

# **The Significance of Jamaica's National Symbol - the Coat of Arms**

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## **History of the Coat of Arms**

According to Escarsega, Mack, Rivenc and Learner (2016), a coat of arms is the principal part of a system of hereditary symbols, which dates back to early medieval Europe, and is used mainly to establish identity in battle. Brooke-Little (2014) makes the point that a coat of arms that is found on an escutcheon forms the central element of the entire heraldic achievement, which consists mainly of a shield, a motto, supporters, and a crest. Traditionally, a coat of arms is unique to an individual, family descent, adoption, a state, an organization, school or other institution or cooperation, alliance, property ownership and later on, a profession.

## **The Importance of a Coat of Arms to Family, Institutions and Countries**

A coat of arms was intended to recognize achievements and family heritage and, as such, a coat of arms design can provide much insight into an individual's legacy. A coat of arms is also passed down throughout generations and can assist in carrying a family's history (Bradley, 2015).



(Sample family coat of arms: <https://www.houseofnames.com/sample-family-crest>)

Many large institutions also have a coat of arms which they deem as very important. These are usually companies recognized for excellence in their products and services, and also elite universities, such as Harvard, Princeton, and Georgetown, as well as our own local university, The University of the West Indies, Mona Campus.

An institution does not have to be in existence for hundreds of years to use a coat of arms. With that being the case, when young or new institutions want to project a serious image, to show that the institution is conservative, traditional or confident, they will use a coat of arms. Pariona (2018) makes the point that when institutions use a coat of arms or logo, it has the power to inspire confidence more easily due to the fact that it contains noble element.



(Sample institution coat of arms: <https://pr.princeton.edu/pwb/05/1024/2n.shtml>)

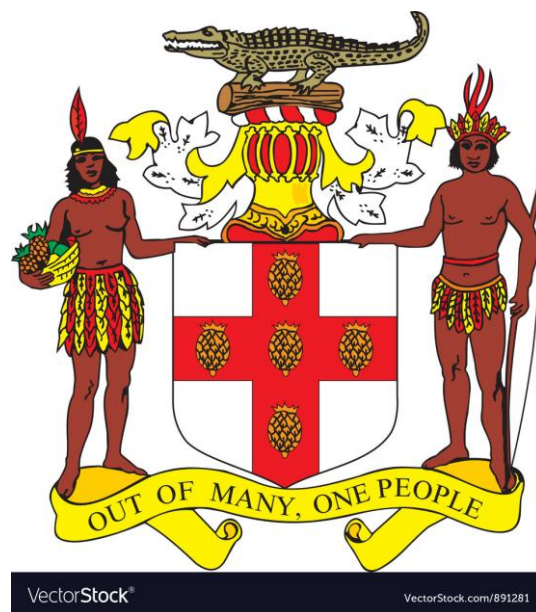
In the same way that a coat of arms is important to families and institutions, it is also important to countries. A national coat of arms is a symbol which is used to denote an independent state by means of heraldic achievement. The coat of arms is regarded as a symbol of the government or the head of state of a country and is used in print as well as armorial ware and as a decoration on walls in official buildings. A national coat of arms is the main symbol found on passport covers - documents that are used internationally to prove that an individual has the citizenship of a country. A national coat of arms is also used as a symbol on coins and money that is associated with the state which is circulated generally.

### **The Jamaican Coat of Arms**

When Jamaica gained independence, the Government and the Opposition party both agreed that the existing arms that was granted to Jamaica in 1661 under Royal warrant, and which was revised partially in 1957, constituted a badge of great historical significance to the nation and should be retained (Senior, 2003). The original coat of arms was designed by William Sancroft who was then Archbishop of Canterbury.

The Jamaican coat of arms consists of a shield which has a red cross and five golden pineapples which are flanked by a male and female Taino standing at each side. On the coat of arms, the male Taino has a bow and arrows. The crest consists of a Jamaican crocodile surmounting the royal helmet and mantling. The motto ‘Out of Many One People’, which was adopted during independence, is located at the bottom of the crest (Senior, 2003). All these figures on the Coat of Arms represent Jamaica in various ways. The national motto, ‘Out of Many One People’ is a tribute to the unity of the different cultural minorities inhabiting the nation. The Jamaican crocodile is the indigenous reptile of the country, but is not endemic to the island as it is found in the coastal wetlands of Cuba, Hispaniola, the Cayman Islands, and Florida (“What the Symbols on Jamaica’s Coat of Arms Represent?”, 2016).

Today, the Jamaican Coat of Arms appears on every Jamaican bank note and coin as well as on every national document. The coat of arms is also often used as the final seal of governmental approval.



(Image of Jamaica's Coat of Arms: <https://www.vectorstock.com/royalty-free-vector/jamaica-coat-of-arms-vector-891281>)

### **Did You Know?**

Did you know that the meaning of the Jamaican motto, '*Out of Many One People*', has the same meaning as the motto of the United States of America, '*E Pluribus Unum*'?

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