

ABSTRACT

Henry Sylvestre-Williams: A New Inquiry Into An Old Hero

Ronald Courtney Noel

This thesis is an inquiry into the life of the man baptised as Henry Sylvester Williams and later known as Henry Sylvestre-Williams. The thesis sets out to correct some inaccuracies in the written information about Williams contained in the two previous biographies on his life. The inquiry investigated selected areas of Williams' life to address the notion that he was an enigmatic man. This characterisation of Williams was spawned from the way he conducted some of his affairs, particularly when he left Trinidad in the 1890s and travelled to the United States, Canada, Britain and South Africa to pursue a career in law and an extra-curricular interest in Pan-Africanism, considered to be his creation.

Certain areas of Williams' life such as; his marriage to an English woman, his performance as a student of Gray's Inn, his ground-breaking activities and activism in South Africa, a visit that he made to Liberia in 1908 and his connections with Freemasonry were developed upon or introduced for the first time into scholarship. In this regard, re-stating a number of matters adequately dealt with by the first two biographers was avoided so that space could be provided for a fresh perspective on his life history and in so doing, help scholars to better understand the man. The inquiry also recognised that in order to study Williams, it is necessary to link with his descendants and to act upon the findings of oral history.

Keywords: Ronald Courtney Noel; Henry Sylvestre-Williams; Pan-Africanism; legal career; interracial marriages; history and Freemasonry.