

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES



Michael Anthony

Chancellor, Michael Anthony's literary career in fiction and history spans nearly five decades.

*Born into a working class family in 1930 in Mayaro, a small rural village in south-eastern Trinidad, without the opportunity to attend a secondary school, far less a university, Michael Anthony dreamt of becoming a writer. During apprenticeship in the iron foundry of the Pointe-à-Pierre oil refinery he composed poetry (some published in local papers) and short stories. By 1954, he was in England – an exile like Selvon, Lamming, Naipaul and others. Employed in factories, he preserved his creativity undimmed by the dark satanic mills. He continued to write short stories and by 1955 he was reading on the BBC's Caribbean Voices, continuing as a regular contributor until the programme came to an end in 1958. Encouraged by his publisher, he produced his first novel, *The Games Were Coming*, in 1963.*

Unlike so many of his colleagues, Michael Anthony returned home, and has spent nearly six decades of his life in his own country, a professional writer. From time to time

he has contributed to Creative Writing courses at The University of the West Indies and in the United States, and has been fundamental to the definition and presentation of Caribbean culture, as in *Cricket in the Road* (1973), and *Folk Tales and Fantasies* (1974). Novels of the sixties, like *The Year in San Fernando* and *Green Days by the River*, have become staple literary fare for Caribbean children through selection as examination texts. Another of our own fine writers, Merle Hodge, has testified that they fire interest even in reluctant readers – perhaps because they reflect Caribbean life through the awakening perceptions of childhood, what Professor Ken Ramchand early identified as an open consciousness. Michael Anthony projects the psychological perspective of an unformed and curious consciousness with heightened awareness of present, rather than past or future. This present is full of fresh uncensored observation of adult life, the vivid experience of physical landscape and bustling community, feverish with the crackle of burning cane, with gossip, seduction, avarice, but irresistibly warm with compassion and vitality.

More recently, the history of his country has pervaded the fiction or overtaken fiction completely. Recent work includes novels, like *High Tide of Intrigue* (2001), and history, like *Historical Landmarks of Port of Spain* (2003). However, so far from sharing Thomas Carlyle's nineteenth century definition of history as "a distillation of rumour," Michael Anthony's non-fiction work is grounded on meticulous and comprehensive research in archival and newspaper sources. Indeed, his *Historical Dictionary of Trinidad and Tobago* is lauded by Professor Bridget Brereton, as an "absolutely indispensable" reference work. In particular, he has made history accessible - to young readers, (*Profile Trinidad*, and *Heroes of the People of Trinidad and Tobago*) – to visitors (*Glimpses of Trinidad and Tobago* and *Historical Landmarks of Port of Spain*) and to the general public (through historical series in *The Trinidad Guardian*).

There is one sense in which his concept of history perhaps approaches Emerson's: "There is properly no history; only biography." Michael Anthony has made an invaluable contribution to Caribbean history, collecting, assembling and documenting our own social, political and cultural development. Michael Anthony is recognized as having honed a new dimension of Caribbean historiography and produced internationally acclaimed fiction, thus reconstructing and reinterpreting our Caribbean past.

Chancellor, I present Mr. Michael Anthony and ask that by the authority vested in you by the Council and Senate of The University of the West Indies you confer on him the degree of Doctor of Letters, honoris causa.

*St. Augustine campus
October 31, 2003*