

the paper. And since illiteracy was widespread in Jamaica during this period, by virtue of the response to her poems in the *Sunday Gleaner*, Miss Lou revitalised an interest in the oral traditions that so interlaced the people's cultural history.

Extensive investigations

Her verses soon entered the repertoire of rural dramatic groups and she was many times judge of competitions based on her work. Her investigations into Jamaican folklore and oral history were quite extensive while she was studying social work at Friends College in the parish of St. Mary. By 1942 her dialect verses were available in book form. She had by then fully accepted the fact that she lived in an oral tradition where words nevertheless played an important part.

In 1945 she won and accepted a British Council scholarship to study at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) in London. Before graduating and returning to Jamaica in 1947, Miss Lou hosted a weekly BBC radio programme called *Caribbean Carnival*, designed specially for broadcast to audiences throughout the Caribbean. This was her second assignment with the BBC. Before *Caribbean Carnival* she had hosted a programme in which she delivered the usual greetings to folks back home in her unique, comic dialect style. Listeners were also treated to some poems and stories she had specially written for the programme.

Europe and North America

Returning to Jamaica in 1947, she taught drama for a while at one of her old schools, Excelsior High in Kingston. She stayed on the island only three years before taking up another appointment with the BBC in London as presenter of *Westindian Guest Night*. Miss Lou had distinguished herself in the Little Theatre Movement pantomime of 1949 which she co-authored and performed in. Her continued close association with the Movement as author, lyricist and actress for over 40 years has undoubtedly helped towards the massive popularity this form of folk-musical enjoys on the island today. For three months each year, more than 60,000 persons turn out to the Ward Theatre in Kingston to see Miss Lou and the Little Theatre Movement in these pantomime-musicals.

Presenting the BBC's *Westindian Guest Night* from 1950 to 1953 also gave Miss Lou the opportunity to further develop her stage repertoire. She toured extensively



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Ja. Holloway

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with theatre companies based in Huddersfield, Coventry and Amersham. Many tempting offers for her to become a professional actress came her way, but in 1953 she left England for the USA where she lived in New York. Her extensive touring continued as far north as Canada where she registered similar successes among the country's Westindian communities. Back in New York she and Eric Coverley co-directed a folk musical called "Day In Jamaica" which was successful particularly in Harlem. She and Eric Coverley married in May 1954 and returned to Jamaica the following year.

Island travels

Miss Lou then went to work as Drama Officer for the Jamaica Social Welfare Commission, travelling island-wide and collecting songs, proverbs, riddles and other folk material.

In 1960 she was made a Member of the British Empire (MBE) for her contribution to Jamaican literature and theatre, and five years later the Institute of Jamaica awarded her the Musgrave Silver Medal in recognition of similar contributions.

It wasn't until the early 1960s that her captivation of the Jamaican masses became complete. Teaming up with Ranny Williams ("Maas Kan") for the *Lou and Ranny Show* on one of the island's two radio stations she worked magic on the masses. The show came in the middle of independence fever and so linked two generations sharing a common search for a new cultural identity. In a short time she and Ranny Williams became the Island's favourite comedy team and the Lou and Ranny

Show turned them both into living legends.

Later on she presented *Miss Lou's Fires* on JBC radio, a programme which brought out her sharp political humour. She developed the island's favourite auntie (The Public) who wrote to Miss Lou on just about every current topic. Her pungent replies to Auntie's "letters" endeared her to an already huge listenership. She was, however, treated with much suspicion in political circles.

Undisputed excellence

As a performer Miss Lou is without rival in Jamaica; she is a well accomplished actress, comedienne, singer and recitalist. This is backed by her



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GEORGETOWN - Jesuit editor of Guyanese newspaper wins award: The Inter-American Press Association (IAPA) has named *Catholic Standard* Editor, Father Andrew Morrison as co-winner of its 1983 Pedro Joaquim/Chamorra Award for freedom of the press, the Roman Catholic newspaper reported.

Morrison, a Jesuit, received the award - a diploma and 250 dollars - at a banquet in Lima, capital of Peru, on October 26. The IAPA, which represents all major newspapers in the Americas, makes the award annually.

The *Catholic Standard*, organ of the Roman Catholic church here, said the award, named after an assassinated Nicaraguan newspaper editor who opposed the ousted Somoza dictatorship, was presented to Morrison for "carrying out service in the highest journalistic tradition."

ROME - Dominican refuses promotion to fight South African apartheid: An Irishman elected Master of the Dominican order was chosen only after South African Albert Nolan had turned down the job to continue his work against Apartheid.

The Dominicans said it was the first time an elected Master has been allowed to turn down the post since Saint Dominic founded the order in 1216.

The order said in statement that the 134 Dominican provincial leaders, at the end of a five-day gathering here, had first voted by a substantial majority for Father Nolan, 49, head of the Dominicans in South Africa.

But when he declined to accept his election, they chose instead Father Damian Aloysius Byrne, 54, of Ireland. His election was announced at the time when no mention of Father Nolan.

In an edited version of their own internal report on the election, the order said Father Nolan refused the job because of the importance of his work in South Africa "where Christianity itself is being used to justify one of the most oppressive situations in the world."

The Dominicans, who have over 7,000 members in 82 countries, are also known as the Friars preachers or Blackfriars from the black mantle they wear over a white habit.

undisputed excellence in verse and stories written in the form she had done so much to get accepted as a language: "Jamaica talk" as she likes to call it.

Despite her popularity with the masses it wasn't until the approach of independence that her poems were considered to have real literary worth, dismissing earlier suspicions that she was actually poking fun at her fellow Jamaicans. Today her verses, plays and stories are recited and performed by school children all over the island, giving them new interpretations and twists. In fact, to the new, post-independence generation Miss Lou is a tradition in herself.

In London recently Miss Lou lamented that an entire generation of Jamaicans had grown up without respecting their culture. Her prime interest has been to get the Jamaican people to respect what belongs to them. She insists that the tragedy is in the comedy and the purpose of her art is to create laughter rather than tears.

Major awards
She became The Honourable Louise Bennett-Coverley in 1974 when

she received the Order of Jamaica which followed the Norman Manley Award of Excellence in the field of arts in 1972. Since then Miss Lou has picked up three other major awards. In 1979 the Musgrave Gold Medal from the Institute of Jamaica and the Centennial medal of the Institute in 1980. Two years later the University of the West Indies awarded her a Honorary Degree of Doctor of Letters (D.Litt.)^{2a}.

One prime result of her deep interest and research has been to rescue a great deal of Jamaica's folk material from extinction. As part-time tutor at the University of the West Indies, Miss Lou has lectured on Jamaican music and folklore, and on many occasions represented her country abroad at seminars, festivals and other events.

Among her most memorable performances abroad are her appearances at the Commonwealth Arts Festival in Cardiff, Wales in 1965, and in Guyana at the 1972 Caribbean Festival of Arts.

And as we go to press, Miss Lou has just become senior presenter on the fortnightly programme *Black on Black* screened by Britain's Channel Four television - AC

