



Lucille Mathurin-Mair, C D

Chancellor: If the lady whom we honour now is indubitably both graceful and gracious, she is also resilient steel. Note, not iron, Chancellor, not rough iron, but fine and finely tempered steel.

Consider: In 1983 there was held in Geneva the United Nations Conference on the Question of Palestine – that intractable subject which had been longest on the agenda of both the Security Council and the General Assembly. It has been described as the most politically fraught conference in the history of the United Nations. It was the only world conference of that body which was held behind barbed wire and at which there were anti-aircraft guns mounted on top of the conference building. The Secretary-General of the conference had to have twenty-four-hour-a-day security. But she moved through that political minefield with her customary coolness and aplomb. Her personal courage was not in question. She says of herself: "As a child I used to jump in at the deep end before I could even swim."

As her friend and distinguished former colleague Erskine Childers has said: "I think that conference will be recognised by historians as one landmark stage in the process of the Palestine issue, and they will recognise the person who organised it" Chancellor, we recognise her now. I present Her Excellency Ambassador Dr Lucille Mathurin-Mair, Commander of the Order of Distinction, Permanent Representative of Jamaica to the United Nations, first Warden of Mary Seacole Hall, historian, champion and exemplar in the cause of women.

When she agreed to organise the Palestine Conference, she became the first woman to hold the title of Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations. She has never applied for a post at the UN. She was invited to organise the Palestine Conference not only because of her work at the time as Special Adviser to UNICEF on Women's Development, but even moreso because of her earlier success as Secretary-General of the World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women, which was held in Copenhagen in 1980. Her work on that conference was distinguished by, among other things, her alertness to what she calls "the macro-political context of women's lives," her responsiveness to the insistence, particularly of third-world women, that a conference dealing with the condition of women must also be

necessarily involved with political issues such as Palestine, Nicaragua, *apartheid*, the role of trans-national corporations in the exploitation of women, and so on.

Her work for the United Nations is of a piece with her work for Jamaica at the United Nations. She first made an impression at the UN as Jamaica's Deputy Permanent Representative between 1975 and 1978. Today, the distinguished service which she has given to the United Nations redounds to her country's advantage in her capacity as Permanent Representative. She has also served her country as Director of Public Information, as Ambassador to the Republic of Cuba, as a member of the Senate and Minister of State in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade.

So it was obviously to our great good fortune that she agreed to share her wealth of experience with this university as Consultant Regional Coordinator for Women and Development Studies between 1985 and 1989, thereby laying the groundwork for subsequent progress in this area.

The woman who has come to show, by example and by precept, the equal and necessary place of women in development, was the girl who, as Lucille Walrond, at Wolmer's Girls School, numbered among her classmates Ivy Baxter, Avis Ingram (later Henriques) and Phyllis McPherson (later Russell); was the girl who soon knew, under the influence of her history teacher, Minnie Forbes, "a legend," that History was going to be her subject.

In 1945, thanks to a discerning and supportive mother and stepfather, Lucille Walrond proceeded to University College, London to read for the BA Honours degree in History. And what more auspicious circumstance should befall her than that she should meet there, as sister-student and friend, one who was to become an illustrious pioneer among West Indian historians, Elsa Goveia? There were also, assembling in London in those heady postwar years, many other bright young West Indians who were later to become outstanding leaders and educators.

This experience strengthened Lucille's identification with West Indian regionalism, an identification which she quickly proceeded to seal by personal coup, not a coup "of state," but a coup of what has been called "the holy estate." As you know, Chancellor, the art of diplomacy embraces the art of making good alliances. On the day when she went to register at University College, she saw for the first time a brilliant St Lucian law student, Guy Mathurin. A nuptial alliance, rich with bright West Indian hope, was soon effected.

So it was off to St Lucia, to teach History and to start a family. But there were to be dramatic, fateful turns in the road ahead. In 1957, three weeks after the tragic and untimely death of her husband, she received a telephone call from the Vice-Principal of the University College of the West Indies, Philip Sherlock, who, with a characteristically suave pre-emptive strike, said, "I have a job for you. We're opening a new hall of residence." She served as Warden of Mary Seacole Hall from 1957 until 1974. This proved to be a timely opportunity for exploring and applying her still youthful ideas on woman's worth and woman's role in society, by formulating the ideals of the first women's hall of residence in the university, a hall whose name signified the very tradition of woman's achievement to which the young Warden was to make her own sterling contribution. Sherlock, from his eyrie in Irvine, cast an avuncular eye, and watched her develop "an approach which both welcomed men yet kept them in their place, without any need for signs which proclaimed, 'Do Not Kiss the Girl

on First Meeting Her.' " It was an approach which fostered the humane virtues of the collegiate idea, which encouraged free and vigorous participation in the intellectual and cultural life of the campus while maintaining an example of womanly dignity and decorum.

The quality and style of her wardenship could be seen in every aspect of life in the hall, from the fine paintings which hung in the Common Room, to the literary and cultural events which took place there, to the staff appointments which she made. For instance, something of the Warden's sense of style and quality was no doubt reflected in the first Head Porter. One afternoon all the fuses in the Hall seemed to decide to blow. Eventually, when a student rushed down to the porter's lodge with what was about the sixteenth such report, the Head Porter threw up his hands in a dramatic gesture and exclaimed in impeccable Latin, "*Quid faciam?*" – "What am I to do?" Chancellor, such subjunctival sophistication will not be heard among Head Porters any more. Here at Mona too was her opportunity to reactivate her interest in historical scholarship. In 1972 she was awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy for her thesis entitled "An Historical Study of Jamaican Women, 1655-1844," and the supervisor of that thesis was Elsa Goveia. Many publications have come out of that research, including the book *The Rebel Woman in the British West Indies during Slavery*, and she played a decisive role in researching the historical evidence which contributed to Nanny's becoming a national heroine of Jamaica.

The people who have worked closely with her speak warmly of her broad global vision, her important sense of fairness, her ability to maintain her calm and her sense of perspective. They respect her as one who is unpretentious, yet so sophisticated in her knowledge, and as "a woman who has not denied her womanhood in order to be part of the Club."

Chancellor, we pay tribute now to the achievement of West Indian women, past, present and to come, and to their enhancement of all our lives, in honouring one of the most honourable of them. I beg you to exercise the authority of the Council and Senate of our university by conferring upon Lucille Mathurin-Mair the degree of Doctor of Laws *honoris causa*.

November 6, 1993
Mona Campus