



The Eric Williams Memorial Collection

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15th Annual FIU Eric Williams Lecture Hails “The Mighty Sparrow” as Chronicler of History

MIAMI, FL. (November 3, 2013) — Rawle Gibbons and “Lord Relator” literally brought down the house with their stirring tributes to both Eric Williams and The Mighty Sparrow at the 15th Annual Eric E. Williams Memorial Lecture on October 18th. The event was held at Florida International University’s Modesto Maidique Campus as part of its African & African Diaspora Studies Program Distinguished Africana Scholars Lecture Series.

With a combination of the spoken word and excerpts of Sparrow’s numerous calypsoes – covering the rise of Eric Williams; the history of Trinidad and Tobago, the region, and indeed, that of the world – Gibbons and Relator skillfully wove the tapestry of the symbiotic relationship between the two men – the one, elucidating his intellectual vision for his country, the other, in a sense, giving it “street cred.”

“One From Ten Leaves Nought, Ten To One Is Murder: Eric Williams, The Mighty Sparrow and the Arithmetic of Caribbean Self-Definition” completely engaged the listeners with its blend of wit, fun, yet serious scholarship. The audience frequently sang the refrains of the various calypsoes, utilized to showcase the development of a national and regional consciousness in Trinidad and Tobago, authored by Eric Williams, and parlayed into the language of the street by “The Calypso King of the World” – Slinger Francisco, aka the Mighty Sparrow.

Rawle Gibbons, founding Director of the Centre for Creative and Festival Arts at the University of the West Indies (UWI), and Willard Harris, aka Lord Relator, pointedly made the case for calypso being institutionalized worldwide as a chronicler of history, much as has been done for the West African *Griot* storyteller, long recognized as a “repository of the oral tradition.” Both addressed the issue of the apparent

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decline of this form of social commentary, affirming its continued existence and relevance in Trinidad and Tobago at least – the birthplace of the art.

In the lively Q & A that followed Lord Relator, a seasoned Trinidad and Tobago calypsonian noted for imitation and his ability to sing extemporaneously – “the art of composing impromptu lyrics about any subject, at any time, without previous thought or study” – ably demonstrated his considerable talent by responding to the 165-strong crowd with humorous ditties as questions were posed to him.

The Memorial Lecture, FIU’s first named and longest running, was established in 1999, and honors the distinguished Caribbean statesman Eric E. Williams, first Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago and Head of Government for a quarter of a century until his death in 1981. He led the country to Independence from Britain in 1962 and onto Republicanism in 1976. A consummate academic and historian, and author of several books, Dr. Williams is best known for his groundbreaking work, the 69-year-old Capitalism and Slavery, which has been translated into seven languages, including Russian, Chinese, Japanese and this year, Korean and Turkish. Popularly referred to as *The Williams Thesis*, this landmark text continues to inform today's ongoing debate and remains “years ahead of its time...this profound critique is still the foundation for studies of imperialism and economic development,” according to the *New York Times*.

Among prior Eric Williams Memorial Lecture speakers have been: the late John Hope Franklin, one of America’s premier historians of the African-American experience; Kenneth Kaunda, former President of the Republic of Zambia; Cynthia Pratt, Deputy Prime Minister of the Bahamas; Mia Mottley, Attorney General of Barbados; Beverly Anderson-Manley, former First Lady of Jamaica; Portia Simpson Miller, now Prime Minister of Jamaica; the celebrated civil rights activist Angela Davis; and prize-winning Haitian author Edwige Danticat.

The Lecture, which seeks to provide an intellectual forum for the examination of pertinent issues in Caribbean and African Diaspora history and politics, is co-sponsored by FIU: College of Arts and Sciences, School of International and Public Affairs, Latin American and Caribbean Center, AADS Graduate Students Association, Student Government Association; Daniel Alfonso; Pascale Becel; Rhea Mokund Beck; Sandra Bernard-Bastien; Bilmor Advertising – Irvine Headley; Lenore Cameron; Consulates General of Trinidad and Tobago and Saint Lucia; Edwards & Partners; Eglantine Gordon Memorial Fund; Jennifer Jagbir; Glenn Joseph; Joy’s Roti Delight; Nina Khell Garcia; Miami Dade College – Dr. Leroy Lashley; Neki Mohan; PAS Cargo; Aryian & Gieowar Singh; Mervyn Solomon; Linda Spears-Bunton; Trinidad and Tobago Independence Ball Committee; Lillith Trewick; Welch, Morris & Associates, Ltd; Sylvia Worrell and Christine G. Wray, M.D.

The Lecture is also supported by The Eric Williams Memorial Collection Research Library, Archives & Museum at the University of the West Indies (Trinidad and Tobago campus), which was inaugurated by former **U.S. Secretary of State, Colin L. Powell** in 1998. It was named to **UNESCO's** prestigious *Memory of the World Register* in 1999.

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