



Stuart Hall

In the West Indies, Chancellor, except for a handful of academics, the name Stuart Hall has been a well kept secret. However, now that we have him out into the open of a West Indian evening, we have cause to celebrate his long-overdue reclamation by the West Indies. We can take pride, too, in our part in this process. We began to rectify the omission of the past by inviting him to give the keynote address, in 1996, at the conference here at Mona in honour of the work of our present Vice-Chancellor. On that occasion, the Institute of Jamaica took the opportunity to present him with a Gold Musgrave Medal. Then, last year, when we staged a series of distinguished lectures throughout the region, to mark the fiftieth anniversary of our university, and invited some of the cream of Caribbean intellect to give the lectures, we brought off a triumph when Stuart Hall delivered the Barbados lecture. Last year, too, he gave two guest lectures, one on "Cultural Studies and Media Studies," the other on "Representation and Identity," at our Caribbean Institute for Media and Communication.

It is also a curious fact, Chancellor, that the long list of honorary graduates of our university includes very few scholars. Consequently, in our reclamation of Stuart Hall there is yet another cause for celebration, since we are adding to the list a mighty mind. Derek Walcott has recorded the sad truth "that there are homecomings without home," and has observed ruefully that in the West Indies "there are no rites for those who have returned." But although it is we who have been prodigal, in squandering our opportunities to recognise this greatness, and although I see no fatted calf, it is with due sense of solemn ritual, Chancellor, that I present Stuart McPhail Hall, formerly Professor of Sociology, for eighteen years, in the Open University, and before that, for seven years, Director of the Centre for Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham, and currently Visiting Professor at the Open University and Goldsmiths College, University of London.

Stuart Hall has been described as one of the founding fathers of the discipline of Cultural Studies, "a leading figure of the British Left over the last thirty years, and a visionary theorist" of race. "His work has made possible multiple conversations taking place around questions of culture, race and ethnicity." He is also a leading theorist in the field of media studies. He is esteemed among his peers. To Professor Bhikku Parekh, Professor of Politics at the University of Hull, Stuart Hall "is one of the finest minds I have ever known." There are Cultural Studies courses in various universities fashioned after the models he has developed. For example, the Communications Theory course at Brock University is built round a "Cultural Studies Communication Model" that carries the tag "After Stuart Hall." His hundreds of scholarly publications, his many honorary degrees speak for themselves. The books that he has authored, co-authored or co-edited reflect his range of related interests and timely influence: *The Popular Arts* (1964), *Schooling and Society: a Review of Theories* (1977), *Culture, Media, Language* (1980), *The Politics of Thatcherism* (1983), *State and Society in Contemporary Britain* (1984), *Politics and Ideology* (1986) – these are only a few of the titles.

Our region has exported many fine products into the world, but one that we do not often enough remember to sing is "brains," and tonight "is brains for so." Stuart Hall has more than lived up to the bright promise of his youth. He is standing now not far from the scene of his first academic victories. From Jamaica College, where he was Head Boy, he won both the Jamaica Scholarship and the Jamaica Rhodes Scholarship, in the same year, a rare distinction. In 1951 he proceeded to Merton College Oxford on the Rhodes Scholarship, and graduated with a BA Honours degree in English Language and Literature. He continued at Merton, on the Jamaica Scholarship, earning the DPhil degree in English Literature at the age of twenty-five.

His shift from Literature into what came to be called Cultural Studies, as he helped to invent and define it, was not as sharp and unpredictable as it might seem. There was a sociological focus to his DPhil thesis, "Europe vs America: Cultural and Moral Themes in the 'International' Novels of Henry James," and the word "cultural" in the title was a significant foreshadowing. Hall's movement from Literature into Cultural Studies was to prove a paradigm for one line of movement in the development of Cultural Studies. Individual scholars have continued to follow that line, and so have some Literature Departments, which have come to look more and more like Cultural Studies Departments.

Cultural Studies shifted the orientation of "culture" from "high culture" to popular culture. This shift was consonant with Hall's involvement with Britain's New Left. He was a founder and the first editor of the influential *New Left Review*. But he was always an independent Marxist, as original a thinker in this as in other areas. His first university teaching job was as Lecturer in Film and Mass Media at Chelsea College, University of London. He was thus the first person ever to be appointed to teach film and television in a university in Great Britain. It was from this post that he was invited by Richard Hoggart, Professor of English Literature at Birmingham, to become a Research Fellow in the Centre for Cultural Studies which Hoggart had founded and of which he was Director. Hall served as Acting Director for four years, becoming Director in 1972, by which time he was in effect masterminding the development of Cultural Studies in Britain. Such is the measure of the man that in 1979, without any degrees in Sociology, he was appointed Professor of Sociology and Head of the Sociology Discipline in the Open University. He tells the story, amusedly, that, in offering him these positions, the Vice-Chancellor of the Open University said to him, "You are not a Sociologist. Are you willing to become one?"

From the beginning, side by side with Hall's work in Cultural Studies, and not unrelated to it, went his interest, both theoretical and practical, in issues of race, race relationships, and the circumstances of the Black Diaspora in Britain. According to Professor Parekh, who has worked closely with him in this area, "In terms of systematic thinking about race and ethnicity in Britain, Stuart Hall's contribution has been immense." He currently gives voluntary service on the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain, to which "his intellectual contributions have been absolutely first-rate." It is typical of him that he has never missed a meeting and has never been late.

So, although he has for so long been removed from what is happening in the Caribbean, he has always been in close touch with the extended Caribbean in Britain. Indeed, it was in England that he discovered the Caribbean. Of his days at Jamaica College, he says, "Our ignorance about the rest of the Caribbean was profound." His first and only contact with the rest of the Caribbean at that time came in the form of a kind of amused culture shock, hearing for the first time the Bajan accent, from the lips of his Latin teacher, Carl Jackman. And this experience was also in its way Stuart Hall's first link with this University, since Carl Jackman, whose spirit smiles on us now, was to become Registrar and first University Registrar.

So, Chancellor, this is a moment of fulfilment. Alas, Stuart Hall did not have the good fortune to be educated at the University of the West Indies; but we shall not hold it against him; rather, we welcome him into our society and salute his advancement in it. I invite you, Chancellor, by the authority vested in you by the Council and Senate of this university, to make the ritual gesture that will confirm to him that we glory in his huge achievement, and that, in the deepest sense, he has come home, as you confer on Dr Stuart Hall the degree of Doctor of Letters *honoris causa*.

Mona

6 November 1999