



William Anthony McConnell Doctor of Laws (LLD)

Chancellor, there is an ancient distinction, indeed, conflict dating back to the middle ages between two discrete parts of the medieval city: 'the town' and on the other hand 'the gown'. On the one side stood the citadel of higher learning, whose inhabitants had the privilege to live without physical labour, spending much of their time grappling with ideas. And on the other side stood the town, constituting essentially everyone else: the traders, craftsmen, merchants and the rambunctious medieval rabble. Little love was lost between the two and more than one pitched battle was fought, as in the 1355 battle of St Scholastica day at Oxford, when many scholars died at the hands of the rioters from the town.

If, then, Chancellor, most of this august gathering tonight represents the gown, there is no doubt that William Anthony McConnell O.J., C.D., J.P., Managing Director of Lascelles deMercado and Company Limited and the Wray and Nephew Group is representative of the town. Yet today, in contradistinction to history, he is wearing the gown and on closer inspection, the cap to boot! And rightly so Chancellor, for Billy McConnell's entrepreneurial initiatives, most outstandingly manifest in innovative and successful efforts to boost the export of Jamaican manufactured goods have served to multiply Jamaica's collective wealth and set a sterling example for others to follow.

William McConnell was born in Montego Bay in 1947 and educated at DeCarteret School and Munro College in Jamaica, Dean Close School in Cheltenham, England and McGill University in Montreal, Canada. He became a chartered accountant in 1970 and returned to Jamaica in 1973 as financial accountant at J. Wray and Nephew Limited. In 1977 he became Managing Director of the Wray and Nephew group of companies, including subsidiaries associated with the growing of sugar cane, the manufacture of sugar, the distillation, aging and bottling of rum and the local and international marketing of Appleton Jamaica rum and other brands.

While Appleton and its associated brands, including the ubiquitous Wray and Nephew White Overproof are household names in Jamaica, there was only limited recognition outside the island before McConnell's time. It was under his tenure, but particularly after the 1991 liberalisation of foreign exchange that the export of Appleton took off internationally. Under what one Wray and Nephew manager describes as "McConnell's visionary approach", export sales, particularly of premium rums, increased exponentially. Not surprisingly, Appleton is the number one premium rum sold in

Jamaica, but in 2006 it was also the number one imported rum in Canada, Mexico and Peru, to name three significant markets. By that year, shortly before the financial crisis, some ninety percent of earnings from Appleton accrued from international sales. I hasten to add that his focus on making a success of Jamaican rum exports has not been to the exclusion of everything else. William McConnell is also Chairman of Globe Insurance Company of Jamaica, the Sugar Manufacturing Corporation of Jamaica Limited, is a director of the Carreras Group, the Jamaica Observer, the Spirits' Pool Association of Jamaica and the University Hospital of the West Indies Private Wing Limited. In addition, he has served the Private Sector Organisation of Jamaica as either Vice President or Honorary Secretary for twenty years. For his efforts in developing and encouraging local manufacturing and exports, William 'Billy' McConnell gained the Order of Distinction with the rank of Commander in 1996 and the Order of Jamaica for Distinguished Leadership in Business and Export Industry in 2006. To understand the philosophy that has guided these remarkable achievements, I leave the final words to Billy McConnell himself, when he observes "...how important the building and maintenance of confidence is in the well-being of a country and in the creation of its wealth. I implore us all to do everything in our power to maintain this spirit of trust and confidence, each with the other and all with the Government of the day".

Chancellor, I present William McConnell and invite you, by the authority vested in you by the Senate and Council of this University, to confer on him the degree of **Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa***.

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