Twenty Fifth

Dr. Eric Williams Memorial Lecture

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Feature Speaker

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Theme

Eric Williams and the Challenges
of Caribbean Leadership

Eric Williams and the Challenge of Caribbean Leadership

I want you to know that I am deeply honored by your invitation to give this lecture on the occasion of its twenty- fifth anniversary. This is the first time, I am told, that Eric Williams will be its focus. This is entirely appropriate since this year marks the centenary of Williams's birth. It provides us with an opportunity to assess his contribution to the making of Trinidad and Tobago and the larger Caribbean as well.

The last time that I addressed a largely Caribbean audience in Toronto, I was asked whether I had political ambitions in Jamaica. Since the answer remains in the negative, I shall not be constrained in what I plan to say to you this evening. I ask you, however, to suspend partisanship as we reflect on the life and work of this outstanding West Indian. Those of you of a certain generation will remember the excitement that greeted Eric Williams's return to Trinidad and Tobago in 1955, and the speech he gave on that occasion. In the immediate aftermath of his dismissal from the Caribbean Commission, he told the 20,000 people who gathered in Port of Spain to hear him that "I was born here, and here I stay with the people of Trinidad." He vowed "to lay down my bucket where I am. Now, right here with you in the British West Indies." I am renaming this vow tonight. I am calling it the Declaration of Port of Spain because it would have such enormous consequences for his nation in formation and for the Caribbean as a whole.

Nor can anyone easily forget Williams's electrifying speeches at the University of Woodford Square, his oratorical and intellectual brilliance and his demonstration of a

political pugnacity that belied his small stature. His lectures at Woodford Square were enormously important in raising the consciousness of a people thirsty for knowledge about themselves and their history, thirsty for the kind of knowledge that would empower them to command their future. He never spoke down to his enraptured listeners; he elevated his brothers and sisters, making their common history accessible and understood. The celebrated Barbadian writer, George Lamming, said it well:

He turned history, the history of the Caribbean into gossip, so that the story of a people's predicament seemed no longer the infinite, barren tract of documents, dates, and texts. Everything became news; slavery, colonialism, the forgiveable deception of metropolitan rule, the sad and inevitable unawareness of native production . . . his lectures retained always the character of whisper which everyone was allowed to hear, a rumour which experience had established as truth.

Jamaicans, Barbadians, Grenadians, and others listened enviously as the peoples of Trinidad and Tobago boasted about the Doctor when he became Chief Minister and eventually Prime Minister and when he contested the might of the United States of America over the Chaguaramas lease. Williams was not only an inspirational leader at home but he commanded enormous respect, if not affection, from his overseas colleagues. British officials were in awe of his brilliance. Prime Minister Harold Wilson chose him to be a part of a team of Commonwealth Prime Ministers to mediate the conflict in Vietnam. There was even some talk of his succeeding U Thant as the Secretary General of the United Nations. When he made his extended official tour of Africa in 1964 along with Kamaluddin Mohammed and others, he did his nation proudly. The British High Commissioner in Sierra Leone called him "an impressive emissary" of Trinidad and

Tobago. His counterpart in Ethiopia called Williams's visit "a success" describing him somewhat condescendingly as a "mature product of the British colonial system." Norman Costar, the British High Commissioner in Trinidad who followed the trip rather closely, reported that if Trinidadians thought about the trip at all, they saw it as more "bigness" for the nation and "a feather in the cap of the tough little terrier at the top."

Many will recall the widespread hope and expectancy that followed the "tough little terrier's" election in 1956. The delirious joy that it unleashed among some people has not really been repeated in the Caribbean. Barack Obama's election in the United States two years ago generated a similar unabashedly enthusiastic reaction around the world. So it is well, this evening, that we recapture that special moment in September 1956 – and its aftermath too – because a people who have never exercised power often have short memories, often denigrate their historical personages and tend to expect them to work miracles overnight in order to solve problems that had been accumulating for years. There is to be sure, no need to engage in hagiography, but there is a compelling imperative to celebrate those whose vision, persistence, and hard work brought a nation into being and contributed much to its construction. I shall focus, given the brief time that I have this evening, on Eric Williams's imagination of a new Trinidad and Tobago and a new Caribbean and the leadership he provided. I shall also address the continuing relevance of his vision in our contemporary societies. It is, after all, true that one of the obligations of leadership is the conceptualization of a new and different reality and to work to achieve a better tomorrow for one's people. Not even his severest critics can deny that Williams was a bold thinker, an intellectual and leader whose vision was not circumscribed by myopia and parochialism of thought.

Eric Eustace Williams came of age when all of the islands of the Anglophone Caribbean were still colonies. There were rising nationalist sentiments in Africa and Asia, but they were much weaker in the Caribbean colonies. By any measure, however, Williams must be regarded as one of the most significant international advocates of self determination and political independence for all peoples. Scholars can point to Nkrumah of Ghana, Azikiwe of Nigeria, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, and Gandhi and Nehru of India as stalwarts in the struggles for political freedom. The Latin Americans can point to Simon Bolivar, and Grau San Martin, the Haitians to Toussaint Ouverture, the Americans to George Washington and Thomas Jefferson and the Anglophone Caribbean to George Padmore, Norman Manley, Cheddi Jagan, and Eric Williams. I situate Williams in this illustrious group and it can hardly be contested. The struggle for political liberation took different forms in different societies, passive resistance as in India, guerrilla warfare as in Kenya, and military conflict as in the United States. The Anglophone islands in the Caribbean did not have to pursue these strategies and with the possible exception of British Guiana – later Guyana – the demand for independence was neither passionate nor urgent.

There is no question, however, that Eric Williams provided the most aggressive intellectual leadership in the 1950s and the 1960s for the cause of independence in the Caribbean. His preparation for this role began in earnest at Oxford University where he read widely in the history of colonialism. Williams's doctoral dissertation, which subsequently became his classic book, *Capitalism and Slavery*, transformed the historiography of slavery. His thesis that the profits from the slave trade and slavery played a significant role in the rise of British capitalism was brilliantly conceptualized

and argued. Based upon his findings, Williams maintained that the colonies in the Caribbean had a legitimate claim on the British treasury since they had contributed so much to the growth of the mother country's economy. This was a crucial part of his arsenal of criticism of colonialism. The imperial powers had benefitted from the sweat of the colonized, but had contributed little to them in return. Alone among those who led the British colonies to political independence, Eric Williams rejected the "golden handshake" or parting gift that the British government gave to the former colonies. Outraged by the paltry sum that the peoples of Trinidad and Tobago were offered, the author of *Capitalism and Slavery* declared rather ostentatiously that "the offer is quite unacceptable and we would prefer not to have it." He observed that, "The West Indies are in the position of an orange. The British have sucked it dry and their sole concern today is that they should not slip and get damaged on the peel."

Eric Williams's prolonged and acrimonious dispute with the Americans for the return of Chaguaramas to the peoples of Trinidad and Tobago constituted a part of the larger struggle against colonialism. The people of the two sister islands were never consulted when a part of their territory was leased to the Americans in 1941. Williams sought a redress of this mistreatment, earning the opposition of many of his people, the British, and the Americans. The American Counsel General in Port of Spain even recommended to the State Department that it begin planning to remove him from office. The British were also prepared to falsify documents to prove that Trinidadian representatives had assented to the lease, thereby undermining Williams's claim that the transfer of Trinidadian soil to the Americans was illegal.

Williams understood that the struggle to break the chains of psychological colonialism posed a greater challenge than that of severing those that were political. In March 1961 he delivered his "Massa Day Done" speech at the University of Woodford Square. "Massa Day Done," he proclaimed, "Sahib Day Done, yes suh Boss Day Done." He regretted that Massa still "had his stooges who prefer to crawl on their bellies to Massa, absentee or resident, Massa this, Massa that, Massa the other, instead of holding their heads up high and erect." This speech remains in the historical record as one of the most devastating attacks on the deleterious psychological impact of colonialism on its victims.

The imperative to liberate his people from the psychological chains of colonialism and to prepare them for life in a modern world, led Williams to devote his energies to rethinking the nature of the educational system, its structure, content, and objectives. He proposed in his book, *Education in the West Indies,* the creation of a British West Indian University that would reflect and "take into account the social and economic needs of the islands." He argued that "an independent university will give to the people of the British West Indies a confidence in themselves, their roots, and their potentialities." When Williams became Pro Chancellor of the University of the West Indies in the 1960s he was instrumental in redesigning its curriculum to meet the changing needs of the societies it served. He was, for example, responsible for the government of India endorsing an academic chair in "Indian Culture and Civilization" at the Trinidad and Tobago campus. The Draft Plan for the Educational Development of Trinidad and Tobago that Williams introduced in 1968 gave practical expression to his conviction that the educational system needed to break with old verities and help shape a different future for the citizens of his

country. It is an awful commentary on the intellectual bankruptcy in many of our societies that the curricula of the schools are still out of step with their needs.

Eric Williams, more than any other Anglophone Caribbean leader of his time, was committed to the economic and political integration of the region. As early as May, 1940, he endorsed the idea of the federation of the islands. In 1941 he predicted that "with time, democracy, and internal self-government, these British islands could set about abolishing the present absurdity of a congeries of tiny isolated governments duplicating each other at tremendous cost. . . . Some form of a federation is demanded at least by common sense." He also advocated "an economic federation of all the Caribbean areas." Williams's Caribbean consisted of all the Anglophone colonies, as well as the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and at various times Cuba, and Puerto Rico. It was a very elastic definition but it reflected his conviction that the destinies of these mini states and colonies were inextricably bound.

The political federation that he supported so vigorously and consistently came into being in 1958. Trinidad won the federal capital much to the chagrin of the Jamaicans. This was not a promising start and insurmountable difficulties with Jamaica soon emerged. Alexander Bustamante, who was never an ardent federalist, led the opposition to the Union. Williams who strongly supported early independence for the West Indies Federation and advocated a strong federal center was willing, however, to make concessions to keep it alive. He compromised on such crucial questions as the allocation of seats in the Federal Parliament and on the power to be exercised by it. Williams was not always politically sensitive in asserting his positions, but the notion that he was largely responsible for the federation's failure is fallacious.

The Doctor's advocacy of a strong federal center as the sine qua non for the viability of a union of the ten disparate and geographically far flung islands was judicious. The ferocious insularity of the federated units was a major obstacle in the path of an effective union. Only a strong federal government could forge the kind of unity that the federation required for its success. There were other problems as well. Grantley Adams, the Prime Minister, was a vacillating and ineffective leader, quite unsuitable for the position that he held. Norman Manley, with Bustamante snapping at his heels, was ambivalent in his embrace of the union. Alexander Bustamante was unable to look beyond Jamaica's narrow domestic interests and his myopia eventually prevailed. The referendum that he forced Manley to call, gave the federation its deathblow, leading Eric Williams to proclaim that "one from ten leaves nought" as he led his country out of the collapsing union.

Williams never abandoned his faith in the efficacy of the political and economic integration of the Caribbean. His attempt to create a federation of the Eastern Caribbean islands under his nation's leadership did not materialize. The union with Grenada that he tried to promote failed in part because of its potential long term cost to Trinidad and Tobago and Britain's unwillingness to provide the requisite financial assistance.

Williams was disappointed but undaunted by the demise of the federation and the failure of the initiatives I just mentioned. The Prime Minister soon turned his energies to the creation of a Caribbean Economic Community. He even proposed a loose federation of the islands patterned after the Organization of African Unity and including Cuba, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic. Having just led the fight against the federation, Jamaica's Alexander Bustamante's JLP government had no stomach for such ventures.

Williams's proposal for periodic meetings of the heads of government of the independent and self governing countries was accepted, however. The first such meeting of the leaders of Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, Barbados, and British Guiana took place in Port of Spain in 1963. Williams welcomed the creation of the Caribbean Free Trade Association (CARIFTA) in 1968 and the larger CARICOM a few years later. The centralized planning that he wanted for the Caribbean, and worked to achieve, remains as we speak, largely unrealized.

Eric Williams was the son of a society where the spectre of race was always present. The Caribbean societies were constructed on the basis of racial difference, enshrining the superiority of white over black and brown. Williams fervently embraced Trinidad and Tobago's racial diversity, seeing it as an asset and boasting about it to overseas audiences. As a descendant of enslaved Africans, he rejected racist ideologies in all of their forms and was respectful of ethnic differences. His writings, speeches, and personal interactions clearly substantiate this assertion.

There is, of course, some difference of opinion on Williams's record on race during his tenure in office. A fair assessment is made more difficult because of the exigencies of partisan politics and because racial questions invite so many complex emotions. There is no gain saying the fact that Eric Williams's leadership saved Trinidad and Tobago from the terrible racial conflicts that engulfed British Guiana throughout the 1960s. British Guiana and Trinidad and Tobago possessed similar racial configurations so Williams feared the spread of British Guiana's racial virus to his own country, threatening its fragile societal harmony. Some persons in this audience will probably recall that in 1964 alone, 166 persons died as a result of racial conflicts in British Guiana,

over 800 were wounded, numerous cane fields were set ablaze, and about 1400 buildings, principally private homes, were destroyed. Nothing like this happened in Trinidad and Tobago. In fact, in 1964 Cheddi Jagan invited Eric Williams to mediate British Guiana's racially inspired conflicts. This was an expression of enormous confidence in his judgment and reputation for racial balance. The exercise was a failure and Williams harshly condemned the colony's leaders – Jagan, Forbes Burnham, and Peter D'Aguiar – for putting partisan politics ahead of the interests of the common weal.

Williams was acutely aware that he had to forge a vibrant nationalism in his country that transcended ethnic particularities. This did not mean that he opposed the simultaneous existence of ethnically based differences. As early as 1955 he argued that ethnic autonomy could exist within national unity. However, he emphasized repeatedly that an ethnically based loyalty had to take second place to a larger national identity. Many will recall his denunciation of "the opposition which seeks to divide our interracial community and to substitute a new colonialism based on the aristocracy of race for the old colonialism based on the aristocracy of the skin." Williams was also emphatic in his rejection of the "opposition which looks to Mother England, or Father India, or Grandmother Africa." The new nation state that was in the process of formation was to command the loyalty of all of its citizens over and above all other competing ones.

Williams's founding of The People's National Movement in January 1956 gave institutional expression to his vision of a nonracial nationalism for his country. The party's charter promoted the principle of interracial solidarity and cultural diversity. He explained that the PNM's animating ideology stressed "political liberty, social equality, racial fraternity."

These were important and commendable principles but the road to their achievement was sometimes quite rocky. Angered by the opposition of some Indians to the formation of the West Indies Federation and their support for the opposition party in the federal election of 1958, Williams denounced these dissenters as "a hostile and recalcitrant minority." This intemperate outburst was only directed at the Chief Minister's opponents but in its telling and retelling it came to mean for many people, a signifier of his racial ideology, and practice. It was a rhetorical misstep but given Williams's record, any racially abusive comment would have meant a repudiation of all that he had stood for throughout his life. His words represented a harsh indictment of those with whom he disagreed, not an indictment of an entire ethnic group. After all, many Indians supported the federal idea and the designated leader of the opposition in the Federal Parliament was Ashford Sinanan, a prominent and distinguished Trinidadian of Indian descent.

Williams did not retract his criticism; he was too arrogant to do that. Nor did he reveal to the peoples of Trinidad and Tobago that the Indian Commissioner to his country had been recalled for stimulating anti-federal sentiments, complicating the challenge of forging a multiracial nationalism. It was further complicated by the intersection of race and politics. His critics interpreted some ostensibly defensible politically inspired decisions in racial or ethnic terms. British officials in Trinidad and Tobago, however, were able to rise above the rough and tumble of local politics to provide balanced assessments of Eric Williams's performance on racial matters. Saddened by the racially inspired violence in British Guiana, Commonwealth Secretary Duncan Sandys compared Cheddi Jagan unfavorably to Williams. "The trouble with Jagan," Sandys wrote to Williams, "is that he has failed to show your statesmanship in dealing with racial matters

and merely pays lip service spasmodically to your example." A year later, British High Commissioner, Norman Costar, noted that there was some discrimination in the "handing out of jobs" in the country, but that "it is not very serious . . . and is more anti-white than anti-Indian." Costar's successor, Roland Hunt, reported in 1971 that Williams's "principal, most noteworthy achievement has been to show himself evenhanded racially." Another High Commissioner, C.E. Diggines, stressed that "one of Dr. Williams's strongest points . . . has always been his firm and genuine opposition to race as the determining factor in Trinidad politics."

Williams, to be sure, did not leave Trinidad and Tobago a color blind or ethnically neutral society. But he did immunize his young nation from the kind of irrational racial violence that wracked British Guiana, maiming its soul. He left his successors a model for the management of racial issues that they would do well to adopt and improve upon in light of the demands of a changing society and changing times.

Time does not allow me to address adequately Williams's leadership of the economy which saw economic booms in the 1950s, much of the 1960s and the second half of the 1970s. He paid special attention to industrial development although agriculture was not neglected. In agriculture, he emphasized diversification. Williams also promoted community development and in 1963 he inaugurated his "meet the people" tour, designed as an exercise in direct democracy. He used the revenue earned from the oil boom of the 1970s to finance a variety of social programs to improve the people's quality of life.

I want at this point, to discuss Williams in the context of the history of Trinidad and Tobago and the larger Caribbean, and to call attention to some of the challenges that bedevil our contemporary leaders. The Anglophone Caribbean has produced several

significant political leaders, particularly in the second half of the twentieth century. They included Alexander Bustamante, Norman and Michael Manley of Jamaica, Grantley Adams of Barbados, Eric Williams of Trinidad and Tobago and Cheddi Jagan and Forbes Burnham of Guyana. With the exception of Michael Manley, all of these men played important roles in their country's transition from colony to nation but none of them was as passionately convinced as Eric Williams that a better future for their respective nations resided in their being a part of an economic and political unit more viable than their own. He was willing to subordinate his nation's sovereignty to that of a larger federal unit, a vision that remains compelling, timely, and important.

In 1993, the European nations recognized that it was to their collective advantage to create an economic and political union. Today, the European Union has a population of about 500 million people, 27 member states, and a per capita income of $35,000. Its motto is "unity in diversity" and it boasts a single market, enacts legislation in a number of areas and provides for the free movement of people, capital, goods, and services. The Anglophone Caribbean, on the other hand, has a combined population of less than 7 million people struggling to survive in a world where size matters . . . and not doing a good job of it. Generally speaking, Caribbean nations have per capita incomes ¼ or less of some of the member states of the European Union. While we understand the imperatives behind Anguilla's demand for independence, for example, we must remember that it is an island of 35 square miles and 13,600 persons, with an annual recurrent expenditure of $40 million. Independence for this island and others like it will only be viable within the frame work of a larger economic and political unit. We are also reminded this evening that the Caribbean community, CARICOM, now in its fourth

decade, has not achieved its promise, lacking the centralized planning that the region deserves. The unwillingness of some of the territories to give it more teeth is a function of the debilitating insularity and petty nationalism that is still pervasive in the region. The time has come to revisit the question of a meaningful and effective political and economic integration of these nations, as Williams advocated so strenuously and consistently years ago. The times call for bold and farsighted leadership of the territories where, in several cases, mediocrity is the most important qualification for political office. This is essentially the case in the United States as well. Where are our political stalwarts, the people who inspire, the people who speak to the better angels in our societies, the people who can make others achieve more than they ever thought possible? These leaders do exist, but do our political systems and cultures suffocate and kill them early? Are the problems we confront so enormous that they dwarf all those who would lead? Do we have a tendency to elect people who have more charisma than vision or brains?

Eric Williams was the consummate scholar / politician. He even conducted research and wrote books while he carried the burdens of high political office. He was one of the few intellectuals (of whom I am aware) who engaged successfully in politics. Intellectuals and scholars have a special obligation to place their training and talents at the service of their nation. Perhaps I am misinformed, but I believe the members of the faculties of our universities can and should play a larger and more aggressive role in the generation of ideas to address the common problems of the region in science, agriculture, economic development, medicine, urban issues and so on. This means that these academics should be provided with the requisite time and resources to research and write,

the time to sift and winnow and to make their universities the vibrant market place of ideas that they ought to be in our developing nations.

None of us can take comfort from the fact that the extreme poverty of so many of our people is one of the defining characteristics of the region. The slums of Kingston, Port of Spain, Port Au Prince and elsewhere should offend our moral sensibilities. Our leaders must be seen to be doing something about them, and must be seen to be concerned about the welfare of the least among us. In Jamaica, the infamous Dudus or the Prezi filled the vacuum and provided the dispossessed people of Western Kingston with the social services that the government failed to do, but at a terrible societal and moral price. This unacceptable situation is a harsh commentary on the quality of leadership in that nation, and cannot and should not be rationalized away. The systemic obstacles in the path of economic growth and development are enormous and resilient, to be sure, but we need fresh and bold thinking and the will to design effective programs to uplift all of our people. The educational system almost everywhere has not moved with the times, still possessing a lingering affection for intellectually anachronistic curricula. There are many complex factors that explain academic performance but an interesting curriculum and one that is relevant to the students' realities and societal needs must rank at the very top.

There are also serious socio-economic problems that demand attention and solution. We are all too familiar with the ubiquitous presence of drugs, the unacceptably high rate of teenage pregnancies, the problems created by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the alarming incidence of crime, violence and murders, unemployment rates that hover between twelve and fifteen percent, the invisibility of male students in some of the halls of higher learning and so on. There is also the obscenity of corruption in high political

places and in at least one country there is an offensively close relationship between prominent drug lords and political leaders.

Unlike some of our contemporary leaders, Eric Williams's integrity was beyond reproach although one or two of his cabinet members reportedly had unclean hands. He did not enter the political arena for his material benefit and he died a man of very modest means. His detractors should now put to rest the cruel lies about his probity. If Eric Williams had been a corrupt politician, the British and the Americans would have had no compunction about publicizing his misdeeds, given their antipathy to him. One British High Commissioner, in fact, noted that Williams's honesty was beyond question. Our contemporary leaders must likewise strive to maintain a public image that is beyond reproach, and should also eschew appealing to the people's worst instincts; abuse of one's opponents is often a substitute for the articulation of ideas. Similarly, the politics of race should have absolutely no place in any of our societies. Our politicians, civic leaders, and religious leaders too should take the lead in creating that socially just and Beloved Community that Martin Luther King spoke about and worked so hard to bring into being in the United States. For peoples who have been mistreated on the altars of prejudice and racism, we can ill afford to recreate and perpetuate these travesties in our new nations. The hate and violence that fertilize homophobia in all of our countries must be condemned because bigotry should not exist in civilized society. Nor can there be compromises with discrimination based on gender, phenotype, and class background. The apostles of bigotry in all of its manifestations must receive our collective condemnation always.

Although we can identify our common problems and challenges in the region, they do not lend themselves to easy solutions. I would like, for a start, to see regular meetings of ministers of the region who hold the portfolios of Finance, Education, Agriculture, Health, Trade, Science and Technology and so on to discuss common problems and to cross-fertilize one another. I should like our governments to pay greater attention to the provision of skills to our young people that will allow them to function in what is certain to be a technologically driven twenty-first century. The engine of development in this century will be propelled by an educated and technically trained citizenry as it has in Singapore. Our governments need to focus attention creatively on programs for community development to harness the energies of our people at the local level to ensure, among other things, that our youth, particularly our boys, are not derailed at an early age. Some of our societies need to focus a great deal more on preventative medicine, rural development, the provision of clean water, and so on.

None of these initiatives will succeed unless the spirit, the elan, the enthusiasm of our people are harnessed and called into service. Many years ago, Eric Williams gave his celebrated School Bags speech to the children of Trinidad and Tobago. He told them that the future of their nation was in their school bags. Eloquent and rich in imagery, the speech enjoined the students to embrace excellence, to study hard and to use their talents in the service of their nation. It was not a call to accept low standards and to come to terms with mediocrity. In view of the unsatisfactory performance of many of our students in the region, this speech and its sentiments are as relevant today as they were a half a century ago. We need leaders at all levels to constantly remind our people that their

collective destinies reside in their own hands, in the creative use of their energies, and in the disciplined execution of their responsibilities as citizens.

The great Jamaican intellectual, Rex Nettleford, once noted that "the part of the world from which Williams hailed savages its leaders without necessarily assassinating them." Nettleford observed that Williams "was to suffer attacks for rigid authoritarianism, susceptibility to the flattery of sycophants, vulnerability in the face of big business blandishments, and corruption." The author of *Capitalism and Slavery* was subjected to the most scathing abuse from the advocates of Black Power in 1970, describing him as the agent of imperialism and big business. Young calypsonians such as Chalkdust, Lord Relator, and Delamo attacked and derided him mercilessly. That was their right in a democracy. But the "old terrier" could give as good as he got. He had the formidable power of his rhetoric, sending his critics and opponents scurrying away after unleashing on them a torrent of verbal abuse. The terrier was tough on those who did not meet his expectations, he did not suffer fools gladly and could sever his relations with colleagues who displeased him without a backward glance. But the enigmatic leader had a deliciously softer side; he was a doting father, a charming host, a passionate sportsman, and a connoisseur of fine rum.

Let me conclude by emphasizing that the Caribbean region has no paucity of talent in all fields. But as I have stressed, the region continues to demand bold, courageous, innovative, and far sighted leaders, men and women capable of marshalling the energies of their people to work for a better tomorrow as did Eric Williams and Norman and Michael Manley, at various times in their political careers. The recent news that CARICOM's single economy project has been placed "on pause" by the region's

leaders is yet another example of a failure of leadership and an inability to imagine, construct and command a better future for our people. I may be painting with too broad a brush and there are a few exceptions to my indictment, but we should demand more from those who would exercise power. An informed and politically engaged electorate, and a vigilant, probing, and balanced press are indispensable ingredients for the improvement of the quality of leadership in these infant democracies. A Prime Minister, for example, who deliberately lies to parliament and the country should be unceremoniously shown the door. We must be cognizant of the fact that the precedents that are set in the very early years of these nations' self governing history will guide their future behavior and pathways. To put it simply, there cannot be any compromises with corruption, bigotry, violations of the constitution, and abuses of the public trust; bad behavior should not be rewarded with election to high office or with continuation in that office. Serving the people is a privilege, not a right.

In September of this year, the centenary of Williams's birth, several of the world's most distinguished scholars will gather at Oxford University to discuss the life and work of Eric Williams. This is both a tribute to the man, to his country, and the Caribbean region. Sponsored by Williams's alma mater, St. Catherine's College, Oxford, and the Eric Williams Memorial Collection, this timely conference will feature papers on his scholarship and his career as a politician and statesman.

As we reflect on Williams's life and work on the occasion of his centenary, however, let us remember that when he died in office in 1981, his life and legacy became the inheritance of all the peoples of Trinidad and Tobago. In death, he ceased to be identified with, or claimed exclusively by any political party or ethnic group. Like

George Washington, or Abraham Lincoln or Franklin Roosevelt and others, Williams should be seen as transcending narrowly constructed identities to become the property of all the peoples of this great land and by extrapolation the region and the world. Similarly, the rich holdings of the Eric Williams Memorial Collection and the treasures they contain are national treasures, priceless and timeless.

The Doctor is with us this evening and his hearing aid is on. I suspect that he is somewhat pleased with the challenges his successors in the Caribbean have met but probably critical of much of the quality of contemporary leadership, the prevailing lack of vision and the enormity of the unmet challenges everywhere. Eric Williams was an indefatigable worker, a visionary, a Trinidadian and West Indian colossus, but possessing some personal weaknesses that limited his overall successes. We commemorate and celebrate his life and work this evening, and I have no hesitation in declaring him Trinidad and Tobago's most outstanding personage of the twentieth century. We inherit his legacy and we are compelled to honor it as much as we are required to keep faith with his animating visions and to build on them too. Maasa Day may be Done but Eric Williams day no done yet.