



The Eric Williams Memorial Collection

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Seventh Annual Eric E. Williams Lecture Focuses on Williams' Vision for Carnival, Culture and Development

MIAMI, Fla. October 19, 2004)— Dr. Hollis Liverpool, the distinguished scholar-calypsonian (aka Chalkdust), literally ‘brought down the house’ with his humorous but thought-provoking delivery at the Seventh Annual Eric E. Williams Memorial Lecture on October 14, 2005. The event was held at Florida International University, as part of its African New World Studies Program Distinguished Africana Scholars Lecture Series.

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Born and reared in Trinidad and Tobago, Liverpool is an engaging lecturer and clever lyricist, currently Associate Professor of History at the University of the Virgin Islands. He holds a Teacher's Certificate, a Post-Graduate Diploma in Education, a B.A. in History and Sociology, an M.A. in History and African History, a Post Graduate Certificate in Philosophy and a Ph.D. in History and Ethnomusicology.

But it was his inimitable wit and sound historical knowledge that held sway on Friday night, often causing the 400-plus audience to erupt in uncontrollable laughter. The lecture was singular, however, in its denunciation of what today passes for the “art” of Calypso and Carnival. Sounding the death knell of the genre if it continues in its current form, “Chalkie” managed to marry the considerable learning opportunities they both could allow with virtually every university department course – be it physics, history, business administration or psychological counseling. He urged that universities and governments everywhere (which, he said, traditionally do not view culture as a particular imperative) begin to imbue its practitioners with respect and with the tools by which they could develop their respective careers. He lauded the vision of Eric Williams,

head of Trinidad and Tobago's government for 25 years from 1956-1981, who proposed that a nation ungrounded in its own culture was one without a soul. Thus, Williams instituted the Carnival Development Committee (with an emphasis on "development") which, for decades, has managed Trinidad and Tobago's Carnival celebrations. Every single Caribbean nation with a similar Carnival - indeed even those in metropolitan areas - has adopted some form of this model, albeit none, including Trinidad and Tobago has, in "Chalkie's" view, fully implemented the "Williams vision." According to Liverpool, Williams saw the calypsonian as both academic and political scientist, despite the fact that he was often the butt of their barbs. Yet, he made no move to silence them – thus prompting Chalkdust to compose "Let the Jackass Sing" – based on Williams' own admonishment to those who would do so.

In the lively Question & Answer session that followed, "Chalkie" ably demonstrated the vast difference between the calypso of yesteryear with its *double entendre* and skillful play on words, and that of today with its often nonsensical syntax and booming rhythm.

The evening's activities were co-sponsored by the Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs, the Miami-based Consuls General of Trinidad and Tobago, Bahamas, Barbados and Jamaica, as well as other corporate and community donors. Several Florida elected officials proffered Mayoral Proclamations, courtesy greetings, the silver Seal of the City of Miami, and a Distinguished Visitor Certificate. Former **Secretary of State Colin L. Powell**, passionate about calypso, also conveyed his best wishes for a successful occasion.

Many students from area universities were in attendance and FIU's vibrant Caribbean Students Association both financially supported and attended the event *en masse*.

As in the past, a fundraising luncheon was hosted to meet the speaker, the intent being to establish an FIU Eric E. Williams Memorial Scholarship Fund for deserving students of Caribbean ancestry.

The Memorial Lecture is named in honor of Trinidad and Tobago's first Prime Minister and internationally renowned scholar, Eric Williams. In addition to his several other achievements, Williams is best known for writing *Capitalism and Slavery*, published in 1944 and translated into seven languages, with an eighth – Korean – planned

for this year. “The Williams Thesis” was cited in the *New York Times Book Review* (1997) as continuing to be on “the cutting edge of slave trade research in academic circles.”

The Lecture is also co-sponsored by *The Eric Williams Memorial Collection* at the University of the West Indies (Trinidad and Tobago campus), which was named to UNESCO’s prestigious *Memory of the World Register* in 1999.

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