

AfroPanamanian Newsletter



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We encourage our web readers to feel free to use our links to find scholarships, jobs, grants and others.

No.3 Vol. IV

April 2013

Donation



Let's save Black Heritage Day for Colon's children

Anecdotes

Controversy

Poetry

LOS AMIGOS :

Por la superación de la Etnia Negra (Incorporated to SEAPAT EVENTOS, S.A.)

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

CREDITS

Editor : Sandra Patterson (R.I.P)

Assistant: Ines V. Sealy

MEMBERS

**President
Roberto L. Alleyne**

**Treasurer
Fernando A. Goldson**

**Others
Ines V. Sealy
Dilsia Alleyne
Roberto L. Alleyne
Cecil V. Reynolds**

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 issued in 1951 as a 10 cent postage stamp, used for years. Permission for its continuous use was given by his grandnephew, Cecil Reynolds.

Editorial

ADVICE FOR LIFE

LIFETIME relationships

teach you lifetime

lessons,

Things you must build

upon in order to have a

solid emotional

Foundation..

Your job is to accept the

lesson,

Love the person and put

what you have learned to

use in all other

RELATIONSHIPS and

areas of your life.

It is said that love is

blind but friendship is

clairvoyant.

-Kindness is the language the blind can see and the deaf can hear.

If you would like to be removed from our mailing list, please type REMOVE and reply to afropanamiannewsletter@gmail.com

Feedback from our Feb-Mar. Issue:

In response to a forward: Brother John, thanks for the newsletter. Whenever, you receive them please send me one. These positive vibrations will keep our community strong. And this way **WE WRITE OUR OWN HISTORY.**

Ines,

Nice edition dedicated to our Women. Thank you for honoring these movers and shakers. Nadya



That different people see the same situation in different ways - is central to what we seek to impart in our lives and this work:

A Positive person sees the glass half full the Negative person, sees the glass half empty.

Seek the best part of every situation.

When one door closes, another one opens.

Response on our website:

Thanks for the opportunity to read about my heritage, and for allowing me to have a forum where I can read about the development and accomplishment of the black men and women in Panama. Proud of been black and surprising others when open up in fluent Spanish. I'm proud of my heritage! [Mercedes Box](#)

Organizations helping Colon:

People like Rose Cromwell (US citizen born in the US), Norma Lewis, Melida Harris, Sandra Sergent, Dr. Roland Edwards and Jorge Brathwaithe.

They can be reached at these websites: rosecromwell@gmail.com, nlewiscarnavales@yahoo.com, www.nic-eth.com, ssergent1@live.com, reeroland@yahoo.com, www.panamnetwork.com

Opportunities:

Fulbright Professional Exchange Program Hubert H. Humphrey (HHH) administered by IIE - Write to pancultural@state.gov to have your preliminary application sent by email, before June 30, 2013, 5:00 pm.

A ten-month program of academic and professional experience. Aimed at professionals with a distinguished record of achievement in their career. It offers the opportunity to establish lasting productive partnerships and relationships with North Americans and their professional counterparts in other countries, fostering an exchange of knowledge and mutual understanding.

Emphasis is placed on broad policy issues and troubleshooting. This program is not geared toward a degree. For additional information, access the above link. **Required English level: Intermediate to Advanced.**

Israel's first black beauty queen



Yityish Aynaw is her name, unlike many other Ethiopian Jewish immigrants who took on Hebrew names, she kept her own. She was the only black finalist in this year's beauty pageant and she has become Israel's first black beauty queen. She's tall, commanding, and outspoken.

"It's time that someone from my community, someone with my skin color, who is Israeli just like everyone else, represent the country," Aynaw said.

PROTECT YOURSELF:

<http://video.today.msnbc.msn.com/today/50100430> (contributed by John Catón Sr.)

PLEASE OPEN THIS SOUTH AFRICAN LINK:

<http://guyaneseonline.wordpress.com/2013/02/14/botlahle-winner-of-south-africas-talent-2012/>

(Contributed by Yvonne Beech Cajar)

Olden Days Sayings:

“bite off more than he can chew”, “take little and live long”, “what sweet youh mouth, bun yuh tail”, “Empty sack can't stand and full sack can't bend”, “smell yuh grandfather powder?”

Workhouse or prison

In the '40s when young boys misbehaved, skipped school, or ran away from home, they were considered “**jailbait**”. When guys went to jail (“**jailbird**”), they had to do hard labor, therefore the jail was termed “**workhouse**”.

The “**jailbirds**” were the ones who swept the streets, collected the grass for the cavalry, collected the garbage, helped to construct roads working under the Ministry of Public Works.

Sanitation was under the Ministry of Health. The Panamanian Government was very complacent to receive the “**hand-me-down**” garbage trucks which they purchased from the Canal Zone Government at \$1.00, thoroughly repaired and running when the CZ was finished with them.

The dump was in a ravine behind Red Tank, a local-rate community south of Pedro Miguel.

Grandma and Mom's Lily-white clothes

by Dilsia Alleyne



Do you remember how our grandma and mothers kept their white clothes “**lily-white**”?

Well, white clothes were washed by hand in a zinc tub adding water, soap powder and Clorox or bleach, sometimes a bar of soap was used.

With a hard brush and a scrubbing board, clothes were washed. With the soap water still in them they were spread out on the grass to be sunned, and at some homes on a zinc table made with wooden legs.

Clothes would remain on the bleach stand for one or two days, during which time, water was sprinkled on them, the idea was to keep them humid. Then they were picked up and washed once more, for the last rinse blue was added, then starch for those pieces that required ironing. Then placed on the line from where our parents and neighbors would stand and admire their whiteness.

Our grandparents made sure that white clothes were never dingy. If something should get stained or darker than it should be, it would get a special treatment, remaining longer on the bleaching stand or grass.

Remember satina? Sold in the commissary to use in the starch in stead of candle.



Bringing the **Untold Story** Forward

In 1953, from 16th St. Colon to the 4 stops (*Cuatro Altos*) was segregated as an international commercial-industrial area. A Free Zone, the first in the World which caters to the East, Europe and the Americas and produces large revenues for Panama. These do not revert to Colon.

Excerpts from The New York Times' A Once-Vibrant City Struggles as Panama Races Ahead on a Wave of Prosperity - <http://nyti.ms/YyrKbN>

...This month, the government announced a \$9 million project to rehabilitate Colón's seaside park. But Mr. Voitier dismissed such projects as sources of only temporary employment that would do little for the large number of people with informal jobs.

Some Colon boosters have mustered their own piecemeal efforts, tired of waiting for a government rescue. Kurt Dillon, an architect and urban planner, has led a coalition to save and restore some of the crumbling buildings in the city's historic core, recently drawing dozens of preservationists to write a plan with the help of the [World Monuments Fund](#), an independent nonprofit group. "Civil society has to get things done here," he said.

With comments from readers who love Colon:

The money would be better invested in renovating the sewage system in Colon.
Ines

I'm of the opinion that until Black Panamanians unite and put pressure on the government through boycotts, street demonstrations, appeals to the United Nations on the grounds of threats to childrens' health, and other forms of protest, they will continue to be trapped in poverty, crime and despair in the deathtrap of Colon.

Colon is the worst example, but Curundu, Calidonia, Chorillo, are other pockets of poverty where Black people are predominant.

It breaks my heart to see Colon - where my Dad lived a hundred years ago and my Aunt lived until the 1960's and my long-lost cousins MAY still live - in such desperate shape. My Dad spoke glowingly of the Colon of his youth. *Damani*



Houses in the background



Houses that were remodeled during the 2004-2009 administration

...Am I in the same country? A difference in where the progress "*Progreso*" of this country is seen in specific areas that does not come close to others.

...many who look like me, find a way to still smile, laugh and hope for something better.

My heart feels all this reality but my eyes see beyond the broken buildings, the trash, the crime and the poverty. Hope sets in.

-The differences of my Colon have ***Buildings renovated by the Ministry of Housing (2004-2009)*** made me breathe in a reality that I never expected but I have learned to accept. In that acceptance I also chose to not get stuck in the past and gather new stories, new memories that continue to love this city that lives deep within me. Some may say it is naive I chose to say, optimistic and hopeful. The reality of Colon makes me breathe in HOPE that "this too shall pass" and hope will prevail.

.-Feeling responsible for not being home to push back at those who think Colon is what it is only because of the people. Colon is not in the state that it is only because what many say, the people are lazy, the crime, which I acknowledge is really bad, but also because the government has forgotten about the people specifically those who make up the majority of the community.

...I keep saying it but it is never enough, I am in love with Colon in the most unconditional way. The *Buenos Dias nena*, on my morning runs in *Portobelo* are priceless.

Yvette Modestin

"This country would prefer to forget Colón." *Alma Franklin*

DON'T QUIT

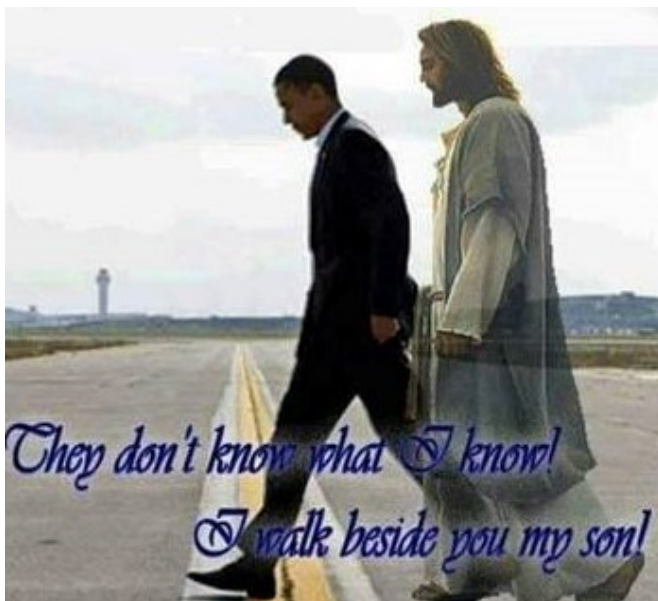
Author unknown (contributed by Daniel George)

When things go wrong, as they sometimes will,
When the road you're trudging seems all up hill,
When the funds are low and the debts are high,
And you want to smile, but you have to sigh,
When care is pressing you down a bit,
Rest, if you must, but don't you quit.

Life is queer with it's twists and turns,
As every one of us sometimes learns,
And many a failure turns about
When he might have won had he stuck it out;
Don't give up, though the pace seems slow--
You might succeed with another blow.

Often the goal is nearer than
It seems to a faint and faltering man,
Often the struggler has given up
When he might have captured the victor's cup.
And he learned too late, when the night slipped down,
How close he was to the golden crown.

Success is failure turned inside out--
The silver tint of the clouds of doubt,
And you never can tell how close you are,
It may be near when it seems afar;
So stick to the fight when you are hardest hit.
It's when things seem worst that you must not quit.



(For those who have white hair or no hair at all)

SENIOR VERSION OF:

JESUS LOVES ME

Jesus loves me, this I know,
Though my hair is white as snow
Though my sight is growing dim,
Still He bids me trust in Him.

(CHORUS)

YES, JESUS LOVES ME..
YES, JESUS LOVES ME..
YES, JESUS LOVES ME
FOR THE BIBLE TELLS ME SO.

Though my steps are oh, so slow,
With my hand in His I'll go
On through life, let come what may,
He'll be there to lead the way.

(CHORUS)

When the nights are dark and long,
In my heart He puts a song.
Telling me in words so clear,
"Have no fear, for I am near."

(CHORUS)

When my work on earth is done,
And life's victories have been won.
He will take me home above,
Then I'll understand His love

(CHORUS)

I love Jesus, does He know?
Have I ever told Him so?
Jesus loves to hear me say,
That I love Him every day.

(CHORUS)



The Untold Story (cont.)**A Post to Lean on**

In a very quiet way, Judy Betty Bowen de Dixon (married to Charles "Charlie" Dixon and mother of Carlos and Carla) supported the community around her. Giving of her knowledge, expertise and connections, Judy served man and country until her demise on January 29, 2008.

Born in the city of Panama on May 29, 1942 to Iris Lindsey and Keith Bowen, and bred in Methodism, Judy graduated as a bilingual secretary from the Pan American Institute (a Methodist school) and obtained a translator's license from the *La Boca* College on the Pacific side of the Canal Zone.

Her years of labor began on the Rodman Naval Base (West bank of the Panama Canal Zone). She went to work in private businesses in Panama as an executive secretary, then on to Government offices: the Ministry of Labor, Ministry of Government and Justice, Ministry of the Canal, then to the President's Palace, where she was the personal secretary of 4 different Presidents.

Selfless and conscious of the needs of people around her, Judy participated in religious and civic organizations, committees and commissions to better the acceptance of the Black community in this country's government without discrimination.

She was on the *Junta de Censura*, a member of the Society of Friends of the Afro West Indian Museum, The Committee to build the *Plaza de la Cultura y la Etnia*, she was instrumental to the Special Commission to establish political inclusion of Blacks in Governmental politics, which was obtained by Executive Decree No. 124 of May 27, 2005.

Music was a part of most young people's upbringing instilled by their West Indian parents. Besides going to English school, the youth had to learn a trade which kept them busy and sometimes brought in a little income. It also prepared them for the future, example: in adulthood if they immigrated to other countries, these trades served them to "make a living".

David Herbert De Leon Martin

Musician, Firefighter, Family man

by Cecil V. Reynolds

The second of the 9 children born to David Augustus De Leon, Jamaican and Elisa Martin, Grenadian (both deceased) who came to Panama for the Construction of the Panama Canal. The son of a Telephone operator at Gorgas Hospital, Pacific side Canal Zone, David went to Teacher Russel Phillips' (religious and musical) English school in Calidonia beside Mueller bldg. where the little market is now in the City of Panama.



At an early age he learned to "**make a dollar**" and save. At age 10, he was selling chocolates at Gorgas Hospital, and accumulating a savings which he used to purchase a \$50.00 violin, for classes he had seen teacher Harry Jarvis giving his daughters, and, finally gotten permission from his father to take the classes. We're talking about the 1920's, and he already had been learning to play the piano which his father had purchased for the home besides reading music, learnt at Teacher Phillips' school. Teacher Jarvis got him a better violin from Italy. His sister, playing the piano and he, playing the violin, became a duo playing on programs of lodges and clubs.

Leaving VI grade at Teacher Phillips' he enrolled in Gil Colunje Spanish school, where he was set back to IV grade (for lack of Spanish), but he was the teacher when it came to Math class. While studying at the National Institute, he was a member of the Bombero Band under Prof. Vitin Paz.

His interest in music lead him to read books, sell musical instruments, practice and learn other instruments to include the trumpet, the viola, guitar, bass, banjo and the cello besides studying at the National Conservatory and INAC graduating as a music teacher. He has taught at public and private schools in the country.

While doing all of this he found time to marry and have 11 children: 6 boys and 5 girls.

Black Heritage day (*Día de la Etnia Negra*)

by Ines V. Sealy

From the *Panameñista* President, Mireya Moscoso signed the 30th of May, 2000 into law as Black Heritage Day, Colon has been celebrating the **day** with a parade in which the schools, from Kindergarden to University participate.

Last year, and this year, instigated by the Minister of Tourism, the official parade of May 30 has been changed to be held on Sunday, whichever that date falls on, just like they do with other holidays such as January 9. On these bridge days (*días puentes*) the populace is glad for a long weekend, go off to the beach, or take a trip abroad; and the day is forgotten. The children don't even know why they are not going to school, if it is in school time, they don't know the reason for the day off.

Do we want this to happen to our Black Heritage Day? Do we want our children to grow up not knowing their heritage, not learning our values, our customs, our ideals? Do we want others to write our history? Can we permit others to take away what we fought so hard to get? When the other countries are beginning and holding strong to their Black Heritage day, week or month, do we want our Black Heritage **Day** to die? There is and international movement celebrating Black inclusion, will we be in it?

The Minister of Tourism is thinking in terms of attracting tourists to the event, but, tourists are in town everyday of the week. They are adults, what they see or hear on that day, they will take with them, whereas our children, who should be participating, will be on the side looking on also, since Sunday is not a school day and they are not obliged to participate, they will not be getting the info first hand. At school, the official day may be celebrated with a program or the teacher may require a composition and that will be all. As far as the community is concerned, that is not enough.



Colon's Black Ethnic Day was something the community looked forward to. Colon's Black Ethnic Month was well organized. They had a type of cloth for each day of the month. Church service and parade on the 30th.

On the Pacific side, it is programmed by Fundación Bayano on a Sunday, because the Rio Abajo and Parque Lefevre community is mostly Black inhabited. When the residents come out of church, right down the road they can see or participate in the parade. The schools are Black administrated, so that there participation is guaranteed. Not so on the Atlantic.

“THE YOUNGER, THE BETTER”, they will grow up knowing their heritage.