

AfroPanamanian Newsletter



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No.1 Vol. II

January 2011

Donation

“I have a dream”



The dream has come true - partially

Controversy

Anecdotes

Poetry

LOS AMIGOS :
Por la superación de la Etnia Negra

A group of friends, in Panama, decided to join forces to work on the rescue of values, customs and cultural traditions bequeathed to us through our ancestors. These have been displaced by others, thus losing a large part of our Black Heritage. We are evaluating all these forgotten traditions and values and highlighting figures as examples for future generations.

“For Black history to be done right, we must do it ourselves.” Edward Gaskin

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**The editor is not responsible for the
opinions expressed by our collaborators**

Cover Page: The stamp which appears on the cover was proposed to the Canal Zone Government by Mr. George W. Westerman (r.i.p.) accepted and used as a 10 cent postage stamp for years. Permission for its continuous use was given by his grandnephew, Cecil Reynolds.

EDITORIAL

It's a year since we got together and started the AfroPanamanian Newsletter, created to rescue our heritage and bring back memories to all those who dare remember good things of yesteryear plus some bits and pieces from elsewhere. We have learned a lot, come a long way and promise to keep on trying to give you the best.

Our commitment has taken us through history and down memory lane to bring back those things we have somehow neglected in passing on to our descendants.

Your support, feedbacks and commenst are our best reward, tell us when we are on the right track and when we are not, but we still need your help by filling us in with those things (anecdotes, tales and so on) that escape our memory, yet are present in yours.

At the end of this our first year we thank you ever so much and as long as the good Lord permits it, we will be around.

*We've become cybernauts with our website:
www.afropanameniannewsletter.mex.tl*



About Martin Luther King

<http://video.kids.nationalgeographic.com/video/player/kids/history-kids/mlk-day-vin-kids.html>
http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_detailpage&v=p2UVUVG9maw

FEEDBACK (from our December issue)

It is wonderful that Carlos is inspiring us to do the work that no one else could or should do for us. If we do not write our history and document our cultural heritage/legacy... someone else will and it will not be as 'authentic'. And he is doing it in such a gentlemanly way. I know a lot [of] us who ventured out of the movies with our girlfriends after the movies to do a lot more than...how he put it?...pet? Of course I know more about what was going on in Gamboa ('dem Paraiso boys may have been different!)

But seriously, he accurately depicts so much more of our common experiences. The intense arguments as we walked home after the movies...not being allowed to leave the house until our chores were done...playing platillo and all the other games after we got out of school at 3pm...having to come back home before the street lights came on...and obeying the strict rules of behavior, ethics, principles, self respect and respect for others laid down by our parents.

-ricardo/butch millet

-----Sandy,

Wonderful edition. Informative, nostalgic and just plain entertaining. Kudos to you and the Staff.

Enjoy the Holidays!!!

Dr Nadya E.Parker

Thank you for sharing your thoughts with us and that we remember our roots and sharing with the future [youngsters] by sending on forwards.

Remembering Xmas, birth of Christ, Kwanzaa, we should be carrying these thoughts in our hearts all year round, then our lives will be happier. We can give back more to our brothers and sisters

**Love
Hermana**

Silvia

■

Congratulations to Sandra, Inés, and the other members of the committee who have been producing this newsletter for almost a year. I keep a copy in our Museo Afroantillano because the information it contains will be valuable to scholars who are writing about our history and culture. I am happy to see that you have been able to stimulate reminiscences from Carlos Garnett, Butch Millett, and others. I am also glad that you are collecting some of our West Indian proverbs. If we read the Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe, we'll see that it is an African tradition to transmit wisdom through proverbs.

Here are some of my mother's proverbs, which my sisters and I still use whenever we find the situation appropriate: **"Everyday de bucket going a well; one day de bottom will fall out."** **"Better to say here it is than where it is?."** **"Trouble no set [up] like rain."** **"If yuh sleep with dogs, yuh'll get fleas."** **"If you play with puppy, puppy will lick you nose."** **"Dog have money, him buy cheese."**

Melva

-----**The person who says it cannot be done should not interrupt the person doing it.**

- **Chinese proverb**
- **Sent by John Edwards**

It is important to note that Kwanzaa is a cultural holiday, not a religious one, thus available to and practiced by Africans of all religious faiths who come together based on the rich, ancient and varied common ground of their Africanness.



OLDEN DAYS SAYINGS:

“Serve you right”. “Take what you get”. He will “lambaste” you for “meddling” with his wife. “If I were you” I would “pick up my feet and run” “bird speed” before “hell cut loose”. You, a “jack of all trades and master of none”, should know better than to “hang your hat higher than you can reach” it. His wife is out of your league, she is too “stuck up” to even look down her nose at you. You should have “gone flying” long time. You’re “going to wake up dead” for being so “stubborn”.

GAMES WEST INDIAN CHILDREN PLAYED:

LAST LICK

When we reach my home and I can hit the person I am walking with, “last lick” and run inside and close the door, or gate where there is a dog and the other person cannot reach me. When I’m about to board the bus and I hit the person and get on before the person can hit me back. If the person hits me back before I board the bus, then it’s his/her “last lick”.

CALYPSO

Ah lick him with the pot and the frying pan
 Ah lick him with the pot and the frying pan
 Ah lick him with the pot and the frying pan
Ah kill nobody but mah husband!

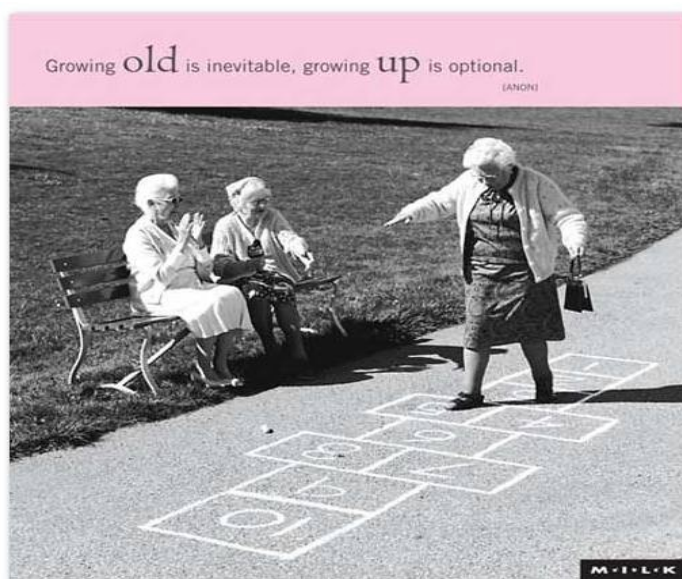
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2HIK96kSNt0>

IN SCHOOL: SOLDA'O

Like with most games, there's a social momentum that either originated it or it (the game) intended to curve a situation.

One of those such games was *solda'o*; the single rule of this game is that one receives a blow for any obscene word one utters.

All one had to do was agree to play with one or more boys, as a result, anytime one said a "bad word" within hearing distance of the others he earned a blow from each one or all at once. This could become very vicious for only the face was off limits, leaving the rest of the body to be punished severely.



We also played Hop Scotch

THE UNTOLD STORY

What did your grandparents, parents do or say to protect and nourish you? What is your childhood story? What does your story have to say that has the potential to inform and protect our folks in Panama or here in the US or to our African American and Latino brothers and sisters who are increasingly victimized by a dominant political perspective and attitude resembling the 19th Century that framed the Canal Zone design and operation?

They were sufficiently successful in protecting us enough to flourish, and be nourished by the childhood environment that Carlos calls us to remember. This is in part why I hope Carlos writes part two and three and four etc... so that we don't forget and can hopefully use and build on the wisdom and ethics of our heritage. -ricardo/butch millet

EDWARD ASTON GASKIN

In 2001, Original Message Courtesy of Cy Jordan at the Anniversary of the Class of '51

“It was his philosophy that for Black history to be done right, we must do it ourselves.”

We remember Ed Gaskin, who died on August 9, 2001, as he forcefully decried the systemic segregated status of our parents, the West Indian workers, brought to build the Panama Canal. They were in dire need of an advocate to articulate and to seek resolution of the inequities and inequalities in the system in which they found themselves. Ed responded to the challenge.

We clearly recollect at a mass meeting of the workers, his audaciousness in pointing out to the Governor of the Canal Zone, who was seated at the podium, the large disparity in pay in favor of the US rate workers, between the white driver of the garbage truck and the black driver of the school bus who was responsible for transporting the white kids to school. He asserted that, other than skin color, there was no justification for the huge pay differential between the white and Black police who both performed identical functions. It is informative and imperative to put these comments in the historical perspective of the mid 1940's where whites were unaccustomed to such bold and direct talks from Blacks. As he made these speeches the "green hornet" (the name given to the white police in his patrol car) was always close at hand.

In 1953, under his leadership as President of the labor union, he organized the largest mass rally with about 15,000 workers in attendance, held at the Panama National Stadium. President Remon, of the Republic of Panama, his entire cabinet and representatives from the Diplomatic Corps were present. In his speech Ed demanded "not charity but justice." Ed Gaskin clearly was a man who was ahead of his times. He predated Malcolm X by several decades.

PLAYTIME IN PARAISO

By Carlos Garnett

During the school week after chores and homework were done, we were allowed to go outside and play and talk until the street lights came on, then we would all run home so as not to get a good whipping.

Sometimes, we skated under the old school and rode our bikes. We used to play *platillo*. We used the top off a soda bottle and stuffed it with mud or candle wax and hammered down the edges and that was our *platillo*. Under the school the concrete was long and smooth, we used our **Tops** and hit the *platillo* to see who could hit theirs the farthest. If it was hit to the other end of the concrete, we called it a "hole in one". We played "**Mongo**" with our Tops. When we played *Mongo*, we would take the point out of the Top and insert a long nail and sharpened it, we flipped a coin to see whose top would be down first and then we would try to hit it with ours and chip it or split it in two.

“Kede”, “Stick in the mud”, and “hide and seek”, were other games we played:

Stick in the mud was a favorite also. Again who lost the flip of the coin would stick their stick in the mud and then we had to hit it or touch it with ours and if we did, we would bat it as far away as we could and stick ours in the mud three times before the other person returned to stick his in the mud before we reached the count of three.

There was this rough game called **Touch Iron**. A small object was tossed around to all who dared to play this game, if when the object came your way, you missed it, you had to run and find Iron to touch before everyone had the right to hit and punch you.

We had the Up the road gang and the Down the road gang. There was no fierce rivalry between these gangs even though there were times when a member of each gang would have to fight, which was usually forgotten the next day in school.

Wow! The good old days!

January 2011

“Once a Mechanic, always a Mechanic”, is this adage still true?

By Fernando A. Goldson

Sister Georgina Weeks, a member of Mary Chapter #1 of the Independent United Order of Friendly Mechanics of the Western Hemisphere, and, a faithful of the National Baptist Church met an untimely accident on Friday December 31, 2010 and the Lord called her home on Monday, January 03, 2011.

Sister Weeks was knocked down by a “Diablo Rojo” bus crossing the street in Calidonia, Panama City suffering serious head injuries from the incident. The medical emergency team took her to the Santo Tomas Hospital where she subsequently died

Family and friends paid their respects to the dearly departed at a religious funeral service at her place of worship, the National Baptist Church in 4th St. Rio Abajo, Panama City on Friday, January 07, 2011, after which the body was taken to Tocumen Airport for a flight to Brooklyn, NY.

That is when her family and close friends encountered a horrible experience from the Fraternal Order she served so well for many years. The fraternal community in Brooklyn refused to perform a “Mechanics Order” fraternal funeral rite over the body before burial. Excuses, excuses, one after another, is what Sister Georgina Weeks’ family received when attempting to arrange for her Mechanics fraternal funeral rites after her body went back to Brooklyn, NY from Panama.

The family approached friends and fraternal brothers of the deceased who are Counsellors on the Executive Grand Council of the Independent United Order of **Friendly** Mechanics of the Western Hemisphere, Inc. (IUOM) to make arrangements for the funeral service at the Temple, 65 Putnam Ave., Brooklyn, NY to no avail. Each time the family complied with the excuse given, they gave another one. The tenet “once a Mechanic always a Mechanic” must have been forgotten because none of them would step forward and do the right thing.

Sister Weeks was a financial member in Mary Chapter No. 1, Panama District No.1 Grand Lodge in Panama City under the jurisdiction of the IUOM. This fact negates the excuse that she is not a member of the IUOM, therefore, it entitles her to the type of “going home” funeral she so desired. Some Fraternal Brothers and Sisters still believe if only one or more high-ranking officials, such as a Counsellor, Past Grand Master, or Grand Master of the Order would step forward, and take the necessary action to allow the Mechanics Rites to take place.

Other brothers and Sisters that previously left the IUOM and later returned could suffer the same disrespect and inconsiderate treatment suffered by Sister Weeks because of her past affiliation in Order Jurisdiction.

This is a message to other Fraternal Mechanics around the World, from other jurisdictions: beware and reconsider switching to the IUOM. Because Counsellors, Past Grand Masters and Grand Masters that were contacted showed a lack of fraternalism, but exhibited great insensitivity.

Any questions or information contact the author, Brother Fernando A. Goldson at e-mail: kingzulu0928@aol.com

**THROUGH LOVE, UNDERSTANDING,
WE SHALL OVERCOME**

(A tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.)

by *Earl V. Newland*

In quest of free labour, the white man began
The nefarious trade of enslaving Black man.
The Whites went to Africa, placed Blacks in chains,
Brought them to the new world to start the slave reign.

The insecure white man developed a tool
Of mass propaganda to establish a rule,
Categorizing Blacks in a class of 'slave';
Maltreating their ranks from the womb to the grave.

The Whites called Black "nigger", a most sordid
name:
Wantonly whipped Blacks without pity or shame.
For any disturbance, the Blacks bore the blame,
And had to suffer excruciating pain.

The Whites used the pulpit to stoutly declare
That black men were dang'rous, implanting strong
fear;
Installing in Whites, strong hatred for Black,
Demanding on buses, Blacks sit in the back.

The Whites treated Blacks as nothing but dirt,
They strongly insisted the Blacks had no worth.
If the Black man protested or tried to resist,
The noose of the hang rope would bring him his
bliss.

The Whites raped Black women at whim or at will,
But wasted no time to vehemently kill
Any Black brother near a girl who was white,
Would be mobbed, kicked and lynched in a public
site.

For cent'ries, the Black man endured with great
faith
The scourges, afflictions, tortuous weight.
He held faithfully, somehow, help would appear,
"Though he knew not how, it would come from
somewhere.

That help was to come from Martin Luther King,
Who in a strange way for the Black man would
bring
A new spirit of freedom, which would incite
The Blacks to overcome fear and fight for their right.

King met with Black brothers to work out a plan,
A way of equality for the Black man.
They formed a great movement and started to act
With a momentum of shattering impact.

The bull-headed white man did all to repel
The surge for the Black man, but he knew darn well
The Black man was tired of being pushed around;
And now bound together, he would overcome.



King urged the brothers to retaliate
With non-violent methods which he would dictate.
"We must teach the white brothers violence is wrong,
the arm of the coward, not of men who are strong."

Armed with an ars'nal of love, hope and faith,
The Black men forged forward to eradicate
The white man's injustice; to right white man's
wrong,
To White's brutal action, Blacks answered with
songs

King led Blacks in marches, he joined in sits-in,
The blows of the white man left scars on his skin.
Whene'er the Blacks seemed they'd turn back to run,
King begged them to hold fast, "We shall overcome".

On April fourth, Nineteen Sixty and Eight,
A white man brought King to his ultimate fate.
A shot from a gun and the martyr fell,
The world was at standstill, the U.S. like hell.

The Blacks, enfuriated, took to the street
There was nothing to stop them, no sign of retreat;
They burned, robbed cities, stalked on like wild
beasts,
They showed Whites no mercy or cared naught for
peace.

The assassin, a coward, would swear now King had
died,
Through his vile action, freedom would be denied;
But Blacks, no longer fearful, want liberty,
They want recognition, the will to be free.

To share every facet, to gain equal right,
For respect for their offspring, the Blacks will fight;
To provide for all people true liberty,
Where all men together form one family.

King, by his actions, taught all men are one;
Brothers of One God, living under the sun;
That peace can't be achieved through violence or
gun,
Through love, understanding, we shall overcome.

Bits and pieces

By Sandra Patterson

During slavery, even by laws, not only in the USA but in other countries, slaves were denied a formal education. That caused them only to be able to access to working jobs suitable to their class: domestic services, agriculture and some manual trades. Nevertheless, that did not mean that blacks didn't have brains or functional minds that could analyze and create

Today, in one way or another, we enjoy and make the best of many inventions without even knowing they were done by a Black person because for many years this information was hidden from us.

The United Nations has declared this year 2011 as the year of the African descendant, so our task aside from being proud, is to enhance and let all good things that Blacks have done to benefit mankind be known.

- *In the USA Dr. Daniel Hale Williams performed the first successful **open heart surgery** in 1893.*
- *Percy L. Julian (USA) greatest achievement is his **synthesis or cortisone**, used to treat inflammatory diseases.*
- *Dr. Charles Richard Drew (USA) is noted for his research in blood plasma and for setting up the **first blood bank**.*

- *Thomas L. Jennings, a tailor in New York (1821) held the first patent issued to an African- American for his invention of a **dry-cleaning process***
- *Benjamin Bradley (USA) as a slave developed a **steam engine** for a war ship, but, unable to patent his work, sold it and purchased his freedom with the proceeds*
- *Elijah McCoy, born in Canada invented a **lubricator** for steam engines.*

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9th of January

By Sandra Patterson

We can't forget the events that took place 47 years ago beginning on January 9th 1964, taking the life of 21 Panamanians and eventually leading to the Torrijos – Carter treaty in 1977.

Going against Canal Zone Lieutenant Governor Parker's orders to let six students from Panama's Instituto Nacional hoist a Panamanian flag at Balboa High School, in a provoking way, students from that Canal Zone school prevented the act, causing a massive reaction of the Panamanian people and a historical act of dignity that no other country has ever done to the USA -- calling home it's ambassador, the Republic of Panama broke off diplomatic relations with that country.

**Special event : announcing
the International year of the
AFRO-DESCENDANT**



<http://www.unmultimedia.org/tv/webcast/2010/12/special-event-launching-of-the-international-year-of-peoples-of-african-descent.html>