



The University of the West Indies

Howard Felix Hanlan Cooke

Chancellor, in its 41 years of independence Jamaica has had three native Governors General. The man we honour tonight is the third of those illustrious sons. They call him "Teacher" because he has spent a lifetime in the noblest of professions in the tradition of the greatest of teachers, by living an exemplary life.

In six days Howard Felix Hanlan Cooke will be 88 years old and from the Free Village of Goodwill founded by the Presbyterians in St James where he was born, to Kings House has been a long but fruitful journey.

He was still wearing short pants when he passed the Third Jamaica Local exams at age fifteen and had to wait two years before he could enter The Mico College to train formally as a teacher. Though the youngest, he graduated as the most outstanding member of his class and was appointed a junior master of his alma mater. Following studies at the Institute of Education at London University, he spent 23 years in the class room where he quickly moved from being a junior master to being a master teacher teaching teachers; to being President of the Jamaica Union of Teachers as it was then called, to being an executive of the Caribbean Union of Teachers.

In the turbulent 1930s the roles of teacher and politician were virtually interchangeable and often indistinguishable. Teaching was about nation building both inside and outside the classroom and nation building was about learning to make our way in the world as a people independent and proud. As a founding member of the Peoples' National Party, whose constitution he helped to draft, Howard Cooke, gender notwithstanding, was a midwife at the birth of the Jamaican nation.

Leaving the formal classroom in 1958 he became the representative of St James in the nascent West Indies Federal Parliament when it seemed that the route to independence would have been regional. Following the collapse of the Federation, Sir Howard entered the Jamaican Parliament in 1962 as a Senator. Becoming an MP in 1967, he served until 1980 occupying ministerial posts of Pension and Social Security, Education and the Public Service and Labour at various times. He presided over the Senate from 1989 to 1991 when, redolent with symbolism, he became Governor General of Jamaica on August first.

A keen sportsman in his earlier years, Sir Howard played competitive cricket and football at parish level in Portland and St. James. And he was for years a member of the Jamaica Cultural Development Commission and a moving force in the Commission's activities in his native St. James. As well as being a Rover Scout he was also Chief Scout of Jamaica.

Throughout his life and in his multifarious activities, Howard Cooke's moral centre has been defined by his religious beliefs. A senior Elder and Lay Pastor of the United Church of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands, he was for years Chairman of the Cornwall Council of Churches, and a moving spirit in the Moral Rearmament world movement.

Kings House gardens now grow lettuce, tomatoes, carrots, sweet pepper, callaloo, cassava, yams, paw paws, various citrus fruits, ackees, mangoes — you name it ; and the farmer is the Most Honourable Sir Howard Cooke.

Chancellor, I present to you an authentic son of the soil; a man whom the late Michael Manley once described as "one of the most decent human beings I've known"; my former elementary school headmaster; Jamaica's first citizen; Order of the Nation; Knight Grand Cross of the Most Distinguished Order of St. Michael and St. George; Knight of St. John; Knight Grand Cross of the Royal Victorian Order; Governor General of Jamaica, Sir Howard Felix Hanlan Cooke — "Teacher" — and ask that, in keeping with 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 Laws, *honoris causa*.

*At the Mona Campus
November 7, 2003*