



## *The Eric Williams Memorial Collection*

P.O. Box 561631 \* Miami, FL 33256-1631 \* USA \* Tel: 305-271-7246 \* Cell: 305-905-9999 \* Fax: 305-271-4160

### **Howard University and the University of Havana Honor Eric Williams' Scholarship**

**Port of Spain, TRINIDAD and TOBAGO** (September 12, 2024). Howard University and the University of Havana announce their commemoration of the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Eric Williams' ground-breaking book, *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944).

**Media Contact:**

Erica Williams Connell  
Tel: 305-905-9999  
Email: [ewmc@ewmc-tt.org](mailto:ewmc@ewmc-tt.org)

The book has never been out of print in the US, prompting Dr. Christopher Brown of Columbia University to write in the London Review of Books in December 2023:

*“Capitalism and Slavery [is] a ‘landmark’ ...but it would be even more correct to think of it as the progenitor of almost all of the questions, problems, arguments and interpretations that have come to inform the study of slavery, abolition and emancipation in the British Empire.”*

In the UK, however, after the initial intransigence in 1938 of the leading British publisher of revolutionary works:

*“Mr. Williams, are you trying to tell me that the slave trade and slavery were abolished for economic and not for humanitarian reasons? I would never publish such a book, for it would be contrary to the British tradition.”*

*Capitalism and Slavery* was finally published more than a quarter-century later. It was to be a further 58 years before it climbed in 2022, as a Penguin Random House edition, to #5 on the UK Sunday Times non-fiction Bestseller List, a first for Penguin.

The celebration, sponsored by the Center for an Equitable Economy and Sustainable Society (e2s2) at Howard University, comprises a bi-national conference in two parts. The first, *From Columbus to Castro*, will be held at the University of Havana, Cuba, from September 17-21, 2024. It takes its name from Williams' 1970 book of the same name. The second, *Capitalism & Slavery*, will be held from September 26-28 at Howard University's Medical School (Seeley-Mudd Building, Red Room Auditorium from 9 am to 5 pm) in Washington, DC, where Eric Williams joined the faculty in 1939 as a Professor of Political and Social Science, upon earning his doctorate at Oxford University.

Cuba was chosen as one of the sites for the proceedings because Williams researched much of *Capitalism & Slavery* in its National Archives, and he interacted with many of Cuba's leading intellectuals during his time there. Holding a rigorous scholarly conversation at the University of Havana offers the opportunity to view longstanding assumptions about slavery and freedom in a new light, and especially within a larger Pan-Caribbean context. Conventional scholarly literature has insisted that Cuban slaveholders freed the human beings they held in bondage on the eve of their uprising against the Spanish Empire. Yet, Afro-Cuban historians contend that formerly-enslaved people placed so much pressure on the system of plantation enterprise with their frequent insurgencies, that planters and merchants were forced to yield.

Arguably, no scholar has been more influential in theorizing slavery and capitalism than Eric Williams. The very notion that slavery contributed immensely to capitalist growth at the height of the Industrial Revolution in the United Kingdom and elsewhere, has in fact been commonly referred to as "The Williams Thesis." This has been both revered and caricatured in the decades since its 1944 publication. Yet all scholars recognize the lasting influence of Williams' meticulous research and persuasive argument about the central role of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in shaping global commerce and diplomacy, from its inception in the 1500's through the centuries. As such, in what is foreseen will be pathbreaking ways, the Symposium will critically engage the Williams legacy to enrich prevailing research about slavery and capitalism in the United States, the Caribbean, and the larger global Americas.

Besides revisiting his pioneering scholarship, the conferences will gather scholars with novel research in finance, law, politics, Caribbean diplomacy, gender, sexuality, literature, ability, and national origin, all of which characterize modern capitalism. It will ask how scholars define and deploy Williams' two key terms – "capitalism" and "slavery" – as new avenues for scholarship are charted and new political paradigms in the Caribbean, in particular, and on the global stage, in general, are imagined.

A number of highly-regarded scholars are scheduled to participate including, but not limited to, Dr. Eduardo Torres Cuevas from the Cuban Academy of History, one of the preeminent scholars in

Caribbean slavery, as well as President Vinson III of Howard University, whose pioneering studies on slavery in Latin America were highly influenced by Williams' own work.

Thus, in what the organizers hope will prove to be a historic event in the annals of Trinidad and Tobago's, Cuban, Caribbean, and Howard University's history, the empowering legacy of Eric Williams' contributions to West Indian thought and to the development of Caribbean people will yet again be given its due.

The Eric Williams Memorial Collection Research Library, Archives & Museum was inaugurated by former **US Secretary of State Colin Powell** in 1998, and named to UNESCO's prestigious *Memory of the World Register* in 1999.

For more information, please contact Erica Williams Connell, The Eric Williams Memorial Collection Research Library, Archives & Museum, P.O. Box 561631, Miami, FL 33256-1631, USA. Fax: (305) 271-4160; Website: [www.ericwilliamsmemorialcollection.org](http://www.ericwilliamsmemorialcollection.org).