

ERIC WILLIAMS MEMORIAL COLLECTION
INAUGURAL ANNUAL SEMINAR
Learning Resource Centre
9 January 2007

It is an honour and a privilege to play a small role in this Inaugural Annual Seminar focused on the theme “Revisiting Eric Williams’ *Education in the British West Indies*” which seeks to bring together diverse perspectives on Dr. Eric Williams’ seminal piece completed in 1946, the same year that adult suffrage became a reality in Trinidad and Tobago. I consider it to be of great significance that the participants consist in the main of Masters and Doctoral educators. I wish you all a successful seminar and meaningful engagement during the course of today’s activities and I trust that you will develop some keen insights that will impact on your work.

My first task is to welcome you all to this St. Augustine Campus of the University of the West Indies which was founded in Mona, Jamaica in 1948. We are an integral part of a multi-campus regional university which serves 15 countries in this region. Today the enrolment of this campus is 15,700 while The University of the West Indies as a whole services over 36,000 students. At St. Augustine, in spite of significant expansion and massive construction, we have outgrown our present location and logic demands further expansion of this campus at a different location and we are working constructively with the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to effect an early transfer of lands already committed to The University of the West Indies some time ago. I bid you all a warm welcome to The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine.

The library of this campus, as you know, is the home of the Eric Williams Memorial Collection and I note that tours of this facility have been integrated into your programme.

It is our hope that the permanent home of an expanded Eric Williams Memorial collection will be at The University of the West Indies and we are working with Ms. Erica Williams-Connell to achieve this.

Let me simply state this on the occasion of this Inaugural Annual Seminar that I have already made the commitment to Ms. Williams-Connell that as soon as land due to The University of the West Indies, is transferred by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to The University of the West Indies, a mutually acceptable site will be earmarked to house an expanded Eric Williams Collection.

This could either be one floor of a building provided by the UWI for this purpose or it could be a specially designed and constructed building on lands of UWI. For such a building a commitment for funding would be necessary from an external source.

Ms. William-Connell a warm welcome.

Vice Chancellor, Professor Robert Boucher, I think that you must know by now that we are open to collaboration of a mutually beneficial kind with the University of Sheffield.

We appreciate the fact that long term success for any country depends on strategic knowledge transfer, meaningful knowledge exchange and deep local capacity building in a context in which we at UWI see our institution as indispensable to the development of our

Caribbean region. We look forward to continuing the discussion at various levels and to strengthening and deepening the relationships we have begun to build as well as opening the doors to further collaboration. I bid you and your entire team a warm welcome to the Campus.

This seminar celebrates the life and work of a great West Indian intellectual, a son of this soil and founding father of the nation – state of Trinidad and Tobago – a man who was larger than life while he lived and whose shoes remained too large following his demise for all those who would seek to fill them.

The particular text on which you are going to focus is “Education in the British West Indies.” I commend this

close attention to textual detail and to ideas in their context and I commend further your willingness to examine ideas critically against the background of contemporary developments and challenges. I am certain that your seminar will be rich.

One of the significant things about Dr. Williams' approach in "*Education in the British West Indies*" is that it was a systemic approach. He looked at elements of what he conceived of as holistic, integrated system of education which could be "midwife of the emerging social order" in a post colonial era – so he envisaged a dynamic interplay between the education system and the social system in the process of creation.

Having reminded you of this I ask this simple question: Do we today think of education in our region in a holistic and systemic way? And do we not need to spend more time thinking through the connections from preschool to post doctoral in a more holistic and systemic way if we are to make sense of our education strategy and make sensible interventions capable of meaningful impact of a regional nature?

Is it not time that we identify and address those critical challenges to development, which if not identified and addressed will continue to make serious development an elusive goal?

Look at the assets we have now as compared with 1946.
Are we using those assets as strategically and as well as we
could?

Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie