

**Citation presented by Professor Barbara Lalla, Public Orator –
University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus,
Friday, April 24, 2009 on the occasion of the presentation of
The Chancellor's Medal to Professor Rex Nettleford.**

Chancellor,

Our most moving advocate of human dignity through cultural liberation and social transformation is Professor the Honourable Rex Nettleford, Vice Chancellor Emeritus, UWI - multitalented scholar, artist and educator.

Born in Falmouth, Jamaica, Rex Nettleford received his earliest education in his rural upbringing. Then, through Cornwall College he advanced to UWI, Mona, for the BA in History. Thus equipped, and with his academic achievement and potential definitively recognized through the award of the Rhodes Scholarship, he set off for Oxford to read Politics. On return to Jamaica he launched into an integration of political analysis with education as radical social action.

As a trade union educator, as UWI Professor of Continuing Studies and as Director of Extra Mural Studies, he promoted intellectual development for all classes and conditions, affirming Caribbean experience as that of one "cross-fertilized and textured" people and distinguishing this from multiracialism which, he says, enables people to "live side by side without ever having to live together". He envisioned an "organic intellectual" on the heterogeneous principle that he felt a multicultural and cantankerous Caribbean naturally implied. Urging UWI to guard against being "a degree factory" rather than a space for cultivating the mind, he insisted that education (as distinct from training) should let all ideas contend and must unleash the creative power of the Caribbean.

Buoyed up (as he recalls) by Independence, he propelled independence beyond the national event into cultural manifestations like the National Dance Theatre Company. As Co-founder, Director and Choreographer of the NDTC he reached into the collective consciousness of the Caribbean (our "intangible heritage") for folk music and indigenous practices such as those associated with ancestral religions like Kumina, and these practices exploded into dance infused with afro-Caribbean aesthetics. On an understanding of our culture as a lived reality, owned by ourselves, he founded and championed the UWI Cultural Studies Initiative.

A skilled orator, he enlivens profound scholarship with playfulness and piercing wit. A prolific writer, he projects the eloquence and sparkle of the speaking voice with a flair that brings to mind a maxim of Alexander Pope:

True ease in writing comes from art, not chance,
As those move easiest who have learned to dance.

His extensive publications on race, politics and culture include *Mirror Mirror: Identity Race and Protest in Jamaica*; *Manley and the New Jamaica*; *Caribbean Cultural Identity*; *Dance Jamaica*; *Inward Stretch Outward Reach* and (with Philip Sherlock) *The University of the West Indies: A Caribbean Response to the Challenge of Change*. He is Editor of *Caribbean Quarterly*, and editor of essays on *Jamaica in Independence* and (with Vera Hyatt) on *Race, Discourse and the Origins of the Americas*.

His seminal analysis of Rastafarianism demonstrates empathy with aspects of Rastafarian vision that have had global impact as well as a transformative effect on the Jamaican social order - in all its schizophrenia regarding its overwhelmingly black identity. He has thus contributed to recognition of the individual at the base of society as somebody – in other words, played a vital role in the *smadditisation* of the ordinary Jamaican. Simultaneously, with his signature poise and grace, he has unfailingly demanded rigorous standards in academia, in creative performance and in general civility irrespective of social standing. In the immortal words of Mas' Rex, "A butu in a Benz is still a butu".

Professor Nettleford has attracted awards ranging from Jamaica's Order of Merit, through the Institute of Jamaica's Gold Musgrave Medal; Caricom's Order of the Caribbean Community; The Living Legend Award of the Black Arts Festival, Atlanta, and prestigious awards by governments of France and Chile. He has been celebrated in the Rex Nettleford Prize in Cultural Studies (established by the Rhodes Trust of Oxford) and been recognized by the Jamaican Government as Ambassador at Large. He is the recipient of eighteen honorary Doctorates, medals and fellowships from Universities in the Caribbean, like UAG, and abroad, like Emory, Queens and Oxford. Indeed, out of more than 4,000 living Rhodes Scholars, he is one of four on whom Oxford conferred an honorary degree in 2005 to mark the 100th anniversary of the Rhodes Scholarship.

He has served on regional and international bodies from Canada to Ghana, heading Jamaica's National Council on Education, and helping to monitor Implementation of Sanctions and other Actions against Apartheid. Yet, against such an international tapestry he maintains steady focus - taking time to check the actual length of the Black River (Jamaica's longest) because a little boy from a country school wrote him politely to request this information for his project. For this generosity, respect for others and love of learning, Rex Nettleford credits the example of his mother, who recently celebrated her 100th birthday. Whole-heartedly celebrating the old, he also, enthusiastically, cultivates the young, boasting a tribe of what he terms "courtesy" nieces and nephews.

Rex Nettleford upholds art as in sync with life, properly involving the artist's continuing dialogue with self and society. Securely grounded in the Caribbean and committed to our university, he achieves balance between (on the one hand) institutional provision of the stability that sustains creativity and (on the other) creativity as intrinsically radical in itself. Rather similarly, our Guyanese poet, Martin Carter, celebrates a stance of Caribbean resistance and affirmation:

I make my dance right here!
Right here on the wall of a prison I dance!
This world's hope is a blade of fury
and we, who are the sweepers of an ancient sky,
discoverers of new planets – sudden stars
we are the world's hope....

Professor Nettleford's positioning in academia, in cultural development and in social action is one that has enabled the intellectual leap and that has lifted and empowered the peoples of the Caribbean in their movement to self-determination and discovery.

Chancellor, I present our inimitable Professor the Honourable Rex Nettleford for the award of The Chancellor's Medal.