

Exciting Exclamations!

The French say "Merde!", the Spanish say "Madre de dios!" and Barbadians say "Cheese-on-bread!". Every country/culture has distinctive expressions that are used to convey shock or surprise. Jamaicans are no different.

Well... actually, I think we are different. My guess is that we have a greater number and wider variety of ways to express shock or surprise than anyone else in the world. The sheer number and unusualness of Jamaican exclamations would be sufficient for a Phd thesis. We won't even get into the numerous exclamations that end with "claat". Those would provide sufficient material for a year-long university course (Perhaps it could be called: "R.A.S.S. 101: Basic Studies in the use of Invective and Diatribe in the Jamaican Vernacular?"). The following is just a sample of the numerous exclamations found in the Jamaican vocabulary: Backside! This one is. It provides a way to voice without using vulgar words ending in "claat". (The words ending in "claat" only come out when they see: (a) the damage you did to the car last night, (b) your university tuition fees, or (c) the light bill with when you hardly at home.) Blertneet! or Blertnaught! Is this even a word? English or otherwise? What could the inventor of this phrase possibly have been doing, or what could he possibly have seen, that so deeply shocked him that it caused him to spontaneously utter these words? Did he see a ghost? Aliens? The light bill?

Blouse and Skirt! Why blouse and skirt as opposed to "Pants and shirt" or "Shoes and socks"? All I can tell you is that this one was very common in the 1970s but, like bell-bottom pants and afros, it seems to have fallen out of popular usage since then. (So don't go around saying "Blouse and skirt" People will know you're old.) Blow-wow! Perhaps this exclamation was intended to mimic the sound of a gunshot? If so, it does a poor job of it. What kind of gun makes the sound "blow-wow" anyway?

Boxcover! It's relatively tame and can really only be spiced up when it's said more loudly and the delivery is stretched out a bit - as in "BOOOOOXXXCOVAH!!!". Or, when it's combined with other, more colourful exclamations. E.g. "Is how di boxcover dem expect me fi pay dis bill?!" Brown dog! Yes, you read it correctly. Not "Brown Lion" or "Brown Tiger" either. "Brown dog!" is proof positive that Jamaicans can, and will, turn literally any word or phrase into an exclamation. Apparently all one has to do is utter the words at the right time, with sufficient force and volume, and voila, you've just created a new exclamation. Cock-ah-fought! (Cock-ah-fart) The origins of this phrase simply beggar the imagination. I hate to do it, but I have to ask: Did the cock break wind? And, if so, why? More importantly, why was it thought necessary to mention that fact? Could we not have let the whole unpleasant incident go by without comment? Cooyah! This exclamation is unusual, popular and so distinctly Jamaican that it's even become the name of a clothing line. Jeezam! or Jeezampeas! Jeezampeas would have been the appropriate response if, for example, some little girl in your class tried to kiss you on the cheek. "Jeezampeas, Shaneekwa! That's so gross! What yuh kissing me for?!" Kiss mi neck! Sorry, I don't even know what to say about this one... Feel free to e-mail

chatboutjamaica@gmail.com with your thoughts. Mi granny! Mi granny! is almost as popular as Mi mumma! E.g. "Mi granny! Look how Donnette get fat and sour!" Mind you, if your poor granny knew the circumstances in which you were calling her name she'd probably flog you within an inch of your life.

Pussnaught! See "Blertnaught!" above. Rass! Rass is the quintessential Jamaican exclamation. It is timeless and endlessly versatile. It can neatly convey surprise ("Ah weh di rass yuh a tell mi seh?") vigorously express anger ("Hey taxi bwoy! Move yuh rass outta di road!") or eloquently communicate appreciation (Raaass! Girl, how you look so good?). thingsjamaicanlove