



KWAME TURE LECTURE SERIES BEGINS –

“THEY STILL OWES US OUR FORTY ACRES AND A MULE”

African-American reparation advocate and researcher, Deadria Farmer-Paellmann brought her message of compensation for people of African descent to an appreciative audience at the recent launch of the 2011 Kwame Ture Lecture series at the Central Bank, Port of Spain.



The lecture series – a critical element of the Emancipation Support Committee’s Commemoration of the Emancipation of Enslaved Africans, hosted Mrs. Farmer-Paellmann as the Feature speaker for the event.

Farmer-Paellmann – an Adjunct Professor of Law at Southern New England School of Law, Executive Director of the Restitution Study Group, Co-Chair of the Organization of Tribal Unity and a mother of one – has been credited with popularizing the reparations movement through her groundbreaking research exposing corporate involvement in slavery. She gained attention in 2000 when she exposed United States insurance giant, Aetna Incorporated, for writing insurance policies on the lives of enslaved Africans with slaveholders as the beneficiaries in the 1800's. She requested that the insurance company issue a public apology for their role in slavery – which they did. Aetna also promised to create a restitution Trust Fund to benefit the descendants of enslaved Africans.

A number of slavery era disclosure bills soon followed which required corporations doing business in a State or with a Municipal government to disclose any ties they or their predecessor have to the institution of slavery. In 2005, the disclosure law passed in Chicago was successful at pressuring JP Morgan Chase to acknowledge their connection to slavery. The institution also created a reparations scholarship program in the state of Louisiana that provided \$5 million over five years for full-tuition, undergraduate scholarships to black Louisiana students that attend college in-state.

Mrs. Farmer-Paellmann recalled that her drive for reparation was fueled by stories told to her and her siblings by her grand-father.

“We grew up with the knowledge of 40 acres and a mule that was owed to us but was never paid. And it would always come up in the context of something that the government did wrong. They still owe us our forty acres and a mule,” she told her Central Bank audience.



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She subsequently attended the New England School of Law, in Boston, Massachusetts with the specific intention of developing a case for slavery reparations.

Mrs. Farmer-Paellmann said that her fight was not geared towards benefiting only African-Americans and encouraged interested persons to make use of the US\$150 Million endowment fund set up at Brown University in the United States for African students which completely covers students' tuition expenses. Brown University's Committee on Slavery and Justice has also suggested that the university increase its efforts to recruit minority students, specifically those from Africa and the West Indies.

She also noted that there are potential avenues for a mutually beneficial relationship between Africa and the Diaspora.

"They have the land, they have all the culture, they have all the knowledge and they have all the wisdom. They can share that with us and we can all benefit because we have a lot of money outside of Africa. We can bring things in there... we can help them and they won't need to take money from people who are trying to steal Africa away from the Africans again." She said told her Central Bank audience.

Mrs. Farmer-Paellmann suggested that opportunities for dual citizenship be created so that interested persons could connect with the continent. She noted that DNA testing can be used to identify the African ethnic group to which each individual was connected and recommended a fee could be charged for obtaining African passports.

As the world celebrates the International Year of People of African Descent, a number of other international groups such as the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent (WGPAD) and the National Council for Black Studies (NCBS) have supported the call for reparation. The WGAD, in particular, has proposed to mark the year under the title "People of African Descent: Recognition, Justice, and Development" with the intent of recognising the role of people of African descent in global development and bringing up the issue of justice for current and past acts of discrimination that have lead to the situation today.

The Emancipation Support Committee continues to be an advocate for the transfer of knowledge and education that allows persons of African descent to make the right decisions and direct their lives accordingly. Look out for other installments of the Kwame Ture Memorial Lecture series, every Thursday until Emancipation 2011.

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