



# The Eric Williams Memorial Collection

P.O. Box 561631\* Miami, FL 33256-1631\* USA\* Tel: 305-271-7246\* Fax: 305-271-4160

## ERIC WILLIAMS RECEIVES SOUTH AFRICA'S HIGHEST NATIONAL HONOUR

**PRETORIA, Republic of South Africa** (April 24, 2007) —In an elegant and glittering ceremony that was televised throughout the country, the President of the Republic of South Africa, His Excellency Thabo Mvuyelwa Mbeki, bestowed posthumously on Dr. Eric Williams, the first Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, South Africa's **ORDER OF THE COMPANIONS OF O.R. TAMBO (Gold)**. It was received by his daughter, Erica Williams Connell who took the opportunity, while in South Africa, to establish contacts on behalf of the Eric Williams Memorial Collection at The University of the West Indies, Trinidad and Tobago. In addition to discussions with President Mbeki; Minister in the Presidential Secretariat, Essop Pahad; the Minister of Education, Mrs. G.N.M. Pandor; the University of South Africa; executives in both the publishing and energy industries, Mrs. Connell also spoke by telephone to former President Nelson Mandela.

**Media Contact:**  
Erica Williams Connell  
305-905-9999  
ewc.suilan@juno.com



The Awards Ceremony for National Orders took place at the Union Buildings in Pretoria, seat of the Presidency, and was attended by members of the Government of South Africa, the diplomatic corps, as well as recipients of other national awards. It was followed by an official luncheon hosted by President Mbeki.

The distinction paid to Eric Williams underscores President Mbeki's intellectual traditions, at a time when South Africa has gained a seat on the United Nations Security Council. The tribute also serves as recognition of Dr. Williams' commitment to peace and cooperation, and his inspiration to South Africa's own quest for harmony.

*"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.

A distinguished Caribbean statesman, consummate historian and head of government for a quarter of a century until his death in 1981, Williams led his country to Independence from Britain in 1962 and onto Republicanism in 1976. He was consistently passionate in his denouncement of, and activism against, apartheid and his example continues to be a force in South Africa's fight against hegemony. 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 National Orders were 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 Order of the Companions of O.R. Tambo is presented in three classes, of which the 'Supreme Companion' or '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 and scroll representing the country's appreciation for the support and solidarity demonstrated, and its pledge of reciprocation.

Thabo Mbeki succeeded Nelson Mandela as the second democratic president of South Africa in 1999 and was re-elected for another 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.

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