



Afro-PanaVisions.com

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

On-Line Newsletter

April 2009

Evaluating the Mis-Education of the Afro-Panamanians

Brainwashed and Done Over!

Some have asked why we have not put together our stories in a book/novel. The short answer: Some wise person once said that if you want to hide anything from the Negroes put it in a book—the masses won't buy it to read it. Furthermore, they would more buy it if it is written by a white person. As such, we find it necessary to present our history in "spoon-fed" short stories, hoping that it would be spread wide and far. Fortunately, we have the internet to support the flourishing of our stories (although some still find them too long) that readers can get a glimpse and, hopefully, comprehend more clearly our modern but truncated lives. Furthermore, it allows us to be more creative with our presentations. We believe in presenting our history from the bottom up and at the same time to assure that it speaks for the millions of Blacks in the Diaspora and most importantly, to the memory of thousands of WIs who helped build "the greatest engineering work of its kind ever attempted." This evaluation is about showing how we were brainwashed to subscribing to white supremacist ideals, to self-hate, and bickering among ourselves in Panama. Of note, the quote by the Jamaican Governor below reflects how proud and satisfied with themselves the British were of their methods of dehumanizing our forebears:

(My white doll is so pretty)

They continually emphasized the fact that a number of Panamanian leaders obviously had some Negro ancestry, and lamented the fact that these Panamanians did not proclaim themselves to be Negroes and work for the advancement of their race all over the world. These leaders insisted that the force, which makes life difficult for nonwhite people elsewhere, must affect the Panamanian Negroes also. "They need to travel to be made conscious of their color." Other WIs disagreed. "Why, they reason, "drag colored Panamanians down to our level of hate and frustration when they are used to a way of life in which they are rudely set apart simply because of the color of their skins? They have few psychological scars such as ours; why should we insist that they acquire them?"

The Panamanians would seize the moment and in their attempt to "prove" that the *Costeños* were a superior breed to the WIs, they also point with pride to the historically rebellious nature of the native Negro and smear at the WI's respect for authority, dubbing it servility. They either conveniently forgot or perhaps were unaware (the controlling white minority were not considered a very smart bunch) of the fact that Jamaica was once a Spanish colony with communities of runaway slaves. They promote this rivalry once they perceived the WI as an undesirable bunch, showing preference for canal employment because they spoke English. Often enough when a *Costeño* would get a job on the canal his foreman is a *Chombo*, who "lorded" over him in broken Spanish and could quite easily communicate with the American supervisor in English—with the Irish brogue of Barbados and the cockney twang of Jamaica lingering in their speech. The Panamanians considered this a humiliating spectacle. Thus, the *Costeños* felt superior to the *Chombos*, and when they were treated on a par with them on the Zone, they complained, "*Nos tratan como extranjeros en nuestro propio suelo!*" (We are treated like aliens on our own soil!) Jealousy would occur when the *Chombos* usually looked immaculately clean and well starched when not performing hard work, the women conscientiously obeying the Biblical injunction to "cover your heads." The *Costeños* were convinced that *el Chombo no come para toparse* (the WI forgoes eating in order to dress well.) On the other hand, the majority of the *Costeños*, were satisfied with wearing old, worn-out clothes, which they put on backwards or inside out. Ropes tied around their waste support tin cans, worthless trinkets, and miscellaneous junk, leaving an impression of beggary and mockery.

There is some truth to the fact that the coming-of age Afro-Panamanians of WI descent in particular would rather eat a monotonous and inexpensive diet so they can afford the indispensables of middle-class status: attractive clothing and a high school diploma, the professional degree, the teaching certificate are the passports to middle-class occupations and incomes. The white suit and pretty dress proclaim and ensure that status symbol in the WI community. That's why, to answer a previous question of ours, we see so many of our so-called scholars of the community in academia, thus, our so-called community leadership is affected by/centered in specialization of knowledge and marginalization of human studies.



(The Zionians' humerous postcard photo depicting how to put fear in the Negro child!)

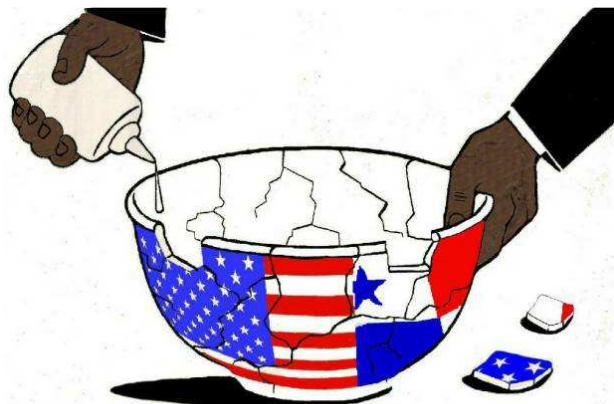
The Rivalry Between the WIs and Costeños

While the British had first emphasized fear and material culture, and later applied the differences in color and insular origin to keep our forebears in line, the Americans came to Panama with their belief in White supremacy and Negro inferiority. They lump us all together, "A Negro is a Negro," regardless of his exact shade, or place of birth, and their desire to keep the Negro 'in his place.' They would use the white police force in applying their fear factor. This treatment and our reading of American periodicals, including Ebony, the Pittsburgh Courier, and the Chicago Defender, as well as Time, Life, and the Reader's Digest, would make us, particularly the younger generation, conscious of ourselves as Negroes with interests in common with the American Negroes. They would further use the "white doll" syndrome to keep our minds occupied with white supremacist ideals and values. How captive/brainwashed were we to white supremacy ideals in this regard? Well, a review of the graduating yearbooks of the classes of the Rainbow City High School between 1950-1962 revealed that, practically without exceptions, the couples with the titles "Mas Simpatico" (Best Looking) were either light-skinned individuals and or those having *pele liso* (good/coolly-looking hair) if they are dark-skinned. As we saw it, they were many of good-looking blacks with "unnatural" hair in our schools that could serve the title well!

On the other hand, and as you know, in Panama City power remained in the hands of the whites despite the large Negro admixture of the population. Negro slaves appeared in Panama as early as 1517. Unlike the Anglo-Saxon slaveholders, the Spaniards imparted much of their culture to the slaves and insisted on baptism and Christian teaching. They were also more eager to take up Indian and Negro women, as there was a shortage of Spanish women. Before long, the typical strain of mixed Spanish, Indian, and Negro emerged in an infinite variety of combinations. By that time the Negro and Indian strain in the population was so pronounced, that Panama was to be called Columbia's "black province." Thus, after construction of the canal and our forebears decided, if not forced to stay in Panama and other parts of Central America, the *Costeños'* descendants already had around 80 years since their emancipation. Therefore, it was unlikely that many Panamanians with considerable Negro admixture really felt greatly inferior or oppressed. By then they did not hate or fear the lighter-skinned folks; they merely considered them lucky.

Dark skin alone was not particularly important in determining a Panamanian's status. If it is combined with straight hair and non-

Afro-Panavisions



(Our institution is broken into pieces and we must put the pieces back together ourselves. We don't need a pair of white hands to do it!)

The Moral of our Short Story

Obviously, it is our opinion that we need to reinterpret/recreate/renew ourselves anew to Panama. First, however, we must recover from our slavish habit of berating our own, bickering among ourselves, and at the same time worshipping others as perfect beings. They (the whites) already believe we are not capable of thinking for ourselves and thus take advantage where possible. Our quest for black identity involves self-respect and the refusal of self-degrading ideals that question black intelligence—stifling intellectual creativity.

Those coming-of-age Afro-Panamanians (both groups) that went on to middle class status in the 1960s were unable to grasp the situation/opportunities as they went off feathering their own nests in their make-believe status world and forgot all about their roots, Colon in particular. As such, we remain unorganized groups. We have become more isolated as a community and our struggles are more tarred with the brush of immortality. With all our (WIs) supposedly better world-knowledge we did not properly identify ourselves to the *Costeños* in order to sidestep the traps of tribalism. As it turns out the young Panamanians of WI descent would "cave in" to Juan Materno Vazquez and his lighter-skinned cronies of *Costeño* descent to join the black masses in worshipping the white minority in power. Giving the fact that our schooling never offered any real course in Negro history, it is true that most of us saw the race question as being settled. Furthermore, many of us, to this day, do not desire to hear anything about race. We seemed to have accepted being assigned the lowest level in Panama's society in which the masses must toil to make a living, and be socially and politically proscribed; remaining in a mentally undeveloped state. That's why we continue to promote our unifying theory in lieu of once a year "Black Solidarity" parades and other annual festivities whereby we dress-up in ethnic garbs and feel good about ourselves without any serious involvement, innovative programs or real community purpose.

Our Quotes of the Month

"It is only Englishmen that can manage coloured labor... The episode (building the canal) has been educational both for the WIs as workers and for Americans as employers of coloured labor. The desultory Jamaicans have been forced to conform to conditions under which alone highly organized industry can be carried on... The method and the manners of white U.S. foremen in dealing with Negroes have been very wholesomely civilized." Governor Sir Sydney Olivier of Jamaica ca. 1917
"If the Negro in the ghetto must eternally be fed by the hand that pushes him into the ghetto, he will never become strong enough to get out of the ghetto."—Carter G. Woodson (*Our literary hero.*)



Negroid features, the assumption is that the person is of Spanish and Indian ancestry, which is regarded as highly preferable to Negro ancestry. A dark person with smooth hair feels less prejudice directed against him than does a lighter person with kinky hair. The Panamanians have a saying which they quote to the children of a mixed-blood family to defend the ones who happen to be darker: "*El color es accidente, pero el pelo no miente,*" (Color is an accident, but hair tells no lies). They used a number of terms to describe the various degree of curl if the person in question is not being disparaged: *bastante crespo* (quite curly), *Pelo rizado* (curly but not necessarily Negroid), *Pelo liso or lacio* (smooth, slightly wavy hair), and *Cholo or chorreado* (Stubbornly-straight hair, like that of the Indians.)

As for the term Negro, it was/is considered a derogatory term, offensive, an insult. A Negro was to be called *Moreno* or "brown" in social situations where "Negro" would be an insult. Panamanians would also say of those whose color may be a stumbling block to higher status, "*El color le ofende,*" (His color holds him back). Colored people appeared satisfied with their treatment in the Republic. Among most social groups people married whom they pleased and associated with whom they pleased. There was a time when some upper-class middle class families made some attempt to discourage intermarriage. Today, it has become quite prevalent, especially among the young people, since it is a matter of love, family relationship and personal taste rather than social status and the law, intermarriage is not considered a problem. As a matter of fact, most mutually benefit!

In connection with the Zonians' brainwashing techniques, however, we further became captive to the Panamanians' insults and began emphasizing on marrying "light" and the heavy use of hair bleaches and brown powder by girls who wanted to appear more Caucasian. In the absence of any color line more definite than noted above, it is not to be wondered that *Costeños* and other part Negroes in Panama felt little or no sense of identification with Negroes elsewhere, or with our forebears then. Westerman and other WI leaders "got it" and thought it was a grave error.

Oswald Baptiste - Editorial Coordinator
Claretta F. Prescott - Content Review Editor
Earl P. Watson - Joselyn Lynch
Jacqueline King - Evita Dove
Veronica Vazques

Click below to visit our website. We are always striving to keep the pages fresh.

<http://afropanavisions.com/>

[Visit our Web site](#)
[Unsubscribe](#)