

# Creative SPACE



CREATIVE SPACE spotlights local art and culture. It is written by Joanne C. Hillhouse. Read the extended edition with extras at [jhohadli.wordpress.com](http://jhohadli.wordpress.com)

## CENTERING US, YEAR ROUND



*Africa-inspired. (Facebook photo)*

February is Black History Month (BHM), started in America as Negro History Week in 1926. March, by 1987 US congressional decree, is Women's History Month (WHM).

Both have had more global penetration than the coronavirus, due in part to US cultural dominance, but also reflecting a lack - even in predominantly Black coun-

tries like ours - owed to a mix of colonial hangover, and isms related to race, class, and gender.

Like, do we understand our history in a majority Black country to begin not on the plantation but in Africa, do we see our ancestors who lived and died on sugar plantations as slaves or enslaved people - meaning do we see their condition

or their humanity, do we appreciate that less than a single handful of women have held elected office since universal adult suffrage in 1951?

One of the things we heard on Observer radio during BHM is how the teaching of history has been de-centred. And we know that even when it was compulsory, it did not centre us. This is what made a book like 'To

Shoot Hard Labour', chronicling, through the life of Papa Sammy Smith, roughly 100 years of Antiguan history (including the slave-like conditions that persisted post-Emancipation) well in to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, so significant when it was introduced to me at Christ the King High School in the 1980s.

I returned to Christ the King as a guest on that leap day between BHM and WHM. It was refreshing to see the majority of students outfitted in Africa-inspired prints, interpreted in their unique Caribbean fashion and individual style.

The programme included a presentation on Africa. We learned about principles like Ubuntu - "I am because we are", about the languages, the sheer size and cultural multiplicity of Africa. The soulful singing, the cadenced dancing, the profound poetry (Not giving back my Black!), the researched presentations about inventive women in history (all interesting, none Caribbean) were moving and entertaining.

But the question that circled my mind was why one month (two if you count Independence season). We don't have the excuse of being numerical minorities, others controlling government, education, media etc. This is ours to design, so why isn't Africa, why aren't we, a core part of our African-Caribbean education, our media, our socialisation year-round in even a fraction of the way it is during BHM?

Barbara Arrindell, one of the presenters, quizzed the CKHS teens on four Antiguan women and their responses suggested some knowledge of only one - national hero Nellie Robinson, founder of the TOR Memorial, a school that transformed society by collapsing class.