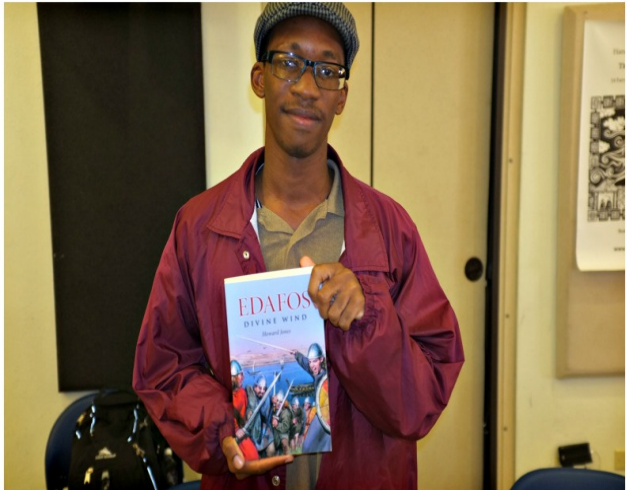


The Virgin Islands Consortium

UVI's Inaugural Literary Festival Brings Out Kincaid, Local Authors

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Cynthia Graham **March 29, 2015**

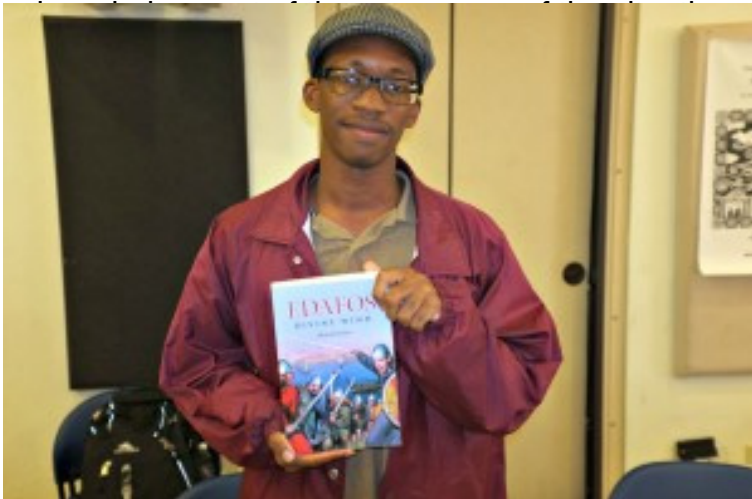


The inaugural U.S. Virgin Islands Literary Festival & Book Fair continued for the third straight day Saturday at the University of the Virgin Islands' Albert A. Sheen Campus on St. Croix with a morning talk by renowned writer and fellow islander, Jamaica Kincaid, along with a host of other speakers and activities.

St. John's, Antigua-born Kincaid, the prolific novelist and essayist known for her forthrightness on topics of mother-daughter relationships and colonialism, held a captive audience in UVI's Great Hall with an easy-flowing keynote address infused with humor.

During her talk, Kincaid made the case against the use of the words "abolish" and "emancipation" when it comes to describing the ending of slavery in the Caribbean and the U.S. South. During an extended question-and-answer segment following her presentation, an audience member asked Kincaid if the words were not appropriate to describe the topic, what would be a better word to use.

"It's not that the words shouldn't be used, they make sense in some way, but they don't acknowledge that what has happened was a deep violation," Kincaid began. "The people who instigated the bondage of Africans, that kind of degradation, never said that it was a degradation and that they also degraded themselves. And so since they never accepted their own degradation, they continued ours. That's what I would have liked to see. An and that they were implicated in the



St. Thomas author Howard

Johnson holds up his nearly 500-page novel, Dedafos Divine World at UVI's Lit Fest, March 28

Kincaid, who was born Elaine Potter Richardson but changed her name in her late teens while living in New York City so she could write without her estranged family back home in Antigua knowing about it, was asked by another audience member to share her thoughts of the change, or deterioration, of the American education system in recent decades.

Known as one not to mince words, Kincaid responded, "What is an education for? Is it to put you in the workplace? Then just say that. Everybody can learn to do what it is they need to do. Just say that's what an education is. The thing that we do today, 'here's a book, learn this, here's how to write a sentence, go to college, write an essay.' It's not really an education, but it's the making of a kind of person; it's almost robotic. It's not a good recipe for a person. To call the thing that we have, schools, an education, it's not really the right word. It's the forming of a person to find a job that will keep them out of prison. That's what I think."

VI Consortium also caught up with award-winning Virgin Islands author Tiphonie Yanique, winner of the 2015 Flaherty-Dunn First Novel Prize from the Center for Fiction and another award from the Academy of American Poets and Writers for her first novel, *Land of Love and Drowning*. Of the book, she said although it brings up a number of "difficult issues," such as familial sisterhood, parenthood, the territory's transfer from

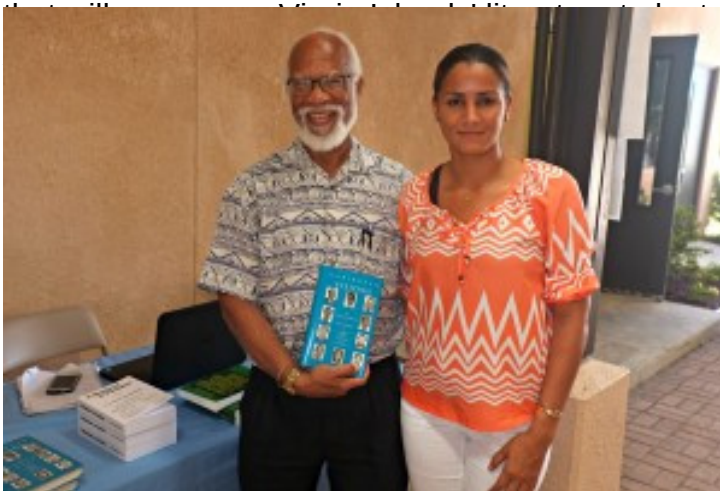
Danish to U.S. rule, tourism and others, "I wrote it really as a love letter to my family and to the Virgin Islands, and I'm hoping that that's the work that the book will do -- to bring our territory the kind of attention that's intellectual, literary and cultural."

When asked for her take on the growth of Virgin Islands' literature, Yanique said, "Our literature here in the Virgin Islands will be about our own struggles, our own cultural and identity issues, which will have to do with our natural environment as global climate change affects us, we'll have to deal with Americanism, we'll have to deal with issues of Virgin Islands identity--who's a Virgin Islander. I think that's where our literature will stem from and where it's going to go.

"In the way that we are a colony [of the United States], many of us grew up reading literature from elsewhere. We did not grow up reading our own literature, we did not grow up reading even Caribbean literature, so it's very hard to see how to create a Virgin Islands literature when you don't have examples that are being taught in our schools," Yanique continued.

To that end, the novelist said she hopes her book would one day be taught in the territory's classrooms.

"This sounds pie-in-the-sky, but I hope my novel will be taught in the schools and I hope it's taught more broadly, not just my book. It's living literature," she said.



Dr. Simon Jones-Hendrickson and

assistant, Veronica Ortiz at UVI's Lit Fest, March 28

Dr. Simon Jones-Hendrickson, the former longtime Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences at UVI who joined the Mapp administration as chief economist and fiscal policy advisor in January, was inspired to bring a literary festival to the Virgin Islands when he attended and presented at a similar event in Anguilla last year. He got the ball rolling before leaving the university for his new role in the V.I. government.

"People have been around, but the idea is to now focus on it. Writing is an art, it's a commitment, but it's also a business, but you also have to write to an experience," Jones-Hendrickson told *VI Consortium*. "We've have a number of persons [writing], but the consistency, however, of having what we're doing here today has been the issue. And, people think when you write a book, you're just doing it for fun. It's a hobby. But, it's a very important part of capturing our lives, our history and our perspective. But when you

write, you find out how much of a shared history we have."

Chenzira Davis-Kahina, PhD, head of the Virgin Islands Caribbean Cultural Center located on UVI's Sheen campus, said there have been upwards of 250-300 people attending the festival.

"A number of students came from the junior and high schools, and then we had a large number of our own University of the Virgin Islands students, and then persons from the general community, and persons that visited from away," she said, adding, "again, another opportunity for an economic development boost to St. Croix."

Davis-Kahina also pointed out that speakers came from as far away as Denmark to participate in the Lit Fest, as many of them are preparing for the territory's centennial that will be celebrated in 2017. There were also speakers from St. Kitts-Nevis, Puerto Rico, Jamaica and places on the mainland.

Jones-Hendrickson said the event is expected to be an annual one and expressed his satisfaction with the turnout.

"Conceptually, when we first thought about it, we said we would do it between St. Croix and St. Thomas," he explained. "But the more I'm thinking about it, it will have to stay on St. Croix, but that is only my view. I am pleased with what I am seeing so far."

First-time author Howard Jones of St. Thomas also attended the festival to showcase his recently published *Edafos Divine Wind*, a fantasy novel that follows the lives of the "three main characters who had been driven out of their homes through war or political strife and forge their way into making a world they deemed fit or try to regain whatever they have lost," Jones explained.

Seasoned self-published author, Richard Schrader, was also on hand to showcase his books and share his experiences.

"Around February of 1984, I attended a poetry reading on the Virgin Islands. I came [to UVI] after work in the afternoon for my studies in my second masters in public administration. I was in the library, I met a guy, I knew him, and he invited me to a poetry reading in the little theater. I went. I liked what I heard and the rest is history," he said. "Many years later on, twenty-six books followed, including poetry, which is my first love."

A Children's Corner was also held with story readings and performances from Muntsa Val, Janice Tutein, Zenzi Hodge, Wayne "Bully" Petersen, Alscess Lewis-Brown and Denise Bennerson.

The Literary Festival concludes today with a number of activities scheduled throughout the day. Go [here](#) to see the remaining schedule of events.

Feature Image: L to R: Taphanie Yanique and Jamaica Kincaid, Howard Jones (top) and St. Croix writer, Richard Schrader (bottom).