

African American Voices Lesson Plans

Lesson Plan: Struggle for Independence

Subject: United States History, World History

Grade level: 9, 11

NGSSS-SS: **SS.912.W.1.5- Compare conflicting** interpretations or schools of thought about world events and individual contributions to



**Description/
Abstract of Lesson:** The students will develop an appreciation for the contributions of Eric Williams.

The students will compare and contrast the views of Eric Williams with Abraham Lincoln in the building (or rebuilding) of a nation.

Objective(s): Understand current and historic events from the perspective of diverse cultural and national groups.

Materials:

- Handouts (Biography: Dr. Eric Eustace Williams, Venn Diagram)
- Dictionary
- World Map
- Computer with Internet access or copies of the *Gettysburg Address* and Dr. Williams' *Independence Day Address*
- Overhead projector
- Transparency: Venn Diagram

Duration: 1 class period

Procedures/

Activities:

1. Distribute biographical reading of Dr. Eric Eustace Williams. Ask students to read and respond to accompanying FCAT- type questions. Discuss the reading and student responses. Emphasize the significant role Dr. Williams played in the independence of Trinidad and Tobago.

2. Ask students to recall the independence of the United States from England. Encourage them to share thoughts and ideas.

3. Have students utilize the Internet to retrieve the *Gettysburg Address* at

<http://www.historyplace.com/speeches/gettysburg.htm>

and Eric Williams' *Independence Day Address* at

<http://users.rcn.com/alana.interport/address.html>

4. Using a Venn diagram, ask students to compare and contrast the similarities and differences between the two speeches.
5. When completed, utilize overhead projector and transparency to complete Venn Diagram as a class reflecting shared responses.
6. Ask students to identify and discuss current events as they relate to countries seeking independence.

Assessment:

- Identify significant contributions made by Dr. Eric Eustace Williams.
- Identify similarities and differences between the United States' and Trinidad and Tobago's struggle for independence by utilizing Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address* and Williams' *Independence Day Address* as vehicles for examination.

Web Resources:

Lincoln's Gettysburg Address

<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/gettysburgaddress.htm>

Williams' Independence Day Address

<http://users.rcn.com/alana.interport/address.html>

Eric Eustace Williams

Popularly called the “Father of the Nation,” Dr. Eric Eustace Williams, the first Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, is considered by many to be its most significant leader of the 20th century. Arguably wielding the greatest influence on the country, an effect still felt to this day, he led it to Independence from Britain in 1962 and to Republicanism in 1976. His administration spanned a quarter of a century, with general elections held democratically every five years.

Born in Trinidad just off the coast of South America, on September 25, 1911, Williams was the eldest of the 12 children of Eliza and Henry Williams, a minor post office official. He studied at Queen’s Royal College in Trinidad where he distinguished himself both as an honored scholar and accomplished athlete.

After being awarded in 1931 the only “Island Scholarship” offered by the colonial government in his field every year, Eric was able to continue his studies at Oxford University in England where he earned his Doctor of Philosophy degree, writing a controversial dissertation that would turn the historical interpretation of the abolition of the British slave trade on its head. This was later expanded into his seminal work **Capitalism and Slavery**, which was first published in America in 1944 and continues in print to this day. It has been translated into eight languages (Japanese, Chinese, Russian and Korean among them).

As a student of history at Oxford at a time when the norm was to pursue either law or medicine, Williams began to question West Indian political and economic conditions and the lack of meaningful industrial development. Why, for example, had the system that accounted for Britain’s great wealth from cheap sugar not produced any tangible benefit for its colonies? In the 1930’s, the West Indies suffered from economic gloom, dominated by political hopelessness. In Williams’ view, it was the continued economic exploitation of the region by its colonial masters that was the culprit.

In 1939, Dr. Williams moved to the United States to teach at Howard University in Washington, DC, commonly known as the “Negro Oxford.” He became Assistant Professor of Social and Political Science, compiling and editing Howard’s first social sciences textbook. While there, he was appointed as a consultant to the Caribbean Commission, a body established

during World War II to strengthen social and economic cooperation among the states with colonies in the region--USA, UK, France and the Netherlands. He traveled extensively throughout the Caribbean, honing his research and making new contacts. By 1948, however, Williams had left Howard and returned to Trinidad where he assumed the position of Head of the Research Council of the Commission. After an increasingly acrimonious relationship with his superiors over the direction of the organization, in 1955, he was effectively terminated.

By that time, Williams had made a name for himself by undertaking a political education program that remains unrivalled to this day. He instituted a series of free university-style lectures to the populace that eventually had to be relocated to a public square which he later renamed the “University” of Woodford Square. Between June 21, 1955 and June 14, 1956, Eric Williams delivered a total of 136 public lectures in Trinidad and Tobago; one each in Guyana and Paris, France; two in the United Kingdom; four in Jamaica; three in Barbados; and six in Grenada. The addresses consisted of university-type lectures on topics ranging from Aristotle to *The Historical Background of Race Relations in the Caribbean*. Thousands, many with no formal education, thronged the venue for hours at a time to “listen to de doc.”

With all these activities crystallizing a passionate responsibility, then, to bring about change; to foster integration in the form of a Federation of the English-speaking Caribbean islands which failed in 1962; and to encourage the idea of self-determination and freedom from British rule, Williams entered the political fray in January 1956, forming Trinidad and Tobago’s first national political party since adult suffrage was granted in 1946, the People’s National Movement (PNM). Nine months later, he had won the general election becoming the country’s first head of government.

Coining the phrase, “To educate is to liberate,” one of Williams’ greatest achievements was the provision of free primary, secondary and tertiary education to the nation’s citizens. At Independence, he exhorted the youth – “you carry the future of Trinidad and Tobago in your school bags.”

With his refusal to export his country’s natural gas, he opted instead to develop its energy resources on spot, thereby laying the foundation for Trinidad and Tobago’s current global leadership in the field of methanol and nitrogenous fertilizers. When the current expansion is complete, it will have the world’s largest liquefied natural gas facility.

But perhaps most important of all, Eric Williams provided a vision for the future. As one of his countrymen, Professor Arnold Rampersad of Stanford University, says:

“Single-handedly and single-mindedly, Eric Williams transformed our lives. He swept away the old and inaugurated the new. He made us proud to be who we were, and optimistic, as never before, about what we were going to be, or could be. 'Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,' and nothing that has transpired since in Trinidad can negate Williams' gift to his people, or his triumph of intellect and spirit.”

Dr. Eric Williams considered himself, first and foremost, a teacher, historian and philosopher, but not one content to labor only in the “ivory tower” of academia. Despite writing more than 600 articles, books and speeches throughout his long and illustrious career, he remained a man of action until his death in office on March 29, 1981. His name is still held in high esteem not only in Trinidad and Tobago but also in the rest of the Caribbean.

1. Read the paragraph containing this sentence:

By 1948, however, Williams had left Howard and returned to Trinidad where he assumed the position of Head of the Research Council of the Caribbean Commission.

What does the word "assumed" mean?

- a. took for granted
- b. claimed
- c. pretended
- d. attained

2. How does the author convey the idea that Dr. Eric Eustace Williams was Trinidad and Tobago's most significant leader of the 20th century? Use details and information from the text to support your answer.

READ

THINK

EXPLAIN

VENN DIAGRAM

Differences

Similarities

Differences

