

George A. O. Alleyne  
Chancellor  
University of the West Indies  
February 16, 2010

**Our Black Prince  
Kingston, Jamaica\***

---

Mr. Speaker;  
Honorable Prime Minister;  
Honorable Leader of the Opposition  
Honorable Members of Parliament;  
Distinguished guests;  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First, let me thank you for the honor you have bestowed on me and the University of the West Indies by giving me the opportunity to participate in this special session of your parliament.

I live in the Washington metropolitan area and by chance or fate, I was there when Rex Nettleford died. It was a stormy evening when he died and indeed, in the days surrounding his death, that area had the largest cumulative snowfall in one hundred years with blizzards and cold that rattled the bones and tried the spirit. That evening, I could not help recalling the lines of Caesar's Calpurnia which seemed particularly apt;

*"When beggars die, there are no comets seen  
The heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes."*

For Rex Nettleford was indeed a prince among us—a prince who was loved rather than feared and whose sudden death left hearts aching with absence and an academic and personal void that will be difficult to fill. There are many others who will speak with authority of the other spheres in which he moved; of his artistic genius, his global and international influence and reach. But I speak this afternoon mainly about what our black prince has meant to the University of the West Indies. I do this because this was where I knew him first and how I knew him best and can speak most confidently of how the university was really where he had his being, the place which provided the soil in which his mustard seed was sown. Our black prince conquered through ideas and not by force of arms as did the legendary black prince of history.

He was cremated and I was entrusted with his ashes. My wife emphasized to me as we brought them home by Air Jamaica that it was appropriate that there should be a stop in Montego Bay before coming to Kingston as that was his original itinerary.

---

\* Tribute to Professor the Honourable Rex Nettleford, Kingston, Jamaica, 16 February 2010

Rex entered the University College on a Jamaica Government Exhibition in 1953 from Cornwall College. He immediately threw himself into all aspects of a vibrant Caribbean campus life. I am told he was Sylla the old general in Derek Walcott's Henri Christophe and he showed even in those days his capacity for choreography. Except for three years at Oxford on a Rhodes scholarship, he spent all the rest of his adult life at our University. His curriculum vitae shows how he ascended the academic ladder, from Resident Tutor in the Extra Mural Department, through Director of Studies of the Trade Union Education Institute, Director of Extramural Studies, Professor of Extra Mural Studies, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor and eventually Vice-Chancellor Emeritus, discharging all the responsibilities of those offices with credit to himself and benefit to the institution.

He did all this while engaged in a vast number of activities in a wide range of areas and geographies and accumulating numerous accolades and awards that speak to his varied talents. But Rex was more than an assemblage of talents.

He had a tenacity of purpose that was often shrouded in his quiet but impressive demeanor and was evinced in a prolific intellectual productivity befitting a prince of academia. He had a generosity of spirit that showed itself in his readiness to place his resources of intellect or his worldly goods at the disposal of those who needed them. He had the capacity to be of service without being servile-a quality that served him and us well as he collaborated easily with more senior colleagues in a variety of ways and could demonstrate the power of ideas when properly put to influence the ideations of the powerful.

But above all, he had a burning almost consuming passion for the University of the West Indies as a regional institution-a passion which showed itself privately and publicly and when the occasion merited it, in the use of his formidable oral and scribal talents to rebuff the naysayers, doubters and detractors. And when I did question him once on the genesis and intensity of that passion, he would say it was not only because his academic navel-string was buried there, but because he believed in the critical importance of institutions in our development. If you would destroy a people, first undermine and destabilize their institutions. It was through institutions, especially institutions of higher learning that individuals would have equal opportunities for self actualization. It was also a rooted part of his credo that our academic institutions had a major role in helping us to understand and appreciate the essences of our being and our personas-to understand our Caribbean culture.

Mr. Speaker, in his last Vice-Chancellor's Report to Council-my first year as Chancellor, he wrote this as an introduction to the nascent Cultural Studies Initiative which he continued to head;

*"If a nation, or in this case a region-the Caribbean region-is to get its priorities right, it must structure its educational system and development strategy based firmly on an appreciation of its history as a people and on the region's existential reality. The Cultural Studies Initiative must be seen therefore as a means of encouraging all Faculties and Centres in the University to investigate such realities and help lead to discovery of self and society"*

Thank you sweet black prince and we will ensure that your legacy lives on for our sake and for the sake of generations to come.

And so, Mr.Speaker, in that context and against that background, it has been decided to establish the Rex Nettleford Foundation for the perpetuation of that legacy.

I thank you.