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MEDIA RELEASE

KWAME TURE LECTURE SERIES YOUTH PANEL: MY AFRICAN HERITAGE IS A PROMISE

"My African heritage is not a penalty, it is not a disease. It is rather a glorious symbol of a nation of greatness. It is a privilege living in the skin I'm in."

That declaration by Shaka Alexander received tremendous applause and general consensus as the guest speakers at the Youth Panel of the Kwame Ture Memorial Public Lecture Series shared, from their hearts, life lessons about our common heritage.

The National Library and Information System Authority (NALIS) - a space where scholars and those who wish to be schooled gather - allowed a home for the evening to the panel of vibrant young adults.

The panel of Trinidad and Tobago youth of African descent included Jervae Caesar - 2009 National Action Cultural Committee (NACC) Young Calypso King; President of the 2011-2012 Guild of Students of the University of the West Indies, St Augustine Campus, Amilcar Sanatan; Shaka Alexander and Rashida Wadada. Together they tackled the topic "This African Heritage: Penalty or Promise". The topic was regarded as apt, as 2011 has been commemorated as the Year of Persons of African Descent as well as the International Year of Youth.

According to the panel, being of African heritage has only served to make them more determined to stand taller amongst their peers as they usually had to fight harder to succeed.

Sanatan, in his presentation, noted that every person of African ancestry was an ambassador for the race since one person's action - especially negative - was used to judge the entire race. He underscored the continuing upward mobility of persons of African

descent throughout the world and called for unity and positive thinking in order to continue the rise to success.

The panel credited the fight by leaders such as Marcus Garvey and Kwame Ture against stereo-typing, victimization and enslavement as the building blocks for the achievements of people of African heritage today.

"For me, seeing my ancestry as a penalty is literally a slap in the face of all those who have struggled. It is to tell them that their work has been in vain. Perceiving myself to be African is no different than perceiving myself to be human." Caesar stated during his presentation.

They agreed that being of African descent did present some penalties particularly while growing up and recalled being referred to as: little black boy (Gypsy's 1997 calypso); Trevor Sayers' son or being taunted for having "picky, late for school hair".

Wadada shared her experience of being told that she was ugly because of her "strong African features". However, the mother of two credited the strong foundations set by her family for keeping her confidence sturdy. She said that, with the many negative images of Africa being portrayed, it was imperative that parents strengthen their children's pride in their African heritage rather than leave it to be learnt through other mediums.

The Emancipation Support Committee's Kwame Ture Memorial Public Lecture Series continues every Thursday until Emancipation 2011. Upcoming lectures include a presentation titled "Celebrating our African Heritage" by Dr. Olabiyi Babalola Joseph Yai, Chairman of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and specialist on the cultures of African Diasporas. The lecture series culminates on July 31, 2011 with a Pan African Forum by several representatives from Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa who will discuss "A Growing Relationship Between the African Diaspora and the African Continent".

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