

A BETTER WORLD

Michaëlle Jean became the new Governor General of Canada on September 27, 2005. Madame Jean had a varied and accomplished career as a teacher of languages, a Quebec broadcaster and a social commentator, while devoting herself to the cause of people in need, including disadvantaged women and children at risk. Born in Haiti and having fled the country as a young child in 1968, when she and her family sought refuge in Canada, Madame Jean brings to the position of Governor General a unique perspective as she represents Canadians as well as Canada to the rest of the world. The following are excerpts from her installation speech.

Here today, I am turning a significant page in my own story as I set off on this new adventure with hope and determination.

Hope has been a beacon for me since childhood and into my adult years. It is embodied in this country with its unlimited possibilities—this country that we sometimes take for granted. My own story begins as a young child in another country, one “draped in barbed wire from head to toe,” in the powerful words of the Haitian poet in exile, René Depestre, who is also my uncle. The story of that little girl, who watched her parents, her family, and her friends grappling with the horrors of a ruthless dictatorship, who became the woman standing before you today, is a lesson in learning to be free.

I know how precious that freedom is; I know what a legacy it is for every child, for every citizen of this country.

I, whose ancestors were slaves, who was born into a civilization long reduced to whispers and cries of pain, know something about its price, and I know too what a treasure it is for us all.

Every Canadian woman, every Canadian man prizes that freedom and would defy anyone who tried to take it away—of that I have no doubt. From Signal Hill to Vancouver Island, from Baffin Land to Thetford Mines, the freedom that is ours unites us all. Freedom has marked our history and our territory; it has marked our summer breezes and our howling winter winds. It has helped create the spirit of adventure that I love above all in this country, this country where each and every one of us is able to participate fully in the ongoing task of building it.

More than four centuries ago that spirit of adventure drove women and men to cross the ocean and discover a



photo: Sgt. Eric Jolin, Rideau Hall

Michaëlle Jean, 27th Governor General of Canada, delivers her installation speech in the Senate Chamber in Ottawa on September 27, 2005.

Madame Jean, her husband, His Excellency Jean-Daniel Lafond and their daughter, Marie-Eden, in the Senate Chamber.

