



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

Danez Smith Delivers Electrifying Performance at 22nd Eric Williams Memorial Lecture

MIAMI, FL. (April 8, 2024) — To a crowd of about 180 attendees, both in-person and online, the 22nd Eric E. Williams Memorial Lecture hosted the celebrated poet and artist of the spoken word, Danez Smith who, among other works, delivered an electrifying presentation with his “Dear White America...” verbal onslaught against racism in America.

“*Prose Poetry as Rebellion*” focused on Smith’s angry condemnation of the continuing circumstances that allow for the targeting of black and brown peoples and, thus, their racial profiling in far too many areas of the country. “Dear White America...” engages the audience in a wake-up call and an indictment of the country’s systems that have enabled violence against black people, Danez told PBS NewsHour in an interview.

Media Contact:
Erica Williams Connell
305-905-9999
ewmc@ewmc.tt.org

With all of the passion and intensity of the outraged, Danez protests, “I’ve left Earth in search of a new God. I do *not* trust the God you have given us...Take your God back! Though his songs are beautiful, his miracles are inconsistent. I want the fate of Lazarus for Renisha, I want Chucky, Bo, Meech, Trayvon, Sean & Jonylah risen three days after their entombing...I have left Earth, I am equal parts sick of your ‘go back to Africa’ & ‘I just don’t see color’...I am sick of calling your recklessness the law! ...We did not ask to be part of your America, (though are we not America?).”

The performance concluded with a serious discussion, followed by a Q&A session that touched on, among other topics, Danez’s inspiration, his discomfort at being commissioned and remunerated for his art, and whether or not he delivered his poems today, some written years ago, with the same verve and forcefulness that he had when they were first composed. His response led one 14-year-old to declare, “He was wild!”

After 19 consecutive years at Florida International University (FIU), the Eric Williams Memorial Lecture, in its new home at the John L. Warfield Center for African and African American Studies at the

UT Eric Williams Lecture page 2

University of Texas, Austin (UT), honors the distinguished Caribbean statesman, consummate academic, internationally-celebrated historian, and author of several books. His 1944 trailblazing study Capitalism and Slavery, popularly referred to as *The Williams Thesis*, arguably re-framed the historiography of the British Transatlantic Slave Trade and established the contribution of Caribbean slavery to the development of both Britain and America. **“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.”** (Christopher L. Brown, London Review of Books, December 2023). The book has been translated into nine languages, including Russian, Chinese, Japanese, Turkish and Korean. The tenth and eleventh, Dutch and German, are in process. Last year, almost **80 years after** it was first published in the US, the book registered at **#5 on the UK Sunday Times Bestseller List (non-fiction)**. Eric Williams was also the 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 Republican status in 1976.

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, 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, Prime Minister of Jamaica; Hon. Kenny Anthony, Prime Minister of Saint Lucia; Hon. Ralph Gonsalves, Prime Minister of Saint Vincent and The Grenadines; and Prof. Angela Davis, renowned for her ongoing work to combat all forms of oppression in the U.S. and abroad.

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 in part by UT’s: Center for Women’s and Gender Studies, Department of Women’s Gender and Sexuality Studies, LGBTQ Studies, Institute of Latin American Studies, New Writers Project; Dr. & Mrs. Leroy Lashley; and Jerry Nagee. It is also supported by The Eric Williams Memorial Collection Research Library, Archives & Museum at the University of the West Indies (UWI, Trinidad and Tobago), which was inaugurated by former **US Secretary of State, Colin L. Powell** in 1998. It was named to UNESCO’s prestigious *Memory of the World Register* in 1999.

Post-Lecture viewing, as well as all prior Lectures, 2021 digital launch videos and an online exhibition of the Eric Williams Memorial Collection Museum at UWI are available at:

<https://liberalarts.utexas.edu/caas/events/ewml.php>