

DEATH OF PROFESSOR THE HON REX NETTLEFORD, OM, FIJ, OCC

The entire University of the West Indies community is devastated by the loss of the colossal Caribbean cultural icon, Professor the Honourable Rex Nettleford. Save for the three years he spent as a Rhodes Scholar at Oriel College, Oxford, Rex Nettleford has lived his entire adult life at and for The University of the West Indies. This life-long association with UWI began in 1953 when he entered the then University College of the West Indies to read for a degree in History. He returned immediately after completing the MPhil in Political Science at Oxford and, at the prompting of UWI Founding Father, Sir Philip Sherlock, took up the challenge of widening the reach of the still fledgling institution through the Department of Extra-Mural Studies, which took him to Trinidad and Guyana as Staff Tutor for the Eastern Caribbean.

Nettleford's life has been seamlessly intertwined with that of the University of the West Indies. At every stage in the growth and development of the institution his quiet, self-effacing leadership could be discerned. He served in this way five Vice Chancellors – Sir Arthur Lewis; his mentor, Sir Philip Sherlock; Sir Roy Marshall, Mr A.Z. Preston and Sir Alister McIntyre – until he himself took up the mantle in 1998. Even after his official 'retirement' in 2004 Professor Nettleford continued to serve in the capacity of Vice-Chancellor Emeritus, Professor of Cultural Studies and unofficial advisor to current Vice-Chancellor, Professor E. Nigel Harris.

His intellectual gifts and wise counsel have been generously shared with many heads of Government, not only in Jamaica, but throughout the Caribbean and beyond. Professor Nettleford has been consulted by just about every Government in the Caribbean region (including the non-English speaking countries) and has served in an advisory capacity to several international organisations, including CARICOM, the Organisation of American States, UNESCO, the ILO, the World Bank and the International Development Research Council (IDRC) of which he is a founding director. His gift of erudition, combined with his inability to decline appeals for contributions of his talent in this area, resulted in his maintenance of a speaking schedule that would daunt normal mortals. He has written

several books and contributed chapters to many more. The texts of his speeches, covering a wide range of topics, provide enough material for many more fine books.

Although Rex Nettleford is perhaps best known for his genius as a dancer and choreographer – he was co-founder and Artistic Director of the acclaimed National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica – it is as an intellectual and academic leader that the University has known him. He has been conferred with numerous academic honours from many universities and received from the Government of Jamaica the highest national award which a civilian can earn – The Order of Merit. He is recipient of the Order of the Caribbean Community (OCC); the Gold Musgrave Medal from the Institute of Jamaica, of which he was also named Honorary Fellow; The Chancellor's Medal (UWI); the UWI Alumni Pelican Award; The Living Legend Award from the Black Arts Festival in Atlanta, USA and The Zora Neal Hurston/Paul Robeson Award from the National Council for Black Studies, among many others.

The Rhodes Trust, in celebration of its Centenary in 2004, established the Rex Nettleford Prize in Cultural Studies, tenable at The University of the West Indies – a fitting and lasting accolade which will ensure that his name and work will live on in perpetuity. Rex Nettleford's life and career were indeed inseparable from the University of the West Indies and he will never, never be forgotten.

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"One UWI, One Alumni Family"

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