

CITATION

Prof. Maureen Patricia Warner Lewis

(GOLD)

The Institute of Jamaica recognises Professor Maureen Patricia Warner Lewis for distinguished eminence in the field of literature. **(PAUSE)**

Maureen Warner Lewis left her native Trinidad and Tobago in the early 1960s, travelling to the Mona campus of the University of the West Indies to read for a degree in English literature, which she completed with honours in 1965. This was to be the start of an academic journey that would take her far afield in the pursuit of a more fundamental understanding of Caribbean culture and development through language. This interest in orature, and particularly the role of Africa in shaping the linguistic patterns and usages in the region would form a substantial part of her life's work. In 1968, she gained her Master of Philosophy degree from the University of York for her dissertation – **“Language in Trinidad, with special reference to English”**. Continuing her formal academic training she completed her doctorate in linguistics at the University of the West Indies, successfully defending her thesis, **“The Yoruba language in Trinidad”**.

Educator extraordinaire, Maureen Warner Lewis taught in the secondary and tertiary level education systems in her native Trinidad and Tobago, in Nigeria and at the University of the West Indies, where she was to spend most of her professional life, progressing from tutor in English to Lecturer, Senior Lecturer, Reader and ultimately **Professor of African Caribbean Language and Orature** in the Department of Literatures in English at Mona. As Senior Lecturer at UWI, true to her commitment to broadening our knowledge and acknowledgement of our unique cultural traditions and the strength of our African roots, she was responsible for introducing a course on oral tradition and literature, in 1985.

Her work has empirically validated the strength of the African presence in the region and the tenaciousness of the culture of our African forebears manifested in linguistic and broader cultural survivals. Her impressive list of publications has made a substantial contribution to our knowledge and understanding of the rich cultural heritage of the literary traditions of the region and has also demonstrated the depth and breadth of her scholarship beyond the sphere of literature and linguistics. This is evident in her work on Afro Caribbean cultural forms and religion, appearing in such works as **“Guinea’s other suns – the African dynamic in Trinidad culture”**, **“Ethnic and religious plurality among Yoruba immigrants in Trinidad in the nineteenth century”**, **“Cultural configurations in the African Caribbean”**, **“African continuities in the Rastafari belief system”**, **“The ancestral factor in Jamaica’s African religions”**, **“Forms of African spirituality in Trinidad and Tobago”**, co-authored with Rudolph Eastman and **“Characteristics of Maroon music of Jamaica and Suriname”**, co-authored with Marjorie Whyllie to name but a few.

Her significant contribution to Caribbean scholarship has been recognised in several fora. The various accolades conferred on her include the Vice Chancellor’s award for excellence in the field of research for 2001-2002, her induction to the Hall of Excellence of her alma mater, St. Joseph’s Convent in 2005 and her receipt of the University of the West Indies Press Bestseller Award in the same year. In 2007 she was honoured by the Ile Eko Sango/Osun Milosa shrine in Santa Cruz, Trinidad, with the Holy Rain Festival Annual Award and in 2008 she received the Vice-Chancellor’s Personal Award for her seminal work, **“Central Africa in the Caribbean”**.

Maureen Warner Lewis has made an indelible mark not only within the halls of the university both regionally and internationally but has lent her vast wisdom and experience to the service of the Jamaican people through her connection to the **Institute of Jamaica**. For many years she actively served on the Board of the African Caribbean Institute of Jamaica/Jamaica Memory Bank, and chaired the publications

sub-committee of that Board, retiring as Deputy Board Chairman in 2008 after an extended period of distinguished contribution. During her long engagement with the ACIJ/JMB she was a constant source of inspiration and support. Her wise counsel helped immensely to guide the work of the Division in fulfilling its mandate to the Government and people of Jamaica. In February 2006, Professor Warner Lewis was the distinguished lecturer, launching the ACIJ/JMB's Annual February Programme at Emancipation Park. She has also been an active contributor to the **Institute of Jamaica's** flagship publication, "**The Jamaica Journal**" with articles such as "**Jamaica's Central African Heritage**" and to the ACIJ/JMB's **Research Review**, both as editor, advisor and author.

After over twenty-three years of distinguished service to the University of the West Indies, Professor Warner Lewis formally retired in October 2003. Retirement, however, seems to have unleashed an untapped vein of academic energy as within two years of formally leaving the lecture hall she has published two major works of scholarship; "**Central Africa in the Caribbean**", which appeared in 2003 and "**Archibald Monteith: Igbo, Jamaican, Moravian**" in 2007. Maureen Warner Lewis, liberated from the daily responsibilities of a university professor, continues to pursue her academic interests with unabated thoroughness and passion. The literary and cultural worlds, indeed all who have an interest in the literary and wider cultural heritage of Jamaica and the Caribbean, await her next offering with great anticipation.

For her contribution to the field of Literature the Council of the Institute of Jamaica is pleased to award the Gold Musgrave Medal to Professor Maureen Patricia Warner Lewis for distinguished eminence in the field.