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	<h1>Afro-PanaVisions.com</h1>
<p>Visions of a more united, self-determining, nurturing, and networking community</p>	
<h2>On-Line Newsletter</h2>	
<p>August 2008</p>	

Evaluating the Mis-Education of the Afro-Panamanians

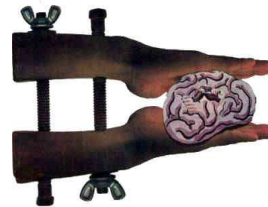
Ability to Properly Structure Ourselves

A Historical Perspective

Grade: **F**

In historical perspective, when African-American civil rights organizations began to dismantle segregation in the 1950s and 1960s, the educated and politically active coming of age Afro-Panamanians tended to pay close attention to the state of affairs of racial politics in the U.S. The young Afro-Panamanians, during the mid 1960s, first created a supposedly umbrella organization: the *Movimiento Afro-Panameño* modeled on the U.S. civil rights movement. Following that, in 1968, the Afro-Panamanian professionals created two middle-class organizations in Colon and Panama City: *the Unión Afro-Panameña* and the *Asociación Afro-Panameña*, respectively. Their aim was to act as pressure groups that could unify blacks of all backgrounds in Panama. These groups held meetings for several years before fading from view, but they took an important step, after much debate, in calling themselves Afro-Panamanians. The name defined out of existence the Anglo-American component of our identity, which the Latins found objectionable at the time. This changed the term of the integration process created by leaders of the *Criollos* generation. (These young professionals would label George Westerman and the other Criollo leaders as "Uncle Toms." But curiously enough, they themselves lost their way— with their strong inclination toward imitative behaviors and instincts.)

The Unusual Forces in our Education!



A poverty of the mind

We have been made fools of, or at the butt of many derogatory remarks regarding our intelligence, for too long. While some may find our following criticisms perhaps unfair or even offensive, we believe it is needed. We must thoroughly analyze ourselves and right our own wrongs if we are to improve on our current stagnant conditions. We must see where and how we have lost our way. It is very obvious that since coming of age we have been attempting to govern ourselves with limited intelligence of various subject matters important to/necessary for community solidarity. We

When Omar Torrijos took control in 1969, he and his advisers grasped the opportunity to redefine us as Afro-Panamanians and openly recruited political support among the young Afro-Panamanians and supported the racially defined black mobilization. Black movements might prove useful in discrediting Zone society. They used language, color, and hand outs to divide the black masses in Panama. By the 1970s all three organizations in Panama had expired, to be replaced by the *Asociación Reivindicadora del Negro Panameño* (ARENEP) and the *Asociación de Profesionales, Obreros y Dirigentes de Ascendencia Negra* (APODAN). Both entities were supported and encouraged by the Torrijos regime and played an important part in mobilizing black support both for Torrijos and for the Panama Canal treaties. These organizations then fell victim to internal disputes and divisions and were largely defunct by the time of Torrijos' death in 1981. General Torrijos' goals were first and primary and when those goals were met, we had nothing to fall back on.

are putting most of the blame on many of the so-called ('Elite Negroes') community leaders that were/are caught up/into themselves with their so-called community standing taking precedence over everything else. We cannot govern ourselves without a philosophy for the basis of our thinking. They should be the ones helping to provide the necessary guidance and direction to the community. These individuals have long been groping around in the dark, not understanding the true purpose of why one seeks scholarly education.

During this same period the "upward mobile" Afro-Panamanians studying or working in the U.S. during the 1960s and 1970s had come into direct contact with the civil rights and Black power movements at the high point of that movement's influence. They, too, began forming "spur of the moment organizations" with traditional limitations to appease Torrijos. In Panama that contact was further reinforced by the presence of African-American soldiers in the Canal Zone, who helped to introduce Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, and the Black Panthers into the local political lexicon. The short-term goals of these U.S. organization/movements were aimed at the Americans. During this period of ego stroking, these individuals experienced a sense of shared accomplishment and self-aggrandizement. However, after the Canal Treaty was signed these organizations/movements also became symbolic and academic/defunct because they really never had/served any other useful purpose.

It all goes back to our learning by rote memory during our formative years, as well as simply memorizing to pass examinations at the higher educational levels for the sole purpose of attaining a title to be considered an "elite" and accepted in the community. Most of these "highly" educated individuals rest on their laurels after graduation and do nothing for/in their communities to help even the least, our children. Furthermore, as the tide goes out, and they are called upon for help, you realize that the majority are swimming naked! Give them a mike and a podium, however, and you'll swear they are somebody. They will talk the talk. Perhaps the whites are correct in stating that we as a group are just plain incapable of democracy. (They did such a good job on the poverty/disempowering of our minds that we can't seem to understand what it takes to get ahead as a group.)

How did the *Latins* really feel about these youths at the time? Well, we have many stories in this regard, but the one most appropriate at this time is that of the prominent historian Roberto de la Guardia who wrote satirical and "mildly" bigoted analysis of the race situation in Panama in his "*Mecos--Chombos--Afros West Indians--Blacks--Latin Americans*." He proposed calling the WI descendants *Melanoanglos* to denote their color and culture. He noted that a struggle had gone on over who would have the power to name this group. First, those residing in Panama and the Zone had fought for this authority, but now the *Melanoanglos* themselves could not agree. Were they blacks, Chombos, Afro-Panamanians? De la Guardia made fun of these young, inexperienced and misguided youths' various attempts at self-identification.

The point we are making is that all of the above organizations were not able to keep things in perspective because none of them understood compassion, discipline, strategy and long-term planning—all important and vital concepts for effectiveness and/or longevity of any community organization. These organizations, and others that came behind them, (including those racial/political defined movements during the Noriega regime in the 1980s--the *Centro de Estudios Afro-Panameños*, and the three *National Congress of Black Panamanians*--were all short lived and failed to achieve much because they refused to envision their goals and the urgent need for shared vision and purpose. Furthermore, we really did not have any "real" political influence during the Torrijos/Noriega strongholds. We may have been led to believe we did then. In short, the young Panamanians did not understand the magnitude/ big picture of the responsibility/community tasks before them. Thus, their aim was to settle for individual gains where possible. These organizations were of no true service to their community/ people.

In addition, there were also numerous cultural organizations operating under the guise of "preserving our heritage," which were ineffective because they really never tried to bridge the generational gap with their programs and membership drives. They sooner or later would become dinosaurs. It is so easy to get a few friends together to form an organization, give it a name, then give everyone a title, to create fancy logos and letterheads for the sole purpose of performing what amounts to be social activities primarily to honor each other's achievements. We have failed miserably in our attempts to organize and govern ourselves.

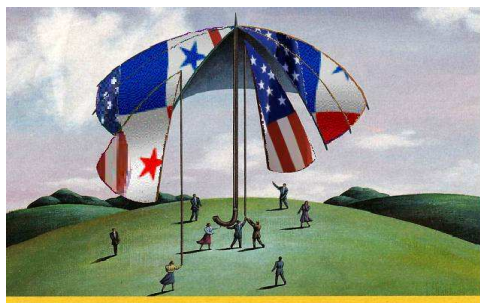


Led to Our Downfall

To effectively accomplish our "assimilation" in Panama's society, the lighter-skinned folks used the usual propaganda to engender their race hate for blacks and our contempt for ourselves; making us feel that our race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other people. We lost moral courage and readily showed our preference for their churches and other establishments of the oppressor and totally neglected those that were established by our forebears—in order to be accepted.

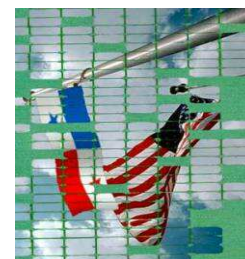
"The West Indian descendants could not contribute to our culture because the illiterate cannot communicate in writing. The ignorant cannot transmit wisdom. Their accusations of discrimination were insincere because they did not encompass plans to assimilate." *Juan Materno Vasquez*

"Our Visions for the Communities"



AfroPanavisions

Building the Proper Governance Structure



A Networking Community

It is time for a new approach to our thinking and actions. If you have not seen our Proposal for assisting our children, you may go to the website and "Contact Us" and we will gladly forward a copy for your perusal and comments and what, if anything, you may be able to bring to the table to help in the situation. You may also request our proposed Constitution and Policy Guide for building what we believe is the proper governance structure for the community. We are still seeking a few more individuals willing to work, collectively, in a disciplined community organizational structure in assisting our children. While some of our community scholars find our proposal "confusing" we prefer to believe it is not. Everything we do/present we endeavor to put our best thinking and minds in the thought process behind it.

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