



The Eric Williams Memorial Collection

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40 YEARS AFTER HIS DEATH, ERIC WILLIAMS MEMORIAL COLLECTION CELEBRATES 23rd ANNIVERSARY

*“He made us proud to be who we were, and optimistic, as never before,
about what we were going to be, or could be.”*

Arnold Rampersad, Sara Hart Kimball Professor in the Humanities, Stanford University

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PORT OF SPAIN, TRINIDAD (March 27, 2021) – March 22, 2021 ushered in the 23rd anniversary of the inauguration of The Eric Williams Memorial Collection Research Library, Archives & Museum (EWMC), at The University of the West Indies (UWI) in Trinidad and Tobago, by former **US Secretary of State, Colin L. Powell**. Powell heralded the country’s first Prime Minister, who died in office 40 years ago on March 29, 1981: *“No one was a greater fighter for justice and equality. No one was a greater leader.”*

In 1999, the EWMC was named to **UNESCO’s** prestigious *Memory of the World Register*. At the time, the documentary heritage of only 47 other countries had been so designated.

The EWMC consists of Williams’ Research Library, Archives and Museum and is the English-speaking Caribbean’s first endeavour at establishing an entity akin to a U.S. Presidential Library. It has served as a model for cultural heritage institutions across the Caribbean, including the museums of the Trinidad and Tobago Central Bank, the College of the Bahamas, and the H. Lavity Stoutt Community College in the British Virgin Islands. In addition to the physical repository at UWI, among other activities, it promotes scholarship, education at all levels, dissent even, which is critical to its academic underpinnings and the sober and unvarnished writing of history.

While the EWMC's Library and Archives are largely responsible for a resurgence of interest in Williams’ intellectual and political contributions, it is the Collection's Museum that has piqued the curiosity of all those who visit, and that speak to a more complete picture of Eric Williams the man, rather than the myth.

“Those who labored in the organizational, financial and other vineyards to create the Collection have provided a unique intellectual gift, not just to Trinidad and Tobago...” states Professor Ivelaw Griffith, former Dean of Florida International University’s Honors College.

The EWMC adheres to the assertion that *“Eric Williams’s legacy cannot be contained within four walls or behind glass. It must **be lived!**”* (Andrew O’Shaughnessy, Vice President, Thomas Jefferson Foundation). Thus, it facilitates and organizes: international conferences (seven to date) and conference panels; symposia; and lectureships. After 19 consecutive years at Florida International University, the Eric Williams Memorial Lecture now has a new home at the University of Texas, Austin. This year, the series will kick off with an online exhibition of the EWMC Museum, and interviews with prior speakers. When circumstances permit, the Lecture will revert to its format of in-house attendance, etc.

The EWMC has also established an annual Caribbean Examination Council CAPE Prize in History; and since 2007, a regional Essay Competition in 17 Caribbean countries, 178 schools. Its first winner, Dr. Dexnell Peters from Trinidad and Tobago, is now the Bennett Boskey Fellow in Atlantic studies at Oxford University. It has introduced an Oral History Project, comprising hundreds of interviews and calypsoes about Eric Williams; has been the subject of academic papers, lectures and books; and has received multiple awards and recognition for its efforts. It has collaborated with the Mayor of London, and the University of Sheffield in the UK. A community-based pilot project in Trinidad and Tobago is currently in the planning stages – *The Baby Think it Over* anti-teen pregnancy programme; as is also an online publication of Williams’ bibliography, consisting of more than 1,000 titles; and a UWI History Department graduate programme in Heritage Studies, with a four-week practicum in the EWMC Museum.

The EWMC’s scholarly foundation centers on Williams’ brilliant scholarship, as demonstrated in his *tour de force*, Capitalism and Slavery. First published by the University of North Carolina Press in 1944, and they are now the designated publisher of destination for the book, Capitalism and Slavery has never been out of print. Some years ago, it was translated into its 8th and 9th foreign language, Turkish and Korean, (also Chinese, Russian and recently a Japanese paperback version), with both the Spanish and Portuguese editions being re-issued after some 40 years. It is now being translated into Dutch for the very first time. Thus, as arguably the current intellectual basis for slave trade reparations, Capitalism and Slavery continues to claim a currency that appears hardly likely to abate any time soon.

The EWMC’s goal, therefore, is nothing less than the institutionalization of a nation’s historical memory. Our mission gives life and meaning to Eric Williams’ words, that:

“History [is] not a record of battles and politicians, dates and events or even of the follies and foibles of mankind, but rather a record of the development of humanity – of life and of society, in all their various manifestations.”

The Eric Williams Memorial Collection Research Library, Archives & Museum is committed to preserving just that, by using the EWMC as a core, around which to encourage and promote academic integrity, analysis, and argument.

Pre-Covid guests of the EWMC Museum continue to be inspired by their experience, as were the **Vice President of India**; the **Prime Minister and former Prime Minister of St. Vincent/Grenadines and Jamaica** respectively; **Commonwealth Secretary General, Prime Minister of Tonga**, and three **Nobel Laureates**, to name a few. Thousands of Trinidad and Tobago students - along with schools/universities from Barbados; Guadeloupe (including the Chamber of Commerce); Martinique; St. Lucia; Suriname; US Virgin Islands; Mauritius; UK; US - have toured the facility since its inception. While a mere 20 schools visited in 2001, this figure had quadrupled within two years. Hence, the EWMC continues to be a means of demonstrating to our younger generation the vital connection to the past – what that signifies for both the present and for the future. And the young continue to demonstrate their profound comprehension as they speak, following, to what the EWMC represents for the population at large and, as important, what it portends for future sons and daughters of Trinidad and Tobago, in particular, and of the Caribbean, indeed the world, in general.

- *“A deep sense of awe and respect, pride, descends upon me in this place. A remarkable collection.”*
Romaine Vularoel
- *“Without a past, how can we look towards the future. This establishment is amazing!”*
Nicola Whitley, Trinidad and Tobago student
- *“An inspiring experience. Propels one to soar to highest high.”*
Sophia Almorales, Trinidad and Tobago student
- *“Thank you very much for treasuring what is really ours.”*
Kimberley Correia, Trinidad and Tobago student

The EWMC is about teaching, research, and community service.
“What we research, is what we teach, is how we can give back.”

Professor Jane Brown, University of North Carolina, U.S.