

Twelfth Annual FIU Eric Williams Lecture focuses on Haiti Reconstruction

Written by

Thursday, 21 October 2010 15:37



Former Jamaican Prime Minister P. J. Patterson waxed warm on his topic with his relevant and thought-provoking delivery at the Twelfth Annual Eric E. Williams Memorial Lecture last Friday. The event was held at Florida International University's South Campus, as part of its African & African Diaspora Studies Program Distinguished Africana Scholars Lecture Series.

Due to the catastrophic devastation wrought by the January 2010 Haiti earthquake, this year's Lecture, "***The Renaissance of Haiti: A Template for Caribbean Integration***," addressed critical issues pertaining to Haiti's rebirth and the special responsibility of metropolitan countries to ensure it.

Patterson is an engaging and self-effacing lecturer, presently the Caribbean Community's (CARICOM) Special Representative on Haiti's Reconstruction and authorized by its government to represent it in appropriate fora. Most notable on Friday night, was his sound historical knowledge of Haiti's - the then 'Pearl of the Antilles' - powerful 1791-1804 slave revolution. This was bolstered by a clear understanding of its potential and the current obstacles to achieving this. Mr. Patterson was firm in his assertion that history should not be repeated in the imposition of prescriptions for Haiti, whatever the context, but that the Haitian people, as one nation, should chart their own destiny. As he succinctly put it: "Every crisis presents an opportunity."

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In the lively Question & Answer session that followed, Patterson ably fielded numerous on-point questions from the record 340-plus crowd, including a suggestion from one student that it was France that should pay reparations to Haiti. (As a consequence of its rebellion, Haiti was forced to reimburse French planters for the loss of their 'property'. The debt was not satisfied until the beginning of the Second World War.)

Numerous US federal and Florida elected officials, including **Governor Charlie Crist**, extended courtesy greetings, Mayoral Proclamations, and the Key to the City of Miami. Five FIU professors offered credit for student attendance, and live media coverage was obtained via TeleAmerica TV Miami; Free I Radio online; CWN5 online TV; Heritage Radio in Trinidad and Tobago; WBAI Radio, New York; York University Radio in Canada; and the Lecture has four times now been featured on the BBC London. As in the past, pledges to the Lecture Endowment Fund were actively solicited.

The Memorial Lecture honors the distinguished Caribbean statesman Eric E. Williams, 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 Republicanism in 1976. A consummate academic and historian, and author of several books, Dr. Williams is best known for his groundbreaking work, the 66-year-old *Capitalism and Slavery*, which has been translated into seven languages, including Russian, Chinese, Japanese and soon-to-be, Korean. The Brazilian and Spanish versions will be reprinted in 2011 for the first time in some 40 years. Popularly referred to as *The Williams Thesis*, this landmark text continues to inform today's ongoing debate and remains "years ahead of its time...this profound critique is still the foundation for studies of imperialism and economic development," according to the *New York Times*.

Throughout the Lecture, Patterson characterized Eric Williams as prophetic, possessing a single-mindedness of vision with respect to the meaningful Caribbean integration of even its non-Anglophone territories.

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, former 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, former Prime Minister of Jamaica; the celebrated civil rights activist Angela Davis; and prize-winning Haitian author Edwige Danticat.

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 by: the Caribbean Consular Corps (Miami); Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs; FIU: College of Arts and Sciences, School of International and Public Affairs, College of Law, AADS Graduate Students Association, Caribbean Students Association, Council of Student Organizations, Haitian Students Organization, Latin American and Caribbean Center, National Society of Black Engineers, Ruth K. and Shepard Broad International Lecture Series, Student Programming

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Council; Angostura, Ltd.; Air Jamaica/Caribbean Airlines, Ltd.; Miami Dade College – Professor Leroy Lashley; Mike Simmons of Mike Golf, Inc.; Emile Sabga; Aryian and Gieowar Singh; Professor Linda Spears-Bunton; Victoria Mutual Florida Representative Office.

The Lecture is also supported by The Eric Williams Memorial Collection at the University of the West Indies (Trinidad and Tobago campus), which was inaugurated by former **U.S. Secretary of State, Colin L. Powell**

in 1998. It was named to

UNESCO's

prestigious

Memory of the World Register

in 1999.