



## MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

By:

**The Hon. Lovitta F. Foggo, JP, MP**

Minister for the Ministry of Labour, Community Affairs and Sports

### 2019 Emancipation Commemoration

July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2019

**Mr. Speaker,** I rise today to advise my colleagues in this honourable House of events taking place this month to recognise the 185<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the abolition of slavery in Bermuda.

**Mr. Speaker,** the history of Bermudians of African descent did not begin with slavery and did not end with slavery. Thus, the Department of Community and Cultural Affairs' Emancipation Committee has over the years centred its programme offerings on educating our people not only about the important history of resistance to slavery such as the conspiracy of 1761, the trial of Sally Bassett, and the poisoning conspiracies of the late 1720s; but also on our history before slavery, including research by Boston University professors Drs Thornton and Heywood indicating the Angolan roots of the original African-Bermudian population; as well as the post-emanicipation contributions of black Bermudians, including the role of our friendly societies, the significance of black entrepreneurship, and the five-year "trail of our people" programme that charted the contributions of unsung champions who supported the black community through the post-abolition and segregation eras.

There is a long and rich heritage that we pull from, and these are the stories that Bermudians need to know and claim as a way of bolstering a sense of national pride, identity and purpose.

**Mr. Speaker,** this year's commemorations focus on the legacy of Mary Prince, who is not only a Bermuda national hero; but who was also an internationally recognised abolitionist whose narrative provided a clarion call for the emancipation of all those held captive under the inhumane practises of chattel slavery throughout the British empire. Her slave narrative "the History of Mary Prince" does not document a benign life as a slave in Bermuda and I am providing today all members of this honourable House with a copy of her book as it is essential reading. I would like to take this opportunity to read a few paragraphs of her experiences.

**Mr. Speaker,** the Department of Community and Cultural Affairs has partnered with Titan Express to offer a historical bus tour providing highlights of Mary Prince's autobiography, visiting three of the sites that she mentions in her book. This tour is running throughout the month of July, and as it stands those tours are already sold out, so we have put on four more tours for the month of August. We congratulate Rashida Godwin and her team at Titan Express for developing this kind of offering; given the level of public interest and value to cultural tourism, we thank Titan for considering the extension of the tours into August and hopefully throughout the year.

**Mr. Speaker,** part of the history of black Bermudians has been about recognising our connection to those throughout the African diaspora; this connection has perhaps been most clear to our historians and artists. The Dr. Kenneth E. Robinson/Cyril Outerbridge Packwood memorial lecture, honouring two of our most insightful historians, has now entered its 14<sup>th</sup> year and last night featured a talk on the African-American poet Langston Hughes. The talk, offered by Stanford University professor emeritus Dr. Arnold Rampersad, will be followed by a second lecture by Dr. Rampersad entitled “writing our lives”, focusing on the importance of autobiography, memoir and biography – Mary Prince’s narrative being a key example.

**Mr. Speaker,** the events relating to the Emancipation Committee are important; but what might sometimes be overlooked is the vital research that the Department of Community and Cultural Affairs funds so that we might know more about the depth and breadth of our history. In 2017-18, the department funded a research project by Dr. Margot Maddison-Macfadyen on the latter days of Mary Prince; since, as vital as Prince’s story is to our national narrative, we had little information about what happened to our hero following the publication of her book.

**Mr. Speaker,** these findings, which have already been shared with a number of schools during education month in February, will now be made known to the public in a lecture by Dr. Maddison-Macfadyen on July 25<sup>th</sup> at the Earl Cameron theatre. This talk will conclude with a dance performance entitled “a woman named prince”, choreographed by Conchita Ming, performed by Arielle lee Ming and the anointed wings of fire.

**Mr. Speaker,** the Department of Community and Cultural Affairs as well as the individuals who comprise the emancipation advisory committee are to be commended for these excellent offerings. **It is my hope that these events will strengthen our understanding of who we are, where we come from, and the strength of the shoulders that we all stand upon.**

Thank you.