



Ministry of
Culture, Gender,
Entertainment
and Sport



MISS LOU

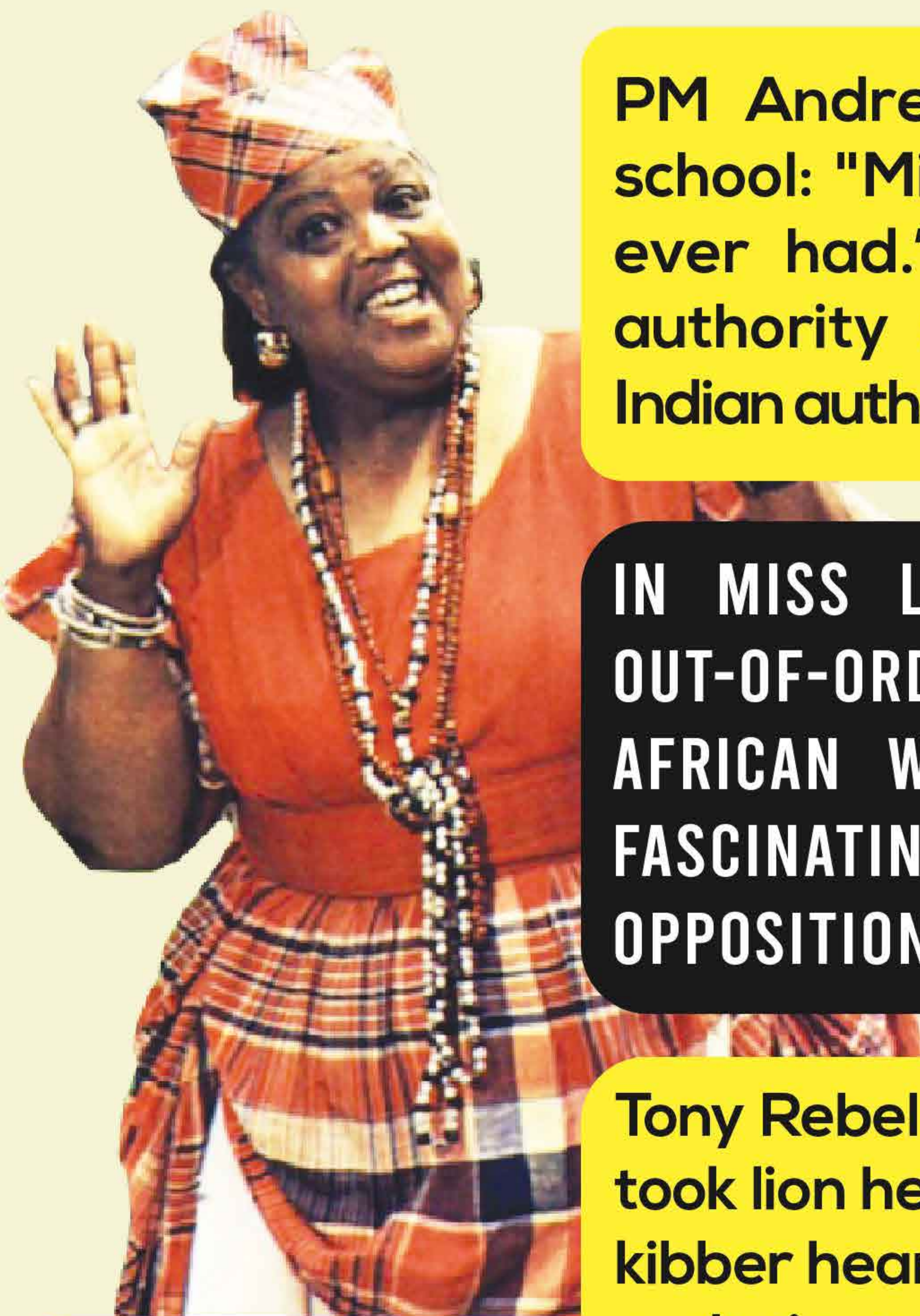


MOTHER OF JAMAICAN CULTURE

September 7, 1919 - July 26, 2006



For over 50 years on radio, stage and television, Louise 'Miss Lou' Bennett-Coverley championed our heritage with wit and warmth. Our native tongue was truly nationalised in print, when the Gleaner first published her poems 'Jamaica in Dialect' on the 23rd May 1943.



PM Andrew Holness remembers performing her poems in school: "Miss Lou spoke to us and for us in a way no one else ever had." Island-wide studies made her the pre-eminent authority on local folklore. Mervyn Morris wrote "No West Indian author, alive or dead, is so credited with having cleared a way."



IN MISS LOU'S WORDS: "SOME THOUGHT JAMAICAN-ENGLISH VULGAR AND OUT-OF-ORDER. IT CAME FROM THE AFRICAN HERITAGE AND THOSE DAYS ANYTHING AFRICAN WAS BAD: HAIR, COLOUR, SKIN, LANGUAGE, MUSIC. BUT IT WAS FASCINATING, EVERYTHING HAD RHYTHM. I KEPT WRITING IN DIALECT DESPITE OPPOSITION BECAUSE NOBODY ELSE WAS AND THERE WAS SUCH RICH MATERIAL."

Tony Rebel likens Miss Lou to Marcus Garvey, inspiring cultural emancipation. It took lion heart self-belief to defy 'white is right' colonialism. She did "tek kin teet kibber heart bun." But poems like 'Pass Fi White', 'Problem', 'Nayga Yard' are as audacious as Peter Tosh. Bob Marley's 'Dem Belly Full' echoes 'Dutty Tough'.



Dutty Tough 1942

Sun a shine an pot a bwile, but
Things no bright, bickle no nuff
Rain a fall, river dah flood, but
Water scarce and dutty tough



Dem Belly Full 1974

Them belly full but we hungry
A hungry mob is a hangry mob
A rain a fall but the dutty tough
A pot a cook but the food no nuff



Culture Minister Olivia Grange says "Many Jamaicans see Miss Lou as a mother. She taught us to be confident in who we are." Few people anywhere so transformed a national identity. If Jamaica is the world's youngest, smallest cultural superpower, then Louise Bennett-Coverley is the giant on whose shoulders all reggae, dancehall and dub poetry artistes stand.



Walk Good Forever Our Beloved Miss Lou.
You will always be an inspiration to Jamaica Land We Love.