics as well



PHOTOS BY WINSTON SILL / FREELANCE PHOTOGRAPHER

Former Prime Minister Edward Seaga strums on a guitar given to him by international Jamaican singer Jimmy Cliff at a testimonial banquet in his honour in 2005.



Professor Barry Chevannes (left), chairman, Institute of Jamaica, presents copies of the 'Jamaica Journal' to Edward Seaga at the launch of volume 32, in commemoration of the 130th anniversary of the Institute of Jamaica. last August

as some good melodies. So he produced music you can whistle, music you can retain in your mind, etc. I don't find that in dancehall at all. But I can't

condemn it as music that is not a part of the artistic world

because art doesn't know good or bad. Art is just different. To the extent that dancehall is a form of art, just as the way Picasso's art was a different form of art we'd been accustomed to in the past, you have to accept it."

He continued: "But I don't consider the association of dancehall with the type of lifestyle that it is associated with (wrapped up with narcotics, macho gun-slinging and things like that) is a healthy one. Because music is a very powerful weapon of communication and to the extent that music is used to convey a value system that is not acceptable to the community then, dancehall, in doing so, lionising murder, and lionising anti-sexual behaviour, is not doing the society any good."

#### FRIGHTENING EXPERIENCE

How often in dealing with situations in Tivoli Gardens or in electioneering has his life been threatened?

"What in your entire life was the most frightening experience that you've ever had?" I asked. He said: "I don't know that I can give you an answer to that because it might sound odd to you if I say so, but I have to tell you what I feel. And that is I don't get frightened. I suppose if something actually threatened my life to the point where it was confronting me, there might be an element of fright but I just have not ever been really frightened. That was the reason I was able to be successful in West Kingston because the people saw in me great courage. That was what they wanted, to be able to be sure that they were protected."

Where does that courage come from? "I don't know. It's not something that was part of my family upbringing or anything like that. I think, if anything, it comes out of a born dislike for injustice. That dislike for injustice builds up an immediate response of rage in me. That rage is what is considered courage and gives me the impetus to action, because of my dislike for injustice."

**In Part Two: Grenada and world leaders**