



Stanley Reginald Richard Allsopp

Chancellor, Stanley Reginald Richard Allsopp has towered over Caribbean speech for 40 years – listening, questioning and mimicking everything said by six million people of the English speaking Caribbean, in Guyanese accent, Bajan accent or Jamaica talk, as he is equally accomplished in all.

He was born in the imperial city of Georgetown 80 years ago, and like most good Guyanese had a Bajan grandfather – which makes him 25% Bajan by birth. But he describes his citizenship as dual - Guyanese and Barbadian. And with the forgiveness of the linguists and lexicographers among us, I would like to explore the duality of Richard Allsopp a little further. Duality is a state of being double – two fold – a pair perhaps, but more often two distinct principles, often opposite characteristics - dualin, for example, is an explosive mixture of sawdust and nitroglycerine – and Richard's laughter is certainly explosive!

But his uniqueness is in the strength and range of his dualities – he is passionate but precise – impetuous but thorough – serious yet humourous – and even his dual citizenship is defining! For with the precision of not just any lexicographer, but of Richard Allsopp, his life, to date, has been divided exactly into two equal parts – two equal citizenships – his first 40 years in Guyana and his last 40 in Barbados!

His first degree was a BA Honours in French, then a Diploma in Education, both at the University of London. He returned to British Guiana in 1948, as Senior French Master, and then Acting Headmaster at Queen's College, until 1963, when he accepted the offer of the post of Lecturer in English at the new UWI College of Arts and Science, at the virginal Harbour Site, Bridgetown. His photogenicity in those days is displayed in our hot new Anniversary book – *UWI 40 years: a celebration* – hot off the press!

To the students of the 60s he was everywhere and everything to them – Jack of all trades, all ideas and all programmes - he was, in the words of one, woven into the very fabric of the College, as it then was, at the Harbour and the Cave Hill Campus, when it moved from Harbour to Hill.

As head of English and chairman of the Language and Linguistics Unit, Chairman of Survey Courses and Social Sciences, and designer and moderator of the Use of English and other courses in English, and Vice-Dean of the College for aeons, he seemed to be omniscient and omnipresent. But his teaching and love of people posed no impediments to his scholarly output, with more than 70 papers in international journals and book chapters flowing from his pen. And he still had time to raise four brilliant children, Disa, Sophia, John and Marie, and to share his love of linguistics with the love of his life, his wife, Jeannette, another linguist.

As his knowledge, eloquence and fame grew, he became increasingly involved in regional and international consultancies, from the World Bank Education Project and the New Liturgy of the Church of the West Indies to the New Oxford English Dictionary, the World Book Dictionary and the Collins Dictionary. He was in fact the only West Indian ever on the Board of the New Oxford English Dictionary.

But the chief brain child, life's work and *magnum opus* of Richard Allsopp is, of course, the Caribbean Lexicography Project and its product, the Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage – the result of 20 years work across 18 countries, and of interviews and recordings of thousands. It would have been a tragedy if the only man in the world who understood the subtleties of phrases like “goat mout” and the correct usage of the singular *unnah* and the plural *wunnuh*, or the 23 different ways of saying “MMMMM”.... across the Caribbean, had not brought forth a compendium of such knowledge for the edification of the whole world.

Richard began this project more years ago than either of us care to recall, and the product, *The Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage* (1996), has been well worth the wait. In the words of the prestigious magazine *The Economist*, we should “Bow down and give thanks and praise, as Samuel Johnson surely would have, for this stupendous work....” Cave Hill and Richard Allsopp put Caribbean lexicography on the world stage. I dare to say that this book is, quite possibly, the most important book to come out of the Caribbean.

And so tonight, Chancellor, I present this gentle giant of scholar and gentleman, this eloquent epitome of Caribbean cultural expression and the first Public Orator of this campus, this human computer of the language, passions and culture of Caribbean people, Professor Richard Allsopp, who by my calculation is 37.5% Guyanese, 62.5% Bajan and 100% Caribbean. And I invite you, by the authority vested in you by the Council and Senate of the University of the West Indies, to confer on this complete Caribbean man, the degree of Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa*.