

VICE CHANCELLOR'S SPEECH
Eric Williams Memorial Collection in Collaboration with the
University of Sheffield, UK - Annual Inaugural Seminar

I am delighted to be part of today's Eric Williams Memorial Collection Inaugural Annual Seminar and to be doing so in partnership with colleagues from the University of Sheffield. I wish to extend an especially warm welcome to Professor Robert Boucher, Vice Chancellor of the University of Sheffield and to Dr. Jennifer Lavia, Director of the Caribbean Programme of the University of Sheffield.

I wish also, to congratulate the founders of the Eric Williams Memorial Collection. Dr. Eric Williams was as an exceptional Scholar as he was an astute politician and gifted national and regional leader. His published works remain still a valuable contribution to West Indian political and intellectual life and these are the centre piece of this collection.

The inauguration of an annual seminar hosted by the Eric Williams Collection is a wonderful means of bringing to life for a new generation of young people the contribution of one of the finest intellectuals and leaders the Caribbean has ever known.

It is heartening to know that the Eric Williams Memorial Collection has not remained static but it has continued to grow, thanks to the caring, energy, and determination of Mrs. Erica Williams Connell, loving daughter of the grand master himself, and she, ably assisted by some former associates of Dr. Williams – I thank all of you for what you are doing and continue to do. This collection stands today as the only entity of its kind in the English-speaking Caribbean, but I do hope there will be others in the future. The Eric

Williams Memorial Collection is in many respects similar to a U.S. presidential library – many of which serve not only as repositories of great (and occasionally not so great) statesmen, but as is the case of the Jimmy Carter Library (with which I am personally familiar), sites for public meetings, policy discussions and intellectual discourse. In conceptualizing this annual memorial lecture in the name of Eric Williams, the organizers are saying to us that this Collection, consisting as it does the Williams’ library, archives and memorabilia, should not be only a place where lonely scholars come to gather information, to think and reflect, but one where groups of people, academics, students, John and Jane Public can come and listen and share in that same intellectual excitement and fervour that fashioned and formed Eric Williams and that previous generation of Caribbean Scholars and thinkers.

We remain very proud that the collection was placed on deposit at the UWI Main Library. You will doubtless agree that this location was apt, since the Williams Collection like UWI, strives to make vital connections between the potential and intellectual life of the region. The UWI is an appropriate site, too, because Dr. Williams played an important role in ensuring the formation of the University and served as it’s only Pro-Chancellor in the late 1960s and 1970s.

Reviewing the views of Dr. Williams on Tertiary Education, one cannot help but be struck by his understanding, more than most people in the Caribbean of those times, of the liberating influence of Education. He knew that the acquisition of knowledge, particularly at the Tertiary Level, placed one in a powerful position with respect to one’s

environment and the world around it. He knew, too that research was a vital activity of the university – that ability to take existing knowledge and to create new knowledge, new ideas, and newly creative structures of thought that transform how we envision the world around us and how we interact with and shape that world.

It is heartening to know that Dr. Williams advocated for the State playing a significant role in supporting the University. As our thinking has evolved on this subject, it is important that Tertiary Education be a shared responsibility among State, Private Sector, the students and parents all of whom benefit from that education. I applaud the Trinidad & Tobago Government and for that matter, other governments in our Region, for maintaining and indeed, enhancing their commitment to Tertiary Education. I am heartened by the increasing interest of the Private Sector in contributing to the University Enterprise. My remaining concern, one that I believe Dr. Williams might have voiced, is the inadequate investment in Research and Graduate Studies. If our West Indian nation is to develop and thrive, the investment in creation and opportunities of new knowledge will need to be far more robust than is currently the case. While some may argue that this is not the platform to advocate for enhancement of research funding and the creation of a Caribbean Research Funding Agency, I would say otherwise – that Dr. Williams would have been standing shoulder to shoulder with me voicing out that the true worth of a University is not only its ability to instruct, but to create, and it is the role of both State and Private Sectors to promote that environment, that ambiance, that milieu in which creative energy will grow and flourish.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is a privilege to be here today and to be part of this historic occasion.

I thank you!