



THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES

Jacques Adélaïde-Merlande

Chancellor,

To the honour of our company and as a tribute to our gathering I am proud to offer you this evening Jacques Adélaïde-Merlande. Professor Adélaïde was born in 1933. His father was the descendant of a family that played a part in the history of Guadeloupe towards the end of the Revolution. His mother, a teacher, belonged to a family that included a colonial administrator in Africa who would later become Secretary to the brief but exciting Mali-Soudan Federation. This was a background that would prepare him well for his future role as the doyen of French Caribbean historians.

He received his secondary education at the Lycée Schoelcher in Fort-de-France and at the Lycée Louis le Grand in Paris, graduating with his Baccalauréat in July 1952 (mention Bien). After completing his degree at the Faculty of Arts at the University of Paris he embarked on post-graduate study of the labour movement in Martinique for which he was awarded the Diplôme d'Études Supérieures

(mention très bien). He went on, in 1962, to take the 'agrégation', the highest competitive examination for teachers in France, and was placed 26th out of 52. On his request, in 1962, he was posted to the Lycée Egerville-Réache in Basse-Terre (Guadeloupe) where he taught as well as introduced courses on French Caribbean history. In 1964 he relocated to Pointe-à-Pitre and taught at the Lycée Carnot.

The turning point however came in 1966 when he was appointed Assistant Lecturer at the Centre d'Études Supérieures at Point-à-Pitre. In 1967 he became Vice Principal, then Principal of the CESS (Centre d'Études Supérieures de Lettres). In rapid succession he would move from Lecturer to Senior Lecturer. Barely one year later, in 1972, at the comparatively tender age of forty, he was elected President of UASQ (Centre Universitaire Antilles-Guyane) which he helped to transform into the U.A.G. (Université des Antilles, Guyane), a position which he held from 1972-1977.

During his short Presidency at the University, Professor Jacques Adélaïde-Merlande was responsible for putting down the basic infrastructure for University education not only in Martinique but also in Guadeloupe, and supervised the construction of buildings to house the Faculty of Law in Guadeloupe which were not included in the original plans. He also accomplished the difficult task of ensuring the transfer of the Faculties of Science from Martinique to Guadeloupe and of Arts and Humanities from Guadeloupe to Martinique, transfers which had been planned before but which had been beset by numerous problems.

Professor Adélaïde added to these accomplishments the lagunapape of a Faculty of Medicine and the establishment of a University Centre in Guyane. By any standard this was a feat of Administration which will long serve both as a

monument to his tenure as President and as a source of inspiration to University administrators elsewhere.

It would be in his capacity as historian however that he revolutionized the agendas of historians in the Caribbean as a whole. It is often asserted that the French academic establishment, possibly because of its emergence from an empire sustained by a doctrine that it was "une et indivisible", generally tended to confine its preoccupations to its own borders.

It is the measure of the man, that Jacques Adélaide not only rose above these fetters but in fact became the founding father of what became the Association of Caribbean Historians. In 1969, Jacques Adélaide invited a few NWJ historians to a small meeting in Guadeloupe. Out of that meeting was born the Association of Caribbean Historians and the policy which Jacques Adélaide relentlessly pursued, of a closer relationship between historians and those involved in the Social Sciences. He went on to serve two separate terms as President of the Association, organised several of its Annual Conferences, and remains up to this day one of its sturdiest pillars.

His early escape from the Presidency of the University, in 1977, enabled him to pursue more vigorously what was certainly his first love and the driving force of his career, namely the history of the Caribbean, irrespective of its colonial borders. It was in pursuit of this objective that he organized, conceptualized and developed links between his own university and similar institutions in Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, the Netherlands Antilles and the Commonwealth Caribbean.

Jacques Adélaide is undoubtedly first and foremost a historian of the late 18th and 19th century Caribbean. He has accordingly written or edited articles on Communism such as Baie-Mahault, Cayenne and Saint-Francois. As President

of the Historical Society of Guadeloupe he has also written on topics such as French Colonization, Caribbean Society, Urban Slavery as well as on the Maroons in Moule; and as a member of the Schoelcher Association he has also published in its journal on human rights and related issues. He has also organized important conferences, which have as their major objective the increasing knowledge of the Caribbean by the peoples of the Caribbean as a whole. One such conference embraced and included the autonomous territories of Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, the Commonwealth Caribbean and the Netherlands Antilles.

Jacques Adélaide also compiled a Dictionary of the famous in the Caribbean that included figures such as Manley, Williams and Barrow. Yet his lasting contribution to the historiography of the Caribbean may very well be his history of the French, Dutch, Spanish and English-speaking Caribbean, which according to one historian, is the only genuine comparative work on the region of such scope, written in the French language

Adélaide does then bestride the Caribbean colossus-like but he does so, not like a Napoleon in Europe, but as a scholar pursuing his chosen topic wherever it leads. He is undoubtedly a scholar dedicated to his craft, above all a productive scholar and one who has either inspired or directed the research of others; as one, however, who long before it became fashionable for Universities to have a foreign policy, engineered important links between and among the various territories and universities of the Caribbean. He is therefore a legitimate claimant for the title of 'Caribbean man'. Sociologists of knowledge constantly remind us that even scholars are trapped by their social origins. The career of Professor Jacques Adélaide-Merlande shows that men can and do triumph over their environment and serve the universal purposes of scholarship. Above all Professor Adélaide-Merlande stands before us this evening, as a vision of what the university academic might be — administrator, scholar

and contributor to the public weal but above all a missionary of a regenerated Caribbean perspective, led now, as it once was, by the Caribbean intelligentsia.

Chancellor, I request you by the authority of Senate and of Council, to confer upon Jacques Adélaïde-Merlande the degree of Doctor of Letters Honoris Causa.

Saturday 28 October, 2000