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**Eulogy to Rex Nettleford
Nassau, Bahamas***

The legacy of a great alumnus

When Ambassador Sherman-Peters asked me to give a tribute to Professor the Honorable Rex Nettleford, I demurred as I have done so three times already, but she convinced me and properly so that there can never be too many remembrances of or tributes to this great man of whom we were proud in life and continue to be in death.

The mortal remains of Rex Nettleford have already been interred, so I cannot come to bury him, but I do come to praise him. I come to praise him in the presence of people who already think highly of him and many of whom have already expressed their appreciation of his life and his work. No one who has read or heard the many tributes can fail to be moved by the depth of feeling that his death has evoked and the almost universal perception that his passing has left a space that will be difficult to fill. I say difficult rather than impossible, as it would not be a fitting tribute to his memory to believe that he has not inspired some young person or persons to be as good as he was and to carry the torch that he carried. For almost above everything else, Rex like a good son of the Pelican was a teacher and every good teacher would wish to see his or her pupils excel and move us all forward.

Much has properly been made of his brilliance in matters cultural, the consistent and persistent emphasis on the importance of a people's culture to their search for and discovery of their identity. Much has been made of his extraordinary talent and leadership in the field of dance as another expression of the cultural roots of the Jamaican people. But because of my position, I am moved to focus more on Rex as a regionalist and his search for, and emphasis on regionalism through our University of the West Indies and that is the legacy which I hold most dear.

As most of you know, Rex graduated from the University College of the West Indies as it was before it became independent from the University of London, and apart from the time he studied at Oxford University on a Rhodes scholarship, spent the rest of his life in one or other position in the University, eventually becoming Vice-Chancellor and on retirement was distinguished by being designated Vice-Chancellor Emeritus. He

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was as permanent a fixture of our University as there can ever be. He is one of our most distinguished and decorated alumni. He is undoubtedly the alumnus with the greatest number of academic distinctions. He received sixteen honorary degrees from institutions as diverse as the Hartford University, established in 1957 with a student body of about 7000, the University of Toronto established in 1827 with its 74,000 students and his own Oxford University which dates back to 1096 and has a modest 20,000 students. He was distinguished by any criterion and one of the beautiful aspects of the man was that he wore the cape of his fame as lightly as I recall him wearing his red undergraduate gown slung carelessly over his shoulders in his early days at Mona when as I would once say to him "the guavas were green".

Rex's heart and soul was in the regional university and through the length and breadth of the Caribbean he preached the value and virtue of an institution that would link us all in a common design of identification as West Indians, conscious of our selves and our destinies. I read his comment on receiving an honorary Degree from St. John's University in the USA as a reference to our place in history. "How do we get the young," he asked, "to understand that the indigenous Amerindians on that Caribbean island discovered Columbus as much as he discovered them?".

He was concerned that we view our history through our own lens and what better instrument to focus the lens than the University of the West Indies. I am sure that Rex would agree that it could do and has done much to foster a sense of oneness and a pride and self esteem in our various peoples including the Lucayans.

He would strengthen the vision of a university for all the Caribbean through his work in the Extra Mural department-all the while questioning whether the concept of walls was one that should have currency a regional institution. He would oversee the conversion of that department into the School for Continuing Studies with not branches, but roots in all parts of the Caribbean. And he must have rejoiced when without the need for anything like Joshua's horns and trumpets, the walls would indeed "come tumbling down" and there would be an Open Campus, covering the whole region, aiming for seamless interdigitation with the existing University academic centers and projecting itself towards the Caribbean diaspora.

Much has properly been said about the National Dance Theater Company which he formed at the time of Jamaica's independence and which has projected the dance as a medium of national expression all over the world. But we must also praise his work as artistic Director of the University Singers. I have very personal fondness for this group of consummate professionals as at my own installation as Chancellor Rex brought them to Barbados and I would thrill at their rendition of my favorite, Psalm 137: "By the Rivers of Babylon".

And there were few who kept dry eyes as the University Singers sang at Rex's funeral the excerpt from Peter Tosh's "Creation".

*Jah is my life and my strength
So whom shall I fear
He is a shield upon my right and my left hand
Jah is my king.*

Rex quite properly received the highest honors that Jamaica and the Caribbean could bestow upon him. The citation read when he was honored with the prestigious Order of the Caribbean Community read thus:

"The Region has shaped this extraordinary person. In turn he has helped to shape and project the Region so profoundly, as a professor, a dancer, a writer, a manager, an orator, a mentor, a critic, a household name, an international icon, a true Ambassador of the Caribbean, a quintessential Caribbean Man."

Rex was a legend in his time and he left a legacy for all time –a legacy that has particular salience for us the alumni of his University. He displayed a pride in our products, a passion for the principles that underpinned the foundation of our institution, perseverance in the face of the prejudices that success brings and I know he sometimes felt pity and some pain at the poverty of ideas of those who sought to belittle our efforts, as he described them "the chattering classes".

At an occasion not too dissimilar to this when I spoke about the life of a dear friend, I recalled James Henry Leigh Hunt's poem that was inflicted on me at age 10, which seems fitting now although I did not quite appreciate its relevance as a child.

Abou Ben Adhem (may his tribe increase!)
Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace,
And saw, within the moonlight in his room,
Making it rich, and like a lily in bloom,
An Angel writing in a book of gold:

Exceeding peace had made Ben Adhem bold,
And to the Presence in the room he said,
"What writest thou?" The Vision raised its head,
And with a look made of all sweet accord

Answered, "The names of those who love the Lord."

"And is mine one?" said Abou. "Nay, not so,"
Replied the Angel. Abou spoke more low,
But cheerily still; and said, "I pray thee, then,
Write me as one who loves his fellow men."

The Angel wrote, and vanished. The next night
It came again with a great wakening light,

And showed the names whom love of God had blessed,
And, lo! Ben Adhem's name led all the rest.

Rex Nettleford was blessed and he blessed us all with his presence and the presents of his many talents. We shall always thank him and to ensure that future generations continue to thank him the University has established the Rex Nettleford Foundation which will promote the areas of intellectual enquiry for which he was known and revered. It will eventually support a chair in cultural and social studies which he taught were an umbrella or point of reference for all academic pursuits. Rex Nettleford must not only be a nostalgic memory but must also be a persistent reminder to us to nourish and cherish a University to which he gave so much of his time and intellectual energy.

I thank you.