



The Eric Williams Memorial Collection

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ERIC WILLIAMS TO RECEIVE SOUTH AFRICA'S HIGHEST NATIONAL HONOUR

PRETORIA, Republic of South Africa (April 8, 2007) — On April 24, 2007, the President of the Republic of South Africa, His Excellency Thabo Mvuyelwa Mbeki, will bestow posthumously on Dr. Eric Williams, the first Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, South Africa's **SUPREME ORDER OF THE COMPANIONS OF O.R. TAMBO (Gold)**. The tribute, in recognition of Dr. Williams' commitment to peace and co-operation, and his inspiration to South Africa's own quest for unity and harmony, will be received by his daughter, Erica Williams Connell in Pretoria.

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A noted Caribbean statesman, consummate historian and head of government for a quarter of a century until his death in 1981, Dr. Williams was consistently passionate in his denouncement of and activism against apartheid. He led his country to Independence from Britain in 1962 and onto Republicanism in 1976. His seminal work, Capitalism and Slavery (taught in South Africa as a means of resistance during that era and translated into eight languages – Russian, Chinese, Japanese and Korean, among them), according to Duke University Professor William Darity, "...*must* be addressed by any serious scholar of slavery and the slave trade,"

"The vision...during our struggle for liberation was...strikingly similar to the vision of that great West Indian historian and prime minister, Eric Williams...[who] directly addressed the great diversity of his country in the cause of national unity:

'There can be no Mother India for those whose ancestors came from India. There can be no Mother Africa for those of African origin. There can be no Mother England and no dual loyalties. There can be no Mother China even if one could agree as to which China is the Mother; and there can be no Mother Syria and no Mother Lebanon. A nation, like an individual, can have only one Mother and Mother cannot discriminate between her children.'

This is the wisdom that we too apply, in our quest for a single South Africa,” wrote President Mbeki in his Foreword to the 2005 book: *Timol: A Quest for Justice* by Imtiaz Cajee.

Dr. Williams’ example continues to be a force in South Africa’s fight against hegemony, and the President praised Williams for the latter’s untiring efforts in this regard in his 2005 feature address at the 50th anniversary of the Bandung Conference, which marked a turning point in the mobilization of Third World peoples against imperialism - both past and present.

Instituted by President Mbeki to reflect the new spirit of South Africa, to create a history of South Africa’s achievements, and to provide motivation to future citizens, the Supreme Order of the Companions of O.R. Tambo can be offered in three classes, of which the ‘Gold’ is the pinnacle. It is reserved specifically for foreign nationals and dignitaries - to persons who have made an exceptional contribution to the struggle against apartheid and non-racial democracy in South Africa, and who have established their active expression of friendship towards the Republic.

The award is named after the late Oliver Reginald Tambo, president of the African National Congress in exile. Tambo was highly instrumental in giving a voice to the international movement against racism and apartheid. The Majola, or mole snake, is its symbol. In African mythology, the Majola visits new born babies to prepare them for a safe and successful life. Along with the oval badge, which depicts the watchful Majola and the universal ying and yang, symbolizing the consolidation of diverse spiritual energy, recipients receive a carved walking stick representing the country’s appreciation for the support and solidarity demonstrated, and its pledge of reciprocation. Previous foreign awardees include Mahatma Gandhi, former Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda (with whose assistance President Mbeki escaped into exile in England in the early sixties) and the late Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme. The distinction paid to Eric Williams at this time underscores President Mbeki’s intellectual traditions, at a time when South Africa has gained a seat on the United Nations Security Council.

Thabo Mbeki succeeded Nelson Mandela as the second democratic president of South Africa in 1999 and was re-elected for a second term in 2004. Like Dr. Williams, President Mbeki is considered to be an academic who has fought hard for peace and unity in South Africa. His forthcoming official biography by Ronald Suresh Roberts will be dedicated to Eric Williams.