

EMANCIPATION AND INDEPENDENCE 2026

THEME:

“UNITED IN CELEBRATING RESILIENCE”

**COMPILED BY THE LIBRARY DEPARTMENT
PORT MARIA VTC, REGION 2**

Jamaica Emancipation

Emancipation refers to the abolition of slavery and the granting of freedom to enslaved Africans in Jamaica. On August 1, 1838, full freedom was granted after the end of the Apprenticeship System, marking one of the most significant events in Jamaica's history. More than 300,000 formerly enslaved people gained their legal freedom and were able to begin building new lives for themselves and their families.

The road to emancipation was long and difficult. Enslaved Africans resisted oppression through rebellions, protests, and acts of courage. One of the most important events was the Baptist War of 1831-1832, led by National Hero Samuel Sharpe. The struggle of enslaved people, together with the efforts of abolitionists in Britain, helped bring an end to slavery in the British colonies.

On August 1, 1834, slavery was officially abolished in the British Empire. However, many formerly enslaved people were required to work under an Apprenticeship System, which limited their freedom. This system ended on August 1, 1838, when full emancipation was finally achieved.

Today, Jamaicans celebrate Emancipation Day on August 1 each year. The day is used to remember the struggles and sacrifices of our ancestors, celebrate their resilience, and recognize their contribution to the development of Jamaica. Emancipation Day also reminds us of the importance of freedom, equality, and human rights.

Independent Jamaica

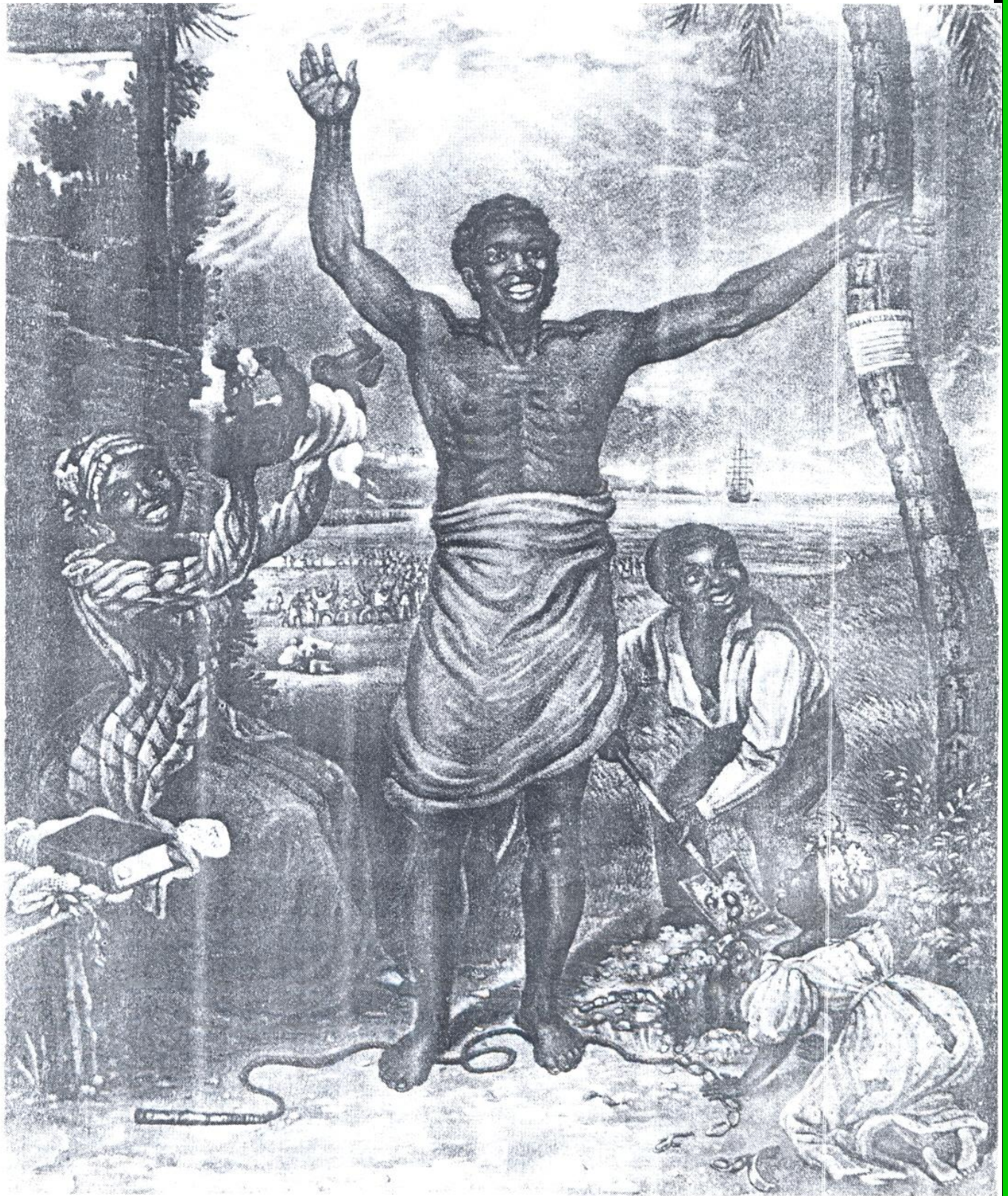
Independence means that Jamaica is solely responsible for managing its own internal affairs. Locally elected officials, headed by the Prime Minister, are responsible for governing the country and making decisions on behalf of its citizens.

As an independent nation, Jamaica has its own Constitution, national symbols, emblems, and military. We also have our own passport, banking institutions, and currency, which feature images of our National Heroes and other distinguished Jamaicans.

Jamaica also has ambassadors who represent the country abroad. The nation's leaders can negotiate and sign treaties with other countries. As an independent state, Jamaica is a member of international organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and the Organization of American States (OAS). Jamaica enjoys equal status with other independent nations, and its vote in international bodies carries the same weight as that of much larger countries, such as the United States of America and the United Kingdom.

On Independence Day, August 6, Jamaicans at home and abroad celebrate the nation's achievement of self-government. As an independent nation, we also honour those who contributed to the birth and development of our country.

At this time, we recognize the contributions and sacrifices of our foreparents, whose struggles and resistance paved the way for the freedoms and opportunities we enjoy today.



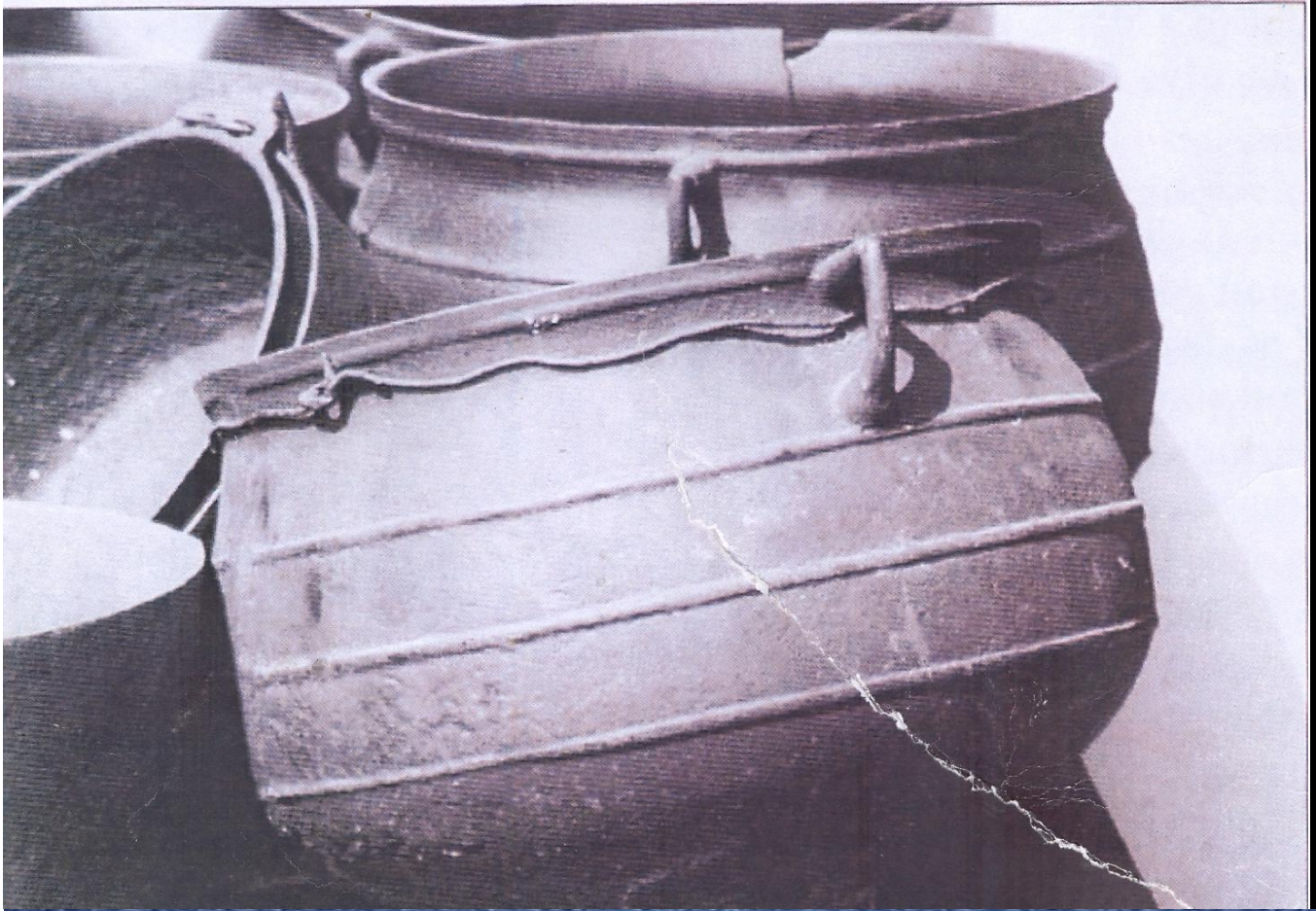
EMANCIPATION CELEBRATION

Courtesy of the National Library of Jamaica



Yabba

This vessel is of African origin. It was used for storing and holding water as well as cooking and serving food. It was also used for mixing cakes and for salting and storing meat.



Dutchie

This term is the short for ‘Dutch pot’ – a heavy cast iron pot with three small feet, handles, and a cover. It was the all-purpose cooking utensil used for frying, boiling and baking, as a coal or wood fire could be placed both underneath and heaped on its top.



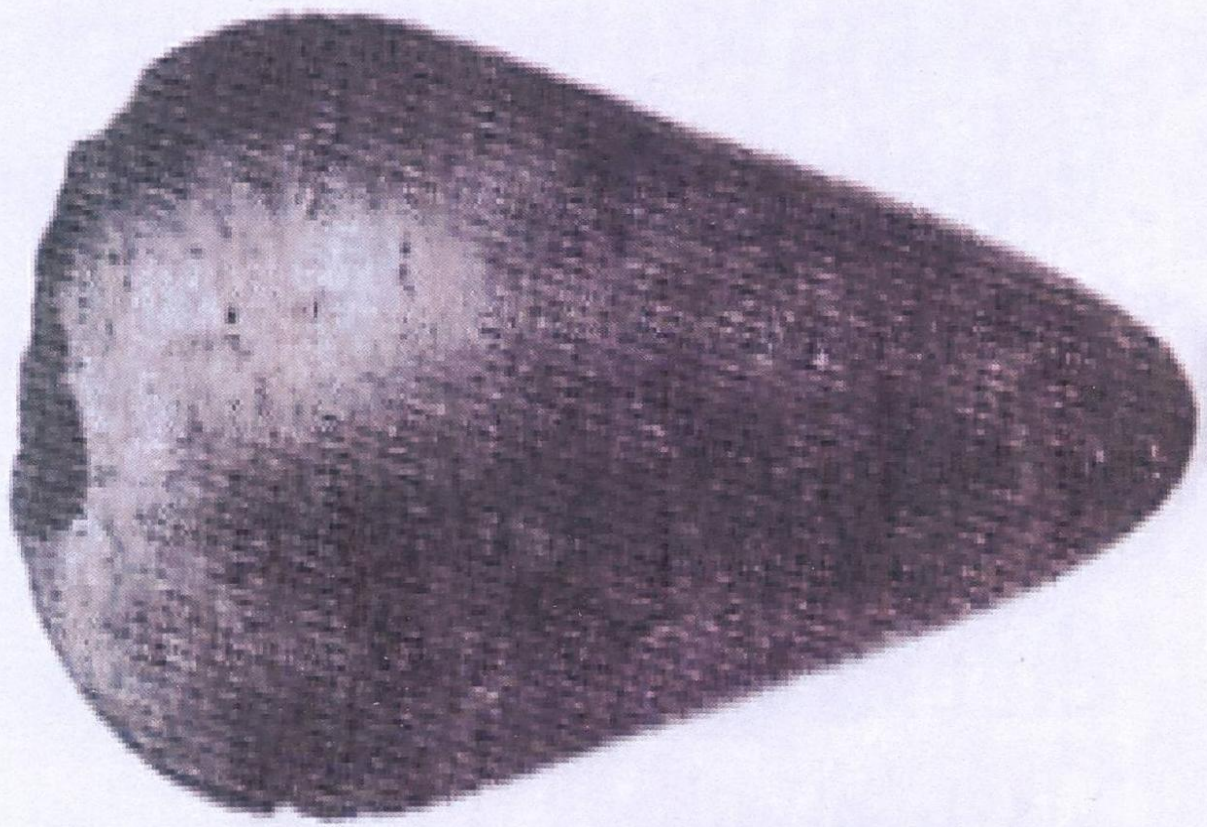
Calabash

In the past, this was one of the most useful fruits in the domestic economy, and for many peoples including the Tainos. It was also a very important spiritual fruit for them. This fruit can be emptied out and dried and used as containers.



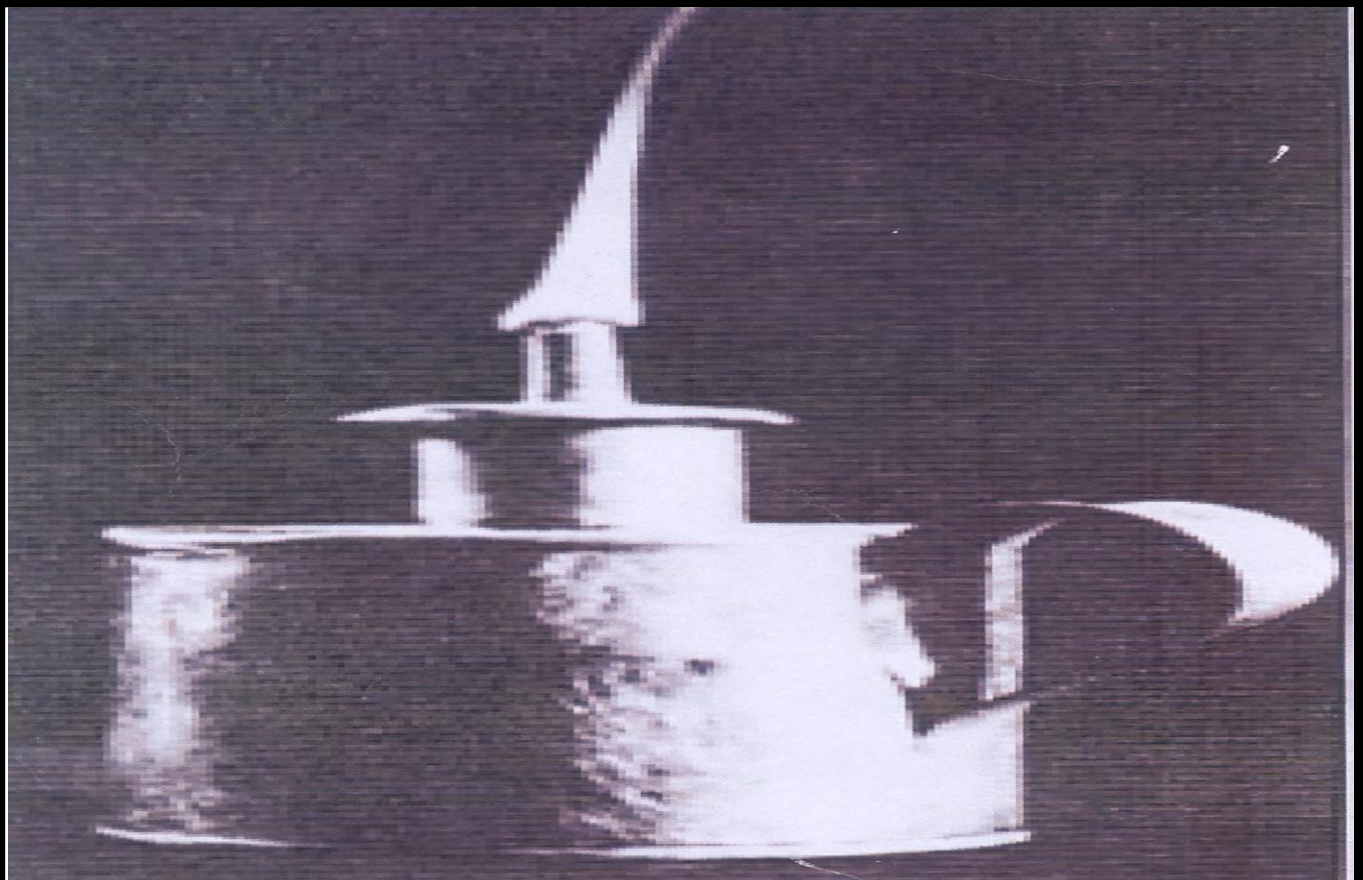
Monkey Jar

This was once common in every home for storing and pouring water. Monkey jars incorporate both African and European ceramic features and have been made for hundreds of years; examples dating from the late 17th century have been found in Port Royal.



Thunder Ball

In the past, Jamaicans kept family drinking water stored in this jar and it was believed to keep the water cool. These stones are believed to have fallen from the sky.



Kitchen Bitch

A small oil lamp used by the poor, consisting of a tin can filled with kerosene oil with a cloth wick, and a handle attached by the local tinsmith. It was also called 'cowgut' in some localities. The kitchen bitch was known to be used only in the kitchen.



Coal Pot

Not a pot but a small charcoal stove, its other name of 'coal stove' being more accurate. The coals are placed in the basin-like top, and the ash falls through a grill into the hollow cylindrical foot. It was widely used for heating flat-irons for ironing clothes.

Mento

Mento is the original popular music form in Jamaica, developing during the plantation period and holding sway up to the 1950s. It was born out of the fusion of African and British influences. Its performance mode, rhythmic impulse, as well as its call and response type singing are African in origin, while the scale patterns, harmonic concepts, verse and chorus song types are British.

Mento was one of the vehicles by which aspects of life considered taboos, were addressed. Often done with a touch of humour, the words of the accompanying songs addressed our social and economic struggles. A mento band could be found in most villages throughout the country.

Mento is regarded in some circles as the Jamaican equivalent to calypso. While some of the songs were aired regularly, others were banned as they were thought to be too sexually explicit.

Myal

Myal, one of the oldest dances in Jamaica, is associated with a type of religious observances. This dance was mostly performed in the parish of St. Elizabeth. It has also been erroneously associated with obeah. The difference, however, is the belief that while obeah uses evil powers Myal uses good powers.

Myalist captured the ghosts of dead people to use and control them. Myal was deemed illegal by the authorities who regarded it as a great evil.

In the 1840s Myal was revived when missionary activities began to get stronger. It was recorded in the Moravian and Presbyterian records that the action distresses the ministers.

The Myal cult is now a relic of the past and elements still exist. The dance shows a wide range of body movements, extensive use of space and violence of action. These are done by throwing the body on the ground and by acrobatic feats. As well as a vibrating movement brought about by succession of rapid sideways shifts from foot to foot on the toes and with knees bent.

Ettu

The Ettu dance is performed in the parish of Hanover and is a social dance from Africa. It is believed that Eto is a corruption of the word Edo, the name of a West African Yoruba Tribe.

The dance involves the lifting and dropping of elbows and shoulders, with the feet doing a sideways shuffling step.

The musical instruments consist of a double headed goatskin drum – the ire and kerosene tin referred to as the achaka or katta. The dance metre is of two types, simple duple and compound duple, known as the blues on four notes only and sung in a Yoruban dialect.

Ska

Ska, regarded as the forerunner of reggae music, was popularized by the late Don Drummond and The Skatalites during the early 1960s. It could be described as a Jamaicanized version of the North American Rhythm and Blues (R&B).

During the Ska era, sound systems which started out as a Saturday night hobby for the owners, made a significant contribution to the development of the music form. The sound system consisted of amplifiers and loudspeakers turned up to high volumes.

The Ska dance consisted primarily of very fast paced movements such as shuttle and split. “Shuttle and split” consisted of moving the hands upwards, downwards, side to side, backwards and forwards while lifting the legs bent at the knees alternately.

Ska gained national popularity through the efforts of the Skatalites, regarded as the greatest Ska band. It was included on the list of Jamaican attractions issued by the Jamaica Tourists Board and went even further to win international acclaim.

Dinki Mini/Gerreh

Dinki Mini originates from the Congolese word ndingi', which means lamentation or funeral song. Dinkies are celebratory occasions. Although associated with death, the music is lively, joyful and exciting, intending to cheer the family and friends of the dead person. Dinki Mini was practiced openly throughout slavery but is done mainly during our annual Festival celebrations.

However, it is still performed in the parishes of St. Mary, St. Ann, St. Andrew and Portland. While Gerreh is found in the parishes of Hanover, Westmoreland and St. James. Its popularity came about from the death of Tacky a hero of the Maroons as it was performed during his funeral celebrations.

Revivalism

Revivalism began in Jamaica between 1860 and 1861 as part of a religious movement called the Great Revival. It is a combination of elements from African pagan beliefs and Christianity and has several forms. The two major ones, however, are Pocomania and revival Zion (Zion).

Revivalists believe that the temporal and spiritual worlds are indivisible, therefore living can be possessed and influenced by the spirits of the dead.

Once a worshipper is possessed, the spirit becomes his protector and consultant, in return for food which is usually offered.

A ritual which involves singing, drumming, dancing, clapping, groaning and the use of prayers is done to invite possessions. Some of the music and songs come from the orthodox religion. Evidence of possession is wheeling and dancing, falling into a trance and speaking in unknown tongues.

Rival groups or bands have leaders the male leader is called a "Shepard" or "Captain", while the female leader is referred to as "Mother".

Kumina

Kumina also spelt (Cumina) is a religious group which originated in Congo, West Africa, and was brought to Jamaica by the free Africans, who came here between the 1840s and 1860s. It is strongly believed that Kumina expresses the strongest African Retention of Jamaican folk culture and provides us with powerful clues about the religious and social practices of our African Ancestors.

Kumina practitioners believe in the existence of three spirits- Sky Spirits (all powerful God Nzombi Ampangu), earth Spirits and Ancestral Spirits. The sky spirits carry the highest rank followed by earth spirits and ancestral spirits. The earth spirit may appear by entering the body of a practitioner. However, the ancestral Spirits are the most used.

Kumina is performed to celebrate achievements and at special events such as engagements and weddings. Thus, it is referred to as rejoicing music. It may also be performed at set-ups and nine nights.

The three most important elements in a kumina session are dancing, singing, and drumming. The drums are the most important, because of the control they have over the spirits. Two types of drums are used – the kbandu or Bandu and the playing Cast.

The colours worn by participants in a Kumina ceremony are of utmost importance. These colours give an indication of the occasion, for example black and white for a mourning dance; green and white for thanksgiving.

The dance in a kumina ritual is led by either a “King” or “Queen”. Kings and Queens are usually the best dancers and are generally the knowledgeable of the customs, practices, rhythm of the drums and traditional songs through which the spirits are called.



Jonkonnu

Jonkonnu (called John Canoe by the British) is a band of masqueraders who usually perform in towns and villages at Christmas time. The Jonkonnu customs go as far as the days of slavery, but at that time the bands were very large and elaborate.

Characters in the Masquerades can be very frightening to onlookers. Masqueraders are dressed in costumes such as King and Queen, Cow Head, Horse Head, Devil, Pichy Pachcy, Re Indians and Belly Woman. Occasionally a mock Policeman Masqueraders would be added to keep on lookers in order. The characters are usually played by men with fully covered face as part of the tradition.

It is also believed that Jonkonnu became associated with Christmas because this was the only major holiday of the slaves. However, Jonkonnu also appeared at Easter called “pickney Christmas” by slaves

This ancient art form declined rapidly in the mid-1800s when in 1841 the mayor of Kingston banned Jonkonnu Parades. This was a result of frequent clashes between revelers and the police and for a very long time Jonkonnu became almost non-existent, except for rural areas which were excluded from the ban.

However, Jonkonnu was revived around 1951 when the daily Gleaner sponsored a Jonkonnu competition and the level of participation showed that the customs of jonkonnu were still alive. Unfortunately, it was never able to regain its standard and today is but a shadow of the original.



Bruckins

Bruckins belongs to the creolised group of traditional dances, which came into existence to celebrate the emancipation of slavery in 1834. Bruckins takes the form of a pageant, with a processional parade of kings, Queens, Courtiers (known as grandsons and granddaughters), soldiers and pages.

The music being amalgam of European and African elements the drum being the main instrument that is used to accompany the singing. Two double headed drums are used; the bass drum is played with a padded stick, and the rattle with two slender sticks. The participants in the dance wear elaborate clothes to depict the extravagance of the Royal Court, the main movement of the dance is a dip/kotch of the body, as the arms are moved across the chest in an upward movement while wheeling and turning the body. The movements in Bruckins Derived from Pavanne dance which originated in Italy and then taken to the rest of Europe.

A highly competitive spirit is always visible among the participating groups. The queen of each group usually appears first, each dancing and trying to outdo the other to see who could “bruck better”. These are the movements in the lower region of the body which gives the appearance that the body is broken at the waist. After the Queen’s performance the competition continues with the Kings and Courtiers challenging each other.



Quadrille

Quadrille originated from, the popular dances of the French and English in the 18th and 19th centuries. It highlighted the elegance and mannerism of the elite of these societies. It is however believed that quadrille began in France as it was the leading country in cultural Development, especially in the dances of that period.

Quadrille is performed in four distinct movements called figures. A fifth or “brawta” was later added to the dance- the Mento.

The Square and Long way set formation of Quadrille was introduced in Jamaica in the early 19th century. However, as the dance developed the names were changed to Ballroom Quadrille and Campstyle.

Both the Campstyle and Ballroom Quadrille dance we know today include African elements, but this is more evident in the Campstyle version.

Quadrille was a popular social dance after emancipation. It was performed at tea parties, house openings and family celebrations, especially weddings. It was also performed at community functions such as the first of august celebrations held by church groups, 4H Club Day Boxing Day and New Year’s Day.

The popularity of the Quadrille declined after the introduction of American music and Calypso in the 1950s. Today it is mostly performed as part of the annual Festival celebrations.







BAMMY

Bammy is a traditional Jamaican deep-fried cassava flatbread. It has been consumed since pre-Columbian times and is believed to have originated with the native Arawak people. Bammy is a popular accompaniment to several foods, especially fish.

Bammy is made from grated cassava root or cassava root flour and salt. The mixture is lightly fried (usually in coconut oil), dipped in coconut milk and fried again.



BREAD PUDDING

A delicious pudding made from leftover bread. The bread is soaked (often overnight), squeezed dry, and mixed with the other ingredients. The mixture is transferred into a dish and baked.

It may be served with a sweet sauce of some sort, such as whiskey sauce, rum sauce, or caramel sauce, but is typically sprinkled with sugar and eaten cold in squares or slices.



BULLA CAKE

Bulla is a round; flat cake made from flour and dark sugar. Its shelf life is long and its traditional partner is avocado (pear). It is a welcome snack at any time for most Jamaicans.



COCONUT DROPS

Jamaican coconut drops are usually made with coconuts that is finely diced by hand. It is boiled and held together with a large amount of sugar.



DUCKUNOO (BLUE DRAWS OR TIE A LEAF)

A pudding made from cornmeal or green bananas, coconut, sugar and spices. It is wrapped in green banana leaf, tied with banana string and steamed. The dark blue colouring imparted by the banana leaf and the shape of the fold have given rise to dukunoos' popular name 'Blue Drawers'



FESTIVAL

A dumpling made with cornmeal, flour, salt and sugar and then fried. It is shaped like a thin hot dog roll and is frequently served with 'jerk' dishes.



SWEET POTATO

Jamaican sweet potatoes (*Ipomoea batatas*) are the root of a vine in the morning glory family and native to the New World tropics. Its history dates to 750 B.C. in Peruvian records. Columbus brought the Jamaican sweet potato to the New World from the island of Saint Thomas. The Taino word for them was batatas which eventually became patata in Spanish, patae in French, and potato in English.



Boiled Shrimps (Janga)

Shrimp is high in calcium, iodine and protein but low in food energy. A shrimp-based meal is also a significant source of cholesterol, from 122 mg to 251 mg per 100 g of shrimp, depending on the method of preparation.



Boiled Crab

Crabs are prepared and eaten as a dish in several different ways all over the world. Some crabs are eaten whole, including the shell, as soft-shell crab; with other crabs just the claws and/or legs are eaten. The latter is particularly common for larger crabs, such as the snow crab.



ROAST BREADFRUIT

Breadfruit was collected and distributed by then Commanding Lieutenant William Bligh as one of the botanical samples collected by HMS *Bounty* in the late 18th century, on a quest for cheap, high-energy food sources for British slaves in the Caribbean. It can be made into puddings. Drinks, wines, chips and flour or used as you would potato, in salads.



ACKEE

Ackee is the national fruit of Jamaica; ackee and saltfish is the national dish. The ackee tree grows in various places in the world where it has many non-edible uses. Cooked ackee can be likened to the look and taste of scrambled eggs and can serve with roast breadfruit or fried dumplings.



SWEET POTATO PUDDING

Sweet potatoes are tuberous roots vegetables that belong to the Convolvulaceae family of *Ipomoea batatas* species. They are native to Central America and have been cultivated in more than 100 countries in tropical, sub-tropical and temperate climates. They are considered as a major food staple in many countries including the Caribbean, and as a luxury addition to the diet in most developed countries.

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