

## Caribbean students analyze Cuban Revolution impact

Written by

Tuesday, 24 August 2010 14:08

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**Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago** (August 16, 2010) The media was out in full force at The University of the West Indies (UWI), St. Augustine, to cover the August 13th Awards Ceremony of the biennial Eric Williams 'School Bags' Essay Competition, whose topic this year was **"The Cuban Revolution, 1959-2009: Discuss its successes and failures. What relevance do these have for today's student?"**

The event was hosted by UWI's Campus Principal, Clement Sankat, and Jamaica's High Commissioner to Trinidad and Tobago, the Hon. Sharon Saunders.

Organized by The Eric Williams Memorial Collection (EWMC), the contest is open to all final-year Sixth Formers in 178 schools, 17 Caribbean countries. This year's Competition, inaugurated in 2007, witnessed a 40% increase in participation, and several countries such as Guyana and Barbados – not previously represented – sent in entries.

First prize winner, among several essays received from her country, is Yunique Shannakay Francis of Holy Childhood School, Jamaica. Topping the Trinidad and Tobago compositions are: second place, Sharifa Ammon, Bishop Anstey's School (POS); and third, Andrew Ali of Hillview College. Submissions were also received from Grenada, Guyana and Barbados.

The judges were: Dr. Franklin Knight, Leonard and Helen R. Stulman Professor of History, The Johns Hopkins University; Dr. Colin Palmer, Dodge Professor of History, Princeton University; and Dr. Rita Pemberton, Head, UWI St. Augustine Department of History.

The reviewers were pleased with the depth of understanding displayed by the awardees whose submissions were of an exceptionally high quality - well researched, well written and persuasively argued. They were particularly interested in determining whether the students could provide a balanced assessment of a highly controversial event in the Caribbean's history. They need not have worried. As Yunique Francis queried: *"What are the implications of the Revolution for students like me? Because of its internationalist nature, several Jamaicans, who could not have realized their dreams without them, have received scholarships to study medicine in Cuba, returning home to provide care to disadvantaged Jamaicans at public hospitals* ."

Sharifa Ammon's take on

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the subject was equally clear:

*“Lessons in perseverance, resilience, self-sufficiency and solidarity can also be learned.*

” And, in addressing some of the failures of the 50-year-old Revolution, Andrew Ali paid special attention to what he characterized as Cuba’s political oppression of its people and its diplomatic ‘pariah’ status.

Patrons of the Essay Competition are: A & B Book Distributors; Banwari Tours; Calaloux Publications; Caribbean Airlines, Ltd.; CARICOM; Digicel, Trinidad & Tobago, Ltd.; Encyclopedia of the Caribbean - Professor John Garrigus; High Commission, Jamaica; IOKTS Productions; Journal of African American History; Kelly Services Customs Brokerage, Ltd.; LIAT (1974), Ltd.; Majority Press; Markus Wiener Publishers; Miami-Dade County Public Schools; The Miami Herald Newspaper; The University of the West Indies; Trinidad Hilton Hotel; UNESCO: British Virgin Islands, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago; Yorke Structures, Ltd.

Prizes include: a four-day trip for two to Trinidad and Tobago with airfare, hotel accommodations and two meals daily; a laptop computer; various tours; US \$1,500 in educational vouchers; courtesy calls on the President of Trinidad and Tobago and the Speaker of the House of Representatives; a set of Eric Williams’ books; and a framed certificate.

The winning essay will be published in the Miami Herald’s online edition, and CARICOM’s and UWI’s (three campus) newsletters.

Scholar-statesman Eric Williams led the Government of Trinidad and Tobago for a quarter century until his death in 1981. Paying special attention to learning, “to educate is to emancipate”, on August 30, 1962, the eve of his country’s Independence from Britain, he exhorted:

*“You, the children, yours is the great responsibility to educate your parents...you carry the future of [the Nation] in your school bags.”*

He would have been immensely proud of the intellectual calibre displayed in this Competition that bears his name, which bodes exceedingly well for the region’s future.

The Eric Williams Memorial Collection at The University of the West Indies in Trinidad and Tobago comprises the Research Library, Archives and Museum of Eric Williams. It was inaugurated by former US Secretary of State Colin Powell in 1998, and named to UNECSO’s prestigious *Memory of the World Register* in 1999.