

AfroPanamanian Newsletter



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Joe Bishop 100 years

Photo by

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

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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 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

***Promise yourself to look at
the sunny side of everything
and make your optimism
come true.***

***To think only of the best, to
work only for the best and
expect only the best.***

***To be just as enthusiastic
about the success of others
as you are about your own.***

Christian Daa Larson (1874-1954)

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

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April Feedback

International Museums' Day

International Museums Day will be officially celebrated on 18th May 2014. To commemorate this event, the BMHS has assigned a number of activities for the week commencing 18th May. As details are confirmed we will forward the schedule of events and activities to you. The theme 'Museum collections, make connections' was conceptualised by the local chapter - ICOM Barbados and adopted as the official theme for International Museums Day 2014.

Panama Exhibition

The Barbados Museum and Historical Society is developing an exhibition to commemorate the centenary of the ending of the construction of the Panama Canal in 1914. Members of the public are therefore asked to submit any memorabilia (artefacts) which might relate to the Barbadian experience in Panama. These can include but not limited to letters, postcards, and objects.

For more information, please contact Mr Miguel Pena: historycurator@barbmuse.org.bb or (246) 427- 0201.

The Hon. Maxine McLean, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Barbados extends a very heartfelt invitation to everyone to the 2014 edition of the biennial Barbados Network Consultation, which runs from August 3-7, 2014 at the Lloyd Erskine Sandiford Centre.

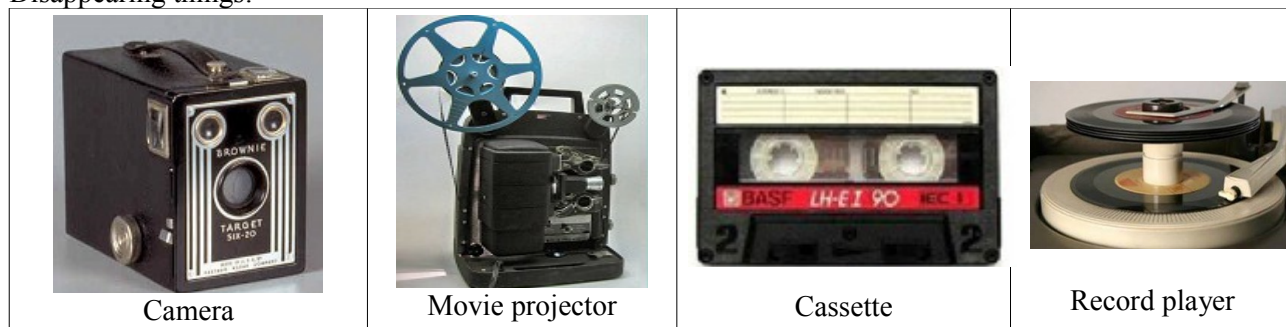
The Theme chosen for this year is "One Nation, One Family – Building Pathways to Prosperity and Development".

The sessions planned include those on new business investment opportunities, legal and regulatory requirements for doing business in Barbados, tracing your Barbadian ancestry and resettlement in Barbados. There will be a session on Panama as we celebrate the 100th anniversary of the opening of the Panama Canal and the contribution of Barbadians to its construction. There will also be a special invitation to attend the Prime Minister's Crop Over reception. The Barbados Network Consultation is to serve as a catalyst for broadening and strengthening the scope of engagement between Barbadians, Barbadian descendants and friends of Barbados at home and abroad.

A charter flight is being arranged for those who wish to attend the above conference. Interested parties may go to the following link:

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/1/#search/charter+flight+barbados/145ff73481f891a4?projector=1>

Disappearing things:



Get your bound copy of the Fourth year of the AfroPanamanian Newsletter

The bound versions of the 2013 Newsletter

2012, 2011 and 2010 are still available

from Ines at (507)224-4177.

In this, the month of May in which we celebrate Black Heritage Day, we present this article from the Equal Times a global news published in Brussels. (Contributed by Newton & Shirley Walker)

IS RACISM BEHIND PANAMA'S CANAL ZONE LAND GRABS?



(Photo Alyya Swaby)

Josefa Barrios fondly remembers her childhood during the United States occupation of the Panama Canal Zone.

She spent many happy hours playing near a small stream behind her grandmother's house in the segregated black neighbourhood of Arco Iris. "It used to be like a playground," she said.

Afro-Panamanian residents of Arco Iris accuse the government of continuing pre-Civil Rights US racism by attempting to force them out and sell their land to private owners.

In 1979, the US began to pull its military from the Canal Zone, and these bases were 'reverted' to Panamanian territory.

As one of Colón province's 'reverted areas', Arco Iris is home to many descendants of black labourers on the Panama Canal, who were separated from and paid less than their white counterparts, due to a US-implemented version of Jim Crow segregation.

The neighbourhood's residents now argue the Panamanian government is continuing US racism by attempting to force them out and sell their land to private owners.

They claim they are being denied land titles to their family homes as well as being forced to fund major, necessary repairs that the government should take care of as the current landlord.

In the past few months, around 200 Arco Iris residents have decided to bring a Supreme Court case against the government, demanding compensation for a backlog of repairs and the rights to their land.

There is just one of many grassroots campaigns around land rights in a country where the steep 8.4 per cent growth rate is drawing hordes of international developers and investors.

At the end of March, scores of residents and local supporters marched down the highway separating the neighbourhood from the Colón Free Trade Zone, demanding justice.

But the government denies the accusations of racism.

"We have been administering everything concerning the reverted areas independently of what zones or neighborhoods they are," said Juan Carlos Orillac, executive secretary of the Unidad Administrativa de Bienes Revertidos (UABR), which oversees the transfer of the reverted areas in the Panama and Colón provinces.

Arco Iris comprises three sections, including a newer one created in 1983, which does not form part of the suit.

The two older sections, established respectively in 1919 and 1945, are primarily inhabited by elderly US federal government retirees and widows of pensioners, who fear they may never be able to buy their titles.

Complainants fall into several different categories: some belong to families who have lived on the land for several decades, while others moved in post-reversion; some owe monthly payments for past mortgages, while others have completed the payments and await confirmation of ownership.

A professor at the University of Panama in Colón, Barrios leads the fight on behalf of her late mother, a Canal Zone worker's widow who never saw the deed to the home, despite repeated attempts to purchase it over almost 30 years.

[Is racism behind Panama's Canal Zone land grabs? - Equal Times](#)

RELATIONS BETWEEN JAMAICA AND PANAMA

(contributed by Rev. Nelson Edwards and published with permission from the Head of (Panamanian) Consular Affairs in Jamaica)

Although Jamaica established diplomatic relations with the Republic of Panama on July 29, 1966, both countries have shared strong historical ties dating back from the construction of the Panama Canal which was completed in 1914, where several Jamaicans went to Panama to participate in its construction. Therefore, there are several Panamanians with Jamaican ancestry to this day.

Given the proximity of Jamaica to Panama and the latter's expansion of the Panama Canal, Jamaica has sought to position itself to take advantage of this, by the creation of a logistics hub in Jamaica. The Government of Jamaica has therefore submitted a memorandum of understanding to the Government of Panama which seeks to further strengthen bilateral relations between both countries in the areas of port development and security, training and internship in the logistics sector among other areas. Presently this memorandum of understanding is at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Panama awaiting its approval and countersigning.

Various tertiary institutions have sought to capitalize on the experience of Panama in the logistics sector and in their present expansion of the Canal, through the introduction of memorandums of understanding with other tertiary institutions in Panama.

- The University of the West Indies (UWI) Mona and the University of Panama have signed a memorandum of understanding on July 4, 2013 to facilitate student and faculty exchange as well as joint educational cooperation programs and research. This MOU is presently at the Audit Authorities of Panama awaiting approval.
- The Caribbean Maritime Institute (CMI) and the International Maritime University of Panama (UMP) have also signed a Memorandum of Understanding on May 7, 2013 to facilitate student and faculty exchanges and student internships between both institutions. Presently, the MOU is also awaiting approval and countersigning at the Audit Authorities of Panama.
- Shortwood Teachers' College of Jamaica (STC) and the University of Panama (UP) currently participate in a student exchange program called the Foreign Language Immersion Program in which students at Shortwood Teachers' College went to the University of Panama from September 19 to October 26, 2013 and were placed in the faculty of Humanities and Education of the University. A group of Panamanian students from the University are expected to be hosted at Shortwood Teachers' College later this year. A draft of Academic Cooperation Framework Agreement Between both institutions has been submitted by Shortwood and is currently being revised by the University.
- The Academic Resource Centre (ARC) a private education institution in Montego Bay currently offers virtual classes in Spanish to its adult and children cohort, with the Universidad de Trabajo y de la Tercera Edad, which is a branch of the University of Panama in the province of Coclé, Panama. In 2011, a group of students from the ARC went to this University to participate in a Spanish Immersion Programme.

Racism & Discrimination

RACISM: according to Wikipedia, “is actions, practices or beliefs, or social or political systems that consider different **rac**es to be ranked as inherently **superior** or inferior to each other, based on presumed shared inheritable traits, abilities, or qualities. It may also hold that members of different races should be treated differently.” It is based on differentiation of human groups into races. Trying to maintain the purity of the races. Preventing mixtures.

And **DISCRIMINATION** according to the Cambridge Dictionary is “treating a person or particular group of people differently, especially in a worse way from the way in which you treat other people, because of their skin colour, sex, sexuality etc.” This basically has to do with the treatment of individuals toward others, which may hurt the other person.

What did we have on the Canal Zone? Racism? Discrimination?

I would say discrimination. A group of people harming another group. There was also some feelings of supremacy, but most West Indian laborers acted humble to be exalted as the Bible states in. Matthew 23:12.

What do we suffer in Panama? Racism? Discrimination?

I would say both. Many of the Governments we have had have been separating the peoples: economically, politically, educationally, in housing and living areas.

The housing and educational separation goes with the economical separation. If you can afford it, you can live in certain areas, but then comes the discriminatory part, in which the neighbors either accept or reject you. Economically you can live in an area, and not have a single friend or acquaintance near you. You may be economically able to send your child to a private school where he/she will be able to get a better education and not be exposed to the constant strikes waged by public school teachers or students, but, that doesn't guarantee that he/she will not be totally accepted, may it be by prohibitions or obligations imposed on them, or ostracism. Braids are a necessity for Black females, but they have come into style for other races and even gone to Red Carpet galas, yet, were prohibited in our schools until during Black Heritage month we've instituted a Braids' day.

Profiling: “If a Black man is running, he has committed a crime; if a white man is running, he is exercising.”

A Black woman, wearing a turban, shopping in a supermarket, removes and returns merchandise from the shelves, is publicly ridiculed, accused of robbery.

Our young, both minors and adults, in certain burroughs are detained, taken to the precinct for investigation. They are kept there, put to clean the precinct, etc. They are then released during the morning while it is still dark and they are exposed to being picked up again and taken in. There is supposed to be a portable “pelepolice” which can be used to verify their status on the spot, but it is not used.

That is one type of discrimination, but, there are many other types of discrimination in Panama. Discrimination is seen in the administration of justice: against women (in politics, labor), against the poor, against men (in domestic cases), etc. There is political discrimination: those in power at the moment dole out the funds unequally to the different parties. Those in power are not judged for their crimes.

For a long while our young people suffered “admission rights”, until a Mayor began to fine and close businesses for discrimination. In the Capital of Bocas del Toro there is a boat canteen that does not admit Blacks. Together with some white skinned friends, a Black youth was rejected by this bar. His friends could enter, he could not.

Blacks have been fighting for visibilization, we have even gotten presidential candidates to promise us a Secretariate **by law**. So many of our young people have been trying to get into the movie or theatre business. Some have left the country to try. **Opening for a few** came with a comical series on Telemetro, and it shows the prejudices, mentality and lack of morals of those in economical power. It shows bias, discriminaation, abuse, humility, innocence, frustration. We are told that there was poor response from the Black community for the auditions, as a consequence, there isn't a larger amount of Blacks in the series. Other short segments were offered on other TV stations. For future efforts, we would expect a better response.

ROLE MODEL: *An Avid worker against Racism*

Born on October 13, 1940 in Marañon, Panama City, Rep. of Panama, son of Afrodescendant parents Alice Daily and Clarence Priestley, Dr. George A. Priestley did his formative years of study in Panama: Elementary at Jose de Obaldia, Hi school at Artes y Oficios Melchor Lasso de la Vega, where he played in the band and later concluded these studies at the PanAmerican Institute (IPA). He relocated to the US in 1961.

Contributed by his son, Amilcar Priestley to be found at: <http://afrolatinoproject.org/2009/07/01/dr-george-a-priestley-a-father-husband-friend-mentor-5/>

Dr. George A. Priestley graduated from Brooklyn College in 1968; and had received both his Masters as well as his Ph.D. degrees from Columbia University by 1980. He served as Director of the Latin American and Latino Studies program at Queens College, and taught in the Political Science Department at that institution for 40 years. He has also taught for two years as an adjunct Professor in the Department of Pan-African Studies at Barnard College/Columbia University. Dr. Priestley played a significant role in mobilizing grassroots support in the United States for the passage of the 1977 Torrijos Carter (Panama Canal) Treaty which helped to re-establish the national sovereignty of the Republic of Panama following nearly 75 years of U.S. occupation and which called for the return of ownership of the Panama Canal to Panama on December 31, 1999. He was also a key facilitator of the dialogue on race in Panama and its diasporic challenges, as well as Panama's grassroots participation in the World Conference on Racism in Durban, South Africa in 2001.

Dr. Priestley served on a number of academic and editorial boards, including NACLA (North American Report on the Americas) and Tareas (one of Panama's leading social science journal). He was also a contributing editor of Wadabagei, a Journal of Caribbean Studies and its Diaspora and a senior researcher at the Centro de Estudios Latinoamericanos, and Justo Arosemena (CELA) in Panama where his research interest included studies in Comparative Politics, Central American Politics, Comparative Racial Formation, and Transnational Identities in the Black Diaspora; He is the author or co-author of several books and monographs and dozens of articles. Some of his better known publications include:

-Ethnicity and Class in Central America

-Military Government and Popular Participation in Panama: The Torrijos Regime, 1968-1975

-Panama's Political Crisis: Is There a Democratic Alternative

-Piel Oscura: Ensayos y Reflexiones al Filo del Centenario published in 2003 and co-written with long time friend and collaborator Alberto Barrow (he also edited and wrote the prologue to Mr. Barrow's 2001 book No Me Pidas Una Foto: Develando el Racismo en Panama).

One of Dr. Priestley's recent research projects involved the Transnational Identities of Panamanians of West Indian descent, and a political biography of George Washington Westerman, journalist, diplomat and defender of minority rights in Panama.

Dr. Priestley has been the recipient of numerous awards, including a Gulbenkian Fellowship, a Ford Foundation Diversity Initiative Grant, a Mellon Foundation Award, a National Endowment for the Humanities/Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture Fellow 2002-2003, a 2008 honoree award by the NAACP-NorthEast Queens Branch and numerous grants from PSC-CUNY.

Dr. Priestley served as Executive Director of the City University of New York Association of Caribbean Studies, Program Chair of the 24th Conference of the Caribbean Studies Association-CSA (May 1999 at Hotel Panama, Panama City), was a member of the Executive Council of CSA and was a faculty member of Center for Latin American, Caribbean & Latino Studies at the Graduate Center-CUNY (CLACLS). He was the President of the World University Service (United States National Committee) during the 1980s.

Outside of academia he has held numerous positions including that of President of the Third Congress of Black Panamanians (1988), Co-Coordinator of Panama's National Association against Racism, and Vice-President of the Third Congress of Black Culture of the Americas. Most recently Dr. Priestley through a grant from the Ford Foundation and with the support of Queens College-CUNY founded and served as the Principal Investigator of the The Afro Latin@ Project (www.afrolatinoproject.org), a 501(c)(3) non-profit, which aims to document, promote, coordinate and support the development of Afro-Latin@ studies and grass roots activities in the United States. The most recent initiative of the Afro-Latin@ Project, which Dr. Priestley was actively working on as recently as four days prior to his passing, was the "H.I.V. Project" which seeks to research and document the occurrence and impact of H.I.V. infections on the African diasporic community in the Americas starting with Panama, Honduras and the Dominican Republic and ultimately facilitate the development of community and public policy oriented means of education and prevention.

**THE PANAMA CANAL HEALTH PLAN - 54 YEARS
AND
THE PANAMA CANAL - 100 YEARS**



By Cecil V. Reynolds

On April 16, 2014 the Association of Retirees of the Canal Area (AJAC) and AXA Assistance Mexico Sucursal Panama held a tribute to centenarian members of the Plan at the Holiday Inn Hotel, Ciudad Del Saber.

At the beginning of the program a video entitled **One Day In 100 Years** was projected by the ACP. The Master of Ceremonies was Licdo. Ethelbert Mapp, the Religious invocation was given by Rev. Nelson Edwards. The General Manager of AXA Assistance-Mexico, Sucursal Panama, Licdo. Luis Martinez gave the welcome to all present. Licdo. Carlos A. Brown C. Vice President of AJAC gave the history of the Panama Canal Health Plan. Roberto Serbinio AJACs' President sent a message to the honorees. Dr. Headley C. Lennan gave a brief history sharing his experiences in his relationship with the Members prior to the Health Plan and during same. The Administrator of the Panama Canal, Ing. Jorge Luis Quijano gave the commemorative speech to the Centennials.

Ing. Jorge Luis Quijano handed out plaques to the first Medical Director of the Home Care attention to Federal Retirees of the Gorgas Hospital, Dr. Headley C. Lennan, nurses and collaborators in this program:

Licda. Nelly de Ibarra, Licda. Gloria B. de Mootoo, Licda Isabela de Gibbs y Licda Lorena Mesa.

The oldest Centennials present: Mr. Melchor Martinez 104 years old, Mrs. Consuelo Cummings 103 years old, and Mrs. Cecilia de Brathwaite 103 years old. The Centennials with more years of service. Mr. Esteban Huertas with 36, Mr. Jose De la Cruz De Leon 35 and Miss. Adaljisa Tejeira S. with 32.

There were a total of 30 retirees honored between the ages of 100 and 104. Twenty retirees: 12 men and 8 women and 10 widows, members of the plan.

21 of these honorees were able to attend with their families while 9 are bed ridden, represented by their relatives. AJAC Directors handed out plaques to the rest of the retirees.

The Primary Care Physician of these centennials was also distinguished with a certificate.

Esteban Huertas, 100 year old retiree gave thanks in the name of all the honorees.

The closing prayers and toast were offered by Hilberto Wray.