



**Media only:** Michele Urie (202) 633-2950  
**Media Web site:** <http://newsdesk.si.edu>

June 12, 2009

## **James Smithson Bicentennial Medal Presented to Claude Lévi-Strauss**

Renowned anthropologist and social scientist, Claude Lévi-Strauss, has been awarded the Smithsonian Institution's James Smithson Bicentennial Medal in recognition of his contributions to understanding the human condition through anthropological studies and in recognition of his long association with the Smithsonian. Through his wide-ranging work, Lévi-Strauss has revolutionized understanding of non-Western cultures and has had a profound impact on other fields of human knowledge, including linguistics, art and literature. He was nominated for the award by the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History.

"This award recognizes and celebrates Professor Lévi-Strauss' fundamental contributions to understanding the human condition and passionate personal engagement in defense of the common humanity and dignity of all peoples," said Hans-Dieter Sues, associate director for research and collections at the museum.

Lévi-Strauss, considered a national treasure in France, celebrated his 100th birthday in November 2008. He was appointed to the chair of social anthropology at the Collège de France in 1959 and elected to the Académie française, the highest accolade for a French scholar, in 1973. He wrote such monumental works as "Race et histoire" (1952), "Anthropologie structurale" (1958; translated as "Structural Anthropology," 1963), "La Pensée sauvage" (1962; translated as "The Savage Mind," 1966) and the four-volume "Mythologiques" (1964-1971).

Lévi-Strauss also has had a long association with the Smithsonian, especially with the Bureau of American Ethnology, which became part of the Department of Anthropology at the National Museum of Natural History. His involvement began with his contribution to the "Handbook of South American Indians," one of the Smithsonian's finest scholarly achievements, and continued with his mentorship of Smithsonian scholars.

The James Smithson Bicentennial Medal, established in 1965 in honor of the 200th anniversary of Smithson's birth, is given under the Smithsonian Secretary's authority to persons who have made distinguished contributions to the advancement of areas of interest to the Institution. It was Smithson's visionary bequest that established the Smithsonian Institution. The list of previous recipients includes Stephen W. Hawking, Sir David Attenborough and Richard Leakey.

SI-271-2009

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION MRC 135 PO Box 37012 Washington DC 20013-7012 Telephone 202.633.2950 Fax 202.786.2982