

Portia Simpson on:

Giving back to the community



Portia Simpson

"In today's Jamaica, there is much evidence of progress. Through the achievements of many of our outstanding sons and daughters, our country has become well-known across the world. In the 20s and 30s, Marcus Mosiah Garvey made the name of Jamaica famous in the United States, in the entire Caribbean, in Latin America, in India and on the African continent. He was a man of vision. Today, long after his death, his teachings continue to inspire people who are fighting for their freedom.

Since Marcus Garvey, we have had a long list of spectacular achievers in a variety of fields: Herb McKenley; the late Bob Marley; Don Quarrie, Merlene Ottey, Colin Powell and many other big stars, as well as those who quietly and consistently continue to make valuable contributions to national life.

Undoubtedly, we have come a long way since the Leon School of Beauty Culture was established in 1940 and the graduation exercises for the first class of eight were held at the Bournemouth Club. As Jamaicans, we can all be proud of our achievements and we have earned the right to be confident in our talents and abilities.

However, we must also be aware that there is much in our society that needs to be changed. Some of the old ways and the old systems no longer serve a positive purpose and are

sources of pain and discomfort for many of our people.

I put this question to you the graduates, very seriously: As young people with skills, talents, energy and the capacity to take fresh approaches to life, what contribution are you going to make to bringing about the necessary changes for a better Jamaica?

Community

I would like to suggest to you that much can be accomplished through the building of strong professional organisations and strong community organisations, capable of representing your point of view, protecting your interests and advancing your community, on a sustained basis.

In Jamaica today, we are developing an unfortunate tendency to believe that the be-all and end-all of standing up for one's rights and bringing about change is to get a group together in a street corner, hold up placards and speak in angry tones for the benefit of the television cameras. I believe that demonstrations can serve a useful purpose in dramatising a situation. People have a democratic right to demonstrate to use demonstrations as a legitimate means of protest.

However, I would like to emphasise that over the long haul, nothing can substitute for the consistent work of a strong, sober, democratic organisation, concerned with strengthening,

not weakening the country and the capacity of our people to produce. Bringing about fundamental change takes more than two or three minutes before the camera. Lasting change is achieved by the hard consistent, focused work of people united in the determination to succeed.

This evening, I would like to invite you to join those who are willing to do this work for change. There are many problems to be solved and many challenges to overcome. We need to change the way we conduct our politics. We need to find a way to live more peaceably with each other. We need to improve all our social services. We need to become more efficient producers and better money managers. We need to protect the hard-won gains we have made, such as the right of women to paid maternity leave. Will you help to find solutions? Or will you simply see the challenges that face us as someone else's concern?

I think by now, the secret is out. There is nobody else to solve these large problems that affect us all. To quote Bob Marley, "None but ourselves can free our minds." And this is where it starts. Every single one of us, young and old; every single household and every single community in this country will have to sit down and decide that we really want change. Then we must commit to changing ourselves - to changing our own individual attitudes and behaviour.

The next step is to link with others of like mind because the kind of changes that will be necessary call for the combined energies of every man, woman and child. Unite with others around the views you share and the goals you want to achieve. Join your professional organisation; join a community organisation; join a church group; join a political organisation. Lend your talents, your skills and your energy to a worthwhile cause. Your personal success cannot be separated from the success of the community in which you live.

- Excerpts from an address by Miss Portia Simpson, Minister of Labour, Social Security and Sport to the graduates of the Leon School of Beauty Culture at the Signature Gardens, 39 Lady Musgrave Road on December 2, 1995

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF JAMAICA

The Gleaner
Thursday,
January 11, 1996
Page 88