

**Oswald Baptiste**

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	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Afro-PanaVisions.com</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Visions of a more united, self-determining, nurturing, and networking community</p>
<p><b>On-Line Newsletter</b> November 2008</p>	

**Evaluating the Mis-Education of the Afro-Panamanians**
**Our Leadership Abilities**


*(A very slow progress since Emancipation)*

**Grade: What else? 'F'**

*(For simply not understanding the processes necessary for wise leadership, coupled with a strong desire to emulate others rather than to be self-governing.)*

**AfroPanaVisions**


*(Our galant attempt to bring it all together)*

**Historical Perspective**

Our community leadership activities are rated very poor. Obviously, the unfavorable conclusion is heavily influenced by the prior unsatisfactory ratings we gave to our organizing, preservation abilities

Our current leadership crisis provides us another opportunity to look again to our history and remind ourselves of its lessons. We have long lost our way! As a matter of fact, we never found a way! We have never been able to grasp the structural and institutional processes that are necessary for successful community organizing. Moreover, we have never had any serious strategic thinking about how to create models of leadership throughout our history-- since our forebears were dragged from Africa. We need to foster a deeper understanding of the processes of leadership, self-reliance, and innovation.

Again, we can't help but direct our criticism mostly at the supposedly highly-educated individuals in the community, because they have been unable to provide any progressive thinking, far-reaching and inspiring leadership in the community despite their so-called advanced knowledge/higher grasp of

**Our mandate for change is a mandate for innovation**

The crisis of our lack of community leadership can be remedied only if we candidly confront its existence. First, we are not picking on the so-called elites of the community because we believe they are stupid. On the contrary, we believe they need to be jolted awake. Our history shows that we never had the experience of an education for a democratic life growing up in Panama. On the Zone we were low caste, high-end ghetto--by design--bound by rigid restrictions which were partially inherent in a government corporation, partially fostered by American race prejudice. In the Republic, we were marginal men and women, (living mostly in second-class environments), insecure in citizenship status, culturally disoriented. On both sides of the line our education was substandard. We believed that coming-of-age and not having the proper education for a democratic life, lacking any self-governing abilities, and realizing that Panamanian citizenship was perhaps the right way to go, we began emulating Panamanian ways of preferring to follow a charismatic leader (many endorsing Arnulfo Arias) or a strong man the likes of Gen. Torrijos then Gen. Noriega.

With that duly noted our leadership and organizing activities should be determined by our own make-up and by what our environment required of us. It should not simply be by imitating how we see others do things in the application. Our observation of community activities is that hardly anything is formally planned or well organized/thought out. We must forge a new path in creating a

situations and issues. It is necessary to note that most of the scholars in our community, strangely enough, are in academia. (We will explain the historical reason as to why that is in the upcoming quarterly edition.)

These mis-educated individuals tend to estrange themselves from the masses by calling attention to their own marginality. That is, they will often sound off about their perceived standards of excellence--yet usually spin out mediocre manuscript/analysis having to do with other world matters and nothing that may enlighten or uplift the masses in their own communities toward progress. They are quick to borrow ideas from others instead of delving into community problems and working out some original thought of their own. They hardly do any research for gathering community data for analysis. To put it bluntly, they really are of no use to community organizing in their status-minded/ make-believe world. Rhetoric becomes a substitute for any analyses of the problems in the communities. They simply aspire to be successful imitators in the ongoing social order. Many will prefer the status quo--their perceived favorable status in the community. They further attempt to pose as the voice of the community and thus revert to isolated groups and insulated conversations among themselves (if they happen to get along). Some of them will either remain silent or otherwise complain/criticize any honest efforts/attempts in the community to galvanize others around the goals they would like to share--because they usually have no alternatives to any proposal.

Furthermore, these ambitious individuals and other so-called leaders, (those that believe achieving middle-class status makes them a leader) in their struggle for the little things allotted by others have been preventing any achievement of the masses in more constructive matters. Their much-ado-about-nothing has rendered impossible cooperation in the communities, the most essential thing in the development of a people. One has a position created by the oppressors, which the other wants and they struggle to compete and supersede each other. As such, type of everything in the community must yield ground to this trivial contest--a well designed system created by/of the oppressors that we have historically and blindly fell for. A system that was first accomplished during the days of slavery of restricting the assembly of "field negroes" to certain times and places and compelling them to meet in the presence of a stipulated number of selected and privileged individuals ("house negroes") to maintain a semblance of order.... During post-emancipation in the Caribbean, the British colonial method of dealing with the freemen included doling out favors and privileges to a few to achieve the same results. The *Zonians* continued the practice and as we mentioned prior, Gen. Torrijos picked up on it. As a matter of fact, the Panamanian elites took it a step further by doling out "medals" and "keys" to some individuals in the community to make them feel that they have overcome their *Chombo* background and were fully accepted. The government will continue to use these medal-giving ceremonies to their advantage, where necessary, to win us over. This is another unattractive and demeaning type of behavior we are addicted to that must be discontinued!

A particular related case that comes to mind is the story of Lloyd LaBeach, who excelled in the 1937 Pan-American games in Panama. Born in Panama, he went to Jamaica after the games to study. On his return the authorities denied his Panamanian citizenship and refused him entry. He went to the States, and there he became a track star and further excelled in the 1948 Olympics--whereupon Panama ignored Arnulfo Arias' law rescinding the citizenship of English-speaking *Chombos*, and claimed him as a native son. He was given Panama's highest honor, the Order of Vasco Núñez de Balboa, and a scholarship to study dentistry in the States.

Now, please don't read us wrong. We are not saying that they are not many individuals deserving of these medals of recognition. Our argument rests on the observation that the government demeaned the value of these medals by, at times, doling them out (especially during the National elections) at their convenience--for self-serving, glorified photo opportunities-- rather than for legitimate meritorious purposes. They do this knowing how gullible and grateful we are for any little semblance of acceptance. They are also acutely aware that it would surely create jealousy and envy among certain dissident factions in the community.

***The Curse of (limited) Knowledge!***

community/self-governing system with a trusted source of knowledge and best practices that operates transparently under common sense rules and regulations. It's time to transform the larger picture so that its value addresses the needs of our children's future. Investing in our children is investing in the future of our community and of society. To accomplish this new path we must begin to foster and support a community atmosphere centered on innovation. That is, to create innovative programs that blends the disciplines of leadership with a community perspective of giving back. Creating sustainable communities and just feeling good about performing work is what dynamic and creative leadership, coupled with true volunteerism should be all about.

We are simply suggesting instilling some core values to entrench innovation in the community mind-set---encouraging the community on a whole to take risks and think about novel solutions that is true and in keeping to our time, issues and problems. In other words, we need more original thinking regarding advancing an innovative agenda for accomplishing the bigger, brighter community picture/image. A climate/agenda for innovation is vital in determining a shift in our leadership values for the community. Innovation is a process that translates knowledge into economic growth and social well being. To create/acquire such climate requires risk-taking, questioning, openness, patience and trust. All five must be used together. Risk-taking without questioning leads to recklessness, while patience without trust sets up an every-man-for-himself mentality. Openness will foster a climate of trust. We must be able to do these things because we can. But there is another reason. We all should because we must.

Let our past speak for our future!

### The key to our community success



(Working together for the common good)

***"The more you know, the more you understand"***



(The Congos are descendants of Panamanian slaves who were brought to the

**AfroPanavisions***(Seeing the brighter picture)***The other "old guards"***(Trapped within the proverbial box)*

Obviously our innovative minds, with that of the other "old guards" (first-born Afro-Panamanians) in the community don't think alike (it's a pickle of a paradox). The great enemy of knowledge (for us on a whole) is not necessarily only our sheer ignorance of the past—it's also that of 'knowingness/knowing it all.' A feeling encouraged by TV and the Internet, in particular, that give many of us the feeling that we are well informed and on top of things. We are hip and always know what's up. The truth is we don't have a collective clue, to this day, as to what has happened or is happening in our own backyards right under our own noses!

The curse of knowledge means that once one becomes a so-called expert in a particular subject, it's hard to imagine not knowing what you do after awhile. However, when everybody knows that something is so, it sometimes means that nobody knows anything. In other words, it becomes nearly impossible to look beyond what you know and think outside the box you've built around yourself. Thus, when it's time to accomplish a task; those supposedly in the know (primarily the old guards) try to get it done the way it has been done (not necessarily the right way) thereby stifling innovation and creativity as they barrel along the well-worn, beaten path of self-perpetuating mediocrity.

Sometimes you have to look way outside the box to realize what you have within because the proverbial box in which we think are thickening -- complacency/rigor mortis is bound to set in and original thoughts are nonexistent. In other words, you have to systematically expose yourself to things outside of your domain/expertise because breakthrough ideas will come from areas and directions you will not recognize/tap into because you are "boxed in" and constrained by the lackadaisical routine.

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Isthmus during the Colonial period)

**Historical Tidbits**

In 1610 an official report listed 548 citizens: 303 women, 156 children, 146 mulattoes, 148 free Negroes and 3,500 African slaves of both sexes as the population of Panama. Many slaves escaped into the woods. These *Cimarrones* had crowned the fierce Bayano their king. In 1554 Governor Alvaro de Sosa sent an expedition against Bayano of which only four Spaniards survived. Later the Spaniards were successful in capturing Bayano, whose memorial is now a river in eastern Panama province.



(A mosquito-control squad of the "Silvermen" (WI descendants) removes containers that offer breeding places to mosquitos during construction)

The following is a Silverman's poetic version of the Canal administration's Gold & Silver system of remuneration, which we found and thought we should also share:

"Silver" and "Gold" divide the human race.

Here where a fountain's polluted by a stare,

A "silver" man must keep his silver place;

He waits in silver lines, eats silver fare.

Each licks a postage stamp within the pale,

Only at midnight when all colors fail,

What law has done, Freud's children will undo.

And in "gold" churches what do preachers tell

Their congregations in the pews of gold:

Of gentler burnings in the golden hell?

Of dimmer heavens for the silver fold?

But heaven is here: gold homes, gold jobs, and gold schools--

And in the heaven of gold latrines, gold schools.

Sydney Roberts, (Jamaica) *Spotlight*, March 1946

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