

Monthly Newsletter Feb-2009

From: **afropanavisions** (obaptiste@afropanavisions.com)

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To: List Member (oswaldbaptiste59@msn.com)

Attachments: [ATT00000](#) (17.2 KB), [ATT00001](#) (54.3 KB), [ATT00002](#) (22.8 KB), [ATT00003](#) (13.5 KB)**Afro-PanaVisions.com**

Visions of a more united, self-determining, nurturing, and networking community

On-Line Newsletter

February 2009

Evaluating the Mis-Education of the Afro-Panamanians**Zeroing In on Our Major Problems**

(Colonialism is over!)

(The Door is Unlocked, but We don't seem to Realize it!)

First, as long as there is a history, human beings have/will try to think their way around it, hopefully for the better. In this light, our unifying theory ("twist & turn analyses") attempts to explain everything about



(Normalites Class of '44, mainly from the US and Jamaica, returning to Panama in 1969 to honor Alfred Osborne.)

As such, the coming-of age Afro-Panamanians, caught in the shadow of Canal Treaty negotiations, became confused and disoriented, leaving us with a truncated culture. The loss opportunities on the CZ began to further take toll in the form of diminished group identity, which created an atmosphere of "everyone for themselves." Misguided, disenchanted and not knowing what to expect of our future, we allowed the subculture philosophy to fade into memory as our "integration" into Panamanian life proceeded full steam ahead!

We were so confused that we began by imitating others trying, to find individual identities as we were faced with loyalty conflicts just as our parents' generation had in 1955. For the most part, some began imitating the Panamanians (*a la the Costeños*) while others picked up on the mannerisms, style and lingo of American blacks. As you further know, during/post Canal Treaty, many of us came to the US. Noteworthy, although we had a relatively easy access to the US post Canal Treaty, the majority, initially, decided to stay in Panama. How do we know this? As of April 1983, the US Consulate in Panama issued only 1,666 special visas out of the total of 15, 000 authorized by the Panama Canal Act.

Thus, it is no wonder we are unwilling to see the community as an enduring institution and a valuable asset; and to put it above our own personal interests or to make moral judgments. The system of education that was forced upon us, on a whole, taught us merely to think selfishly, and that morality is relative. The lack of confidence in ourselves and in our possibilities is what has kept us down. Our mis-education has been a perfect success in this respect.

our history in our monthly and quarterly editions until the time comes when it doesn't. We are hoping that by that time, if not sooner, most of us will come to understand exactly how our institutions were deliberately and purposely deformed and we are able to stop the bickering among ourselves and roll up our sleeves and get to work in putting the pieces back together! We have never in our lives skinned a cat, but we have heard that there are many a ways to do it:

Afro-PanaVisions



Brainwashed, Rinsed, and Done Over

Growing up in Panama, the majority of us lived, for the most part, in the poorer districts of Panama. If we did not live in Panama's crowded tenements, we lived on the Canal Zone segregated from the American *Zoni*ans in all details and aspects of living. As you know, since our forebears arrived in Panama we, for the most part, did most of the heavy and menial work on the Zone, the fetching and carrying, the sweeping and scrubbing. We also shopped at separate commissaries from the whites, drank cokes and saw movies at separate clubhouses, had separate dispensaries and hospital wards and clinic hours, attended separate schools, and even drank at separate water fountains. As you painfully should remember, the commissaries we shopped in sold only white dolls.

The *Silvermen* generation, (pioneers) were schooled and subjected to unquestionable obedience to authority even before they arrived in Panama. Along with their children, (those brought from the Islands or born in Panama and trained in American or Panamanian schools), they felt very unwelcome in either culture. Marginal people, without a country, they grew up insecure, frustrated (by a wage which, for the most part, allowed for little more than subsistence). In essence, we, as a people, were brought up, one might say, as Americanized Panamanians.

It should be noted here (and for future reference) that the Panamanians themselves, never feeling any racial solidarity with our forebears in spite of their own generous admixture of Negro ancestry, adopted many of the American customs and idioms (even their love of money) since their so-called 'independence' from Colombia. And to both groups, as we have already explained, the caste system of the Zone was anathema. The system that was designed for us, in particular, was to assure that there would not be any promising future for solidarity/racial development as a group.

In this same connection, the pervasive learning experience (relativism) that was sold to us as "Education" in the Zone schools from inception, in our opinion, is precisely why we have witnessed the disintegration of our institutions today. The curriculum for these schools was designed for the three Rs (reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic) acquired through rote memory. Such method of learning, designed to fail in that it hindered the development of problem-solving techniques and other learning experiences young people could apply in a rapidly changing world. Needless to say, our learning experience in the Panamanian schools was also very substandard. As to the WI private schools, they conveyed little relevance to the Islands, much less to Panama and the U.S, unless the students went to Britain for higher learning or university education. None did! Some went to Jamaica, where schools enjoyed high reputations, proven by the fact that some Latin Panamanians studied in Kingston. As you know, WI schoolmasters stressed discipline and social decorum in addition to excellence in academic pursuit.

The *Silvermen's* children's (our parents), coming-of-age began to blend elements of WI, U.S. and Panamanian cultures to form a new subculture. The influence of the American culture became a major part of WI life in Panama. This created a unique work ethic around the CZ, characterized by pride, ritual deference to "gold" supervisors, and cynicism regarding reward for initiative, individualism and responsibility. This charge was initially led by a few young men who took jobs or attended schools in the U.S. and returned to become leaders of the community. Among them were Alfred Osborne, James Edwards, Lloyd Carrington, Arthur Nightingale and R. H. Thorbourne. Also among such outstanding individuals were the few highly qualified lawyers and doctors who were allowed to practice on the Isthmus.

As George Westerman puts it, "The establishment of the La Boca

(Our Gallant Attempts to Put into Context our Unifying Theory.)

Are we Capable of a Democracy After Centuries of Oppression?

We say, most assuredly, yes!

First, our unifying theory is not the promotion of black supremacy; we are simply rejecting black captivity to white supremacist ideology and practice. Our philosophy is not waiting for the whites to change their ways, but to change our way of thinking and way of life. We are ill served by our current institutional arrangement. We don't even seem to possess a shared language with which to discuss our ideals, much less the tools to arrive at some rough consensus about how, as a group, we might work together to bring our ideals about.

To be a serious leader is to put forth a vision of fundamental social changes for all who are suffering from socially-induced misery. We believe that the appropriate euphoria of the political moment (the Obama factor) needs to inspire us to do more to help our children escape the grip of living in unsafe and unhealthy environments. We need to teach, by example, respect for the rules of a community institution. We need to "reorient" our children by way of the past—give them a meaningful understanding of self, their community and social systems. We are ready to "sit down" with all who care about our community/society, listen to ideas and pick the smartest, most effective for implementation. Then and only then, united together, we must roll up our sleeves, put our shoulders to the wheel and get down to the business of serious work. Perhaps we may be able to create a democratic "talented tenth" in the community.

Cultures crumble when the balance is lost between the needs of individuals and the needs of the group. We can make progress only through unconventional thinking. But we must learn how to frame this individualism within the context of a respect for the institution of our community/society. It is important to recognize the claim that history, community and shared values make on us through them. Many of us, as we see it, are willing to place excessive individualism as well as an emphasis on personal happiness over dignity, duty and societal obligations. Both purposes serve as book ends for enhancing the quality of our lives nationally and individually. To be effective one cannot preclude the other.

"The real fights in black communities have always been over which face we should show the whites. Should we be humble and modest or prideful and outraged?" (Shelby Steele) In a unifying community setting one must die so that the other may live on. We, at AfroPanavisions, believe that giving the atmosphere of today "by any means" is currently unnecessary. That is the placing of too much emphasis on the protest-oriented '60s—because, we further believe, it

Normal Training School was a logical step in the CZ Colored School System. It extended to the Silvermen's children, training in the art and science of teaching." It was anticipated that the graduates of the first Normal Class of '38 would blaze a trail of intelligent, progressive leadership worthy of emulating by future generations. During the period of its existence 141 students were graduated from five classes. A review of the Curriculum Vitae of many of these graduates--which was prepared by the graduates of the Class of '44-- suggests that a very high percentage of these individuals were successful citizens, assuming roles of responsibility and leadership in a variety of fields of endeavor. Most, however, fled the oppressive atmosphere of the CZ, especially after the 1955 Remon/Eisenhower Treaty. The hiring options on the CZ for these individuals were limited to the teaching and ministry professions for the WI community.

As we previously explained, the *Zonians*, along with the Panamanian elites, would derail any noted progress in our education that were being achieved through the new subculture philosophy under the direction of Osborne and his teaching staff in particular. They abruptly changed our curriculum to strictly Spanish classroom instruction while at the same time forced the closing of the WI private schools.

sacrifices great ideas and good people for the look of unity. We prefer the Booker T. Washington black responsibility philosophy (hard work, education, moral standards) designed to bring a degree of freedom and independence even in oppression. We can debate these points of view, but one point is beyond dispute: the time has passed for the so-called intellectual leaders to pose as the voice of our community, while at the same time jockeying for labels, status and position!

Our Qoutes of the Month

"It is in vain that we talk of being men, if we do not the work of men." -- Frederick Douglass -1852

"What appears to be lacking {in our educational philosophy} is a moral tone, a tone which will force our youths to accept a new value system aimed at an education for our community." --DuBois Andrews, CZ School Teacher/Principal, (*Thinker*)-1969

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