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British West Indians in Panama:

An Analysis of Linda Smart Chubb's Memorandum in *The Forgotten People*

Nicole Butzke

M.A. Thesis

Supervised by Dr. Ronald Harpelle

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Introduction: The Forgotten People

The history of West Indian labourers on the Panama Canal is one of the most significant chapters in the history of the West Indian diaspora. The West Indian immigrants who worked on the canal left their native islands looking for better wages and opportunities. Most planned on returning to their island homes but as time passed numerous West Indians became permanent residents in Panama or moved on in search of new opportunities. The integration of West Indian people into the Hispanic society of Panama was not an easy transition for the West Indians or Panamanians. The cultural and social history of the West Indian diaspora in Panama was left undocumented by much of the early literature. Historians began to tell the story of the labourers, looking beyond the military, economic and political aspects of the Panama Canal, as interest in the workers lives increased. The many varieties of documents available to researchers of the West Indian community in Panama has produced a wide range of literature on the subject. Histories documenting the struggles of the West Indian community often provide first hand accounts of the hardships faced by the workers. Historians have molded the different accounts together to create a precise story relating the day to day lives of workers, their organizations, and the impact of their community on the Isthmus.¹ Though a vast amount of written documents are

¹ The following of a number of books which have documented the history of West Indians in Panama and its neighbour Costa Rica. The following is a list of key texts which examine the role of West Indian labourers and society in Panama, the Canal Zone and Costa Rica. Aviva Chomsky, *West Indian Workers and the United Fruit Company in Costa Rica 1870-1940* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996); Michael L. Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal: Panama, 1904-1981* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1985); Ronald Harpelle, *The West Indians of Costa Rica: Race, Class and the Integration of and Ethnic Minority* (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001); Lancelot S. Lewis, *The West Indian in Panama: Black Labor in Panama, 1850-1914* (Washington D.C.: University Press of America, Inc., 1980); Trevor O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship: The Evolution of Black West Indian Society in Panama 1914-1964* (Toronto: University Press of America, Inc., 2006); Trevor W. Purcell, *Banana Fallout: Class, Color, and Culture Among West Indians in Costa Rica* (Los Angeles: University of California, 1993); Lara Putnam, *The Company They Kept: Migrants and the Politics of Gender in Caribbean Costa Rica, 1870-1960* (London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Michael D. Olien, "The Negro in Costa Rica: The Ethnohistory of an Ethnic Minority in a Complex Society" PhD diss., (University of Oregon, 1967); Trevor W. Purcell, "Conformity and Dissension: Social Inequality, Values and Mobility Among West Indian Migrants in Limon, Costa Rica." PhD diss., (The John Hopkins University, 1982).

available, histories or primary resources documenting the lives of West Indians were not commonly written by West Indians.

Of the many documents available to researchers, one report stands out as a unique first hand account of the history of the West Indian diaspora in Panama. In 1943 Linda Smart Chubb, a West Indian woman of British citizenship working at the British Legation wrote a memorandum entitled, "The British West Indians and the British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" as part of a collection called *The Forgotten People*.² Linda Smart Chubb wrote the document recording the history of British West Indian representation which she observed while working in numerous positions at British Consulates. Over twenty-two years of experience in the consulate provided the information for the report and placed the writer in a unique position to comment on the situation faced by the West Indian community in Panama. While the writer's experiences are focused on Panama City, she also worked for His Majesty's Consulate in Colon, and for His Majesty's Vice-Consulate in Colon which makes her opinions more widely applicable to the country as a whole. The years spent in the Consulate in Panama City and in the Consulate and Legation in Colon provide not only a voice to the British West Indian community across Panama but within the Canal Zone as well.³ Linda Smart Chubb was able to respond to years of consular and diplomatic actions, involving the British, Panamanian and United States governments, as well as the consequences of decisions made regarding the West Indian community.

Though the document was written at the request of the Vice-Consul at the time J.A.

² Linda Smart Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People: A Report on the Condition of British West Indians on the Isthmus of Panama*. (The National Archives of the United Kingdom, CO 318/447/6 36377), 1.

³ J.A. Thwaites, "Introduction" in *The Forgotten People: A Report on the Condition of British West Indians on the Isthmus of Panama*. (The National Archives of the United Kingdom, CO 318/447/6 36377), 1.

Thwaites, it is important to note the Linda Smart Chubb was able to provide her opinions without fear of repercussions. Vice-Consul Thwaites expressly instructed her to provide her personal opinions “in the frankest possible way”.⁴ Unfortunately, due to relocation Linda Smart Chubb was unable to complete the report herself, but Vice-Consul Thwaites used her notes, partial draft and prior conversations to complete the memorandum. Though Vice-Consul Thwaites claims to have provided only Linda Smart Chubb’s opinions it is important to be aware of his role in the completion of the memorandum.

The memorandum examines the West Indian community and its interaction with British representatives in the area. Although the document was completed by Vice-Consul Thwaites its value is not diminished because Linda Smart Chubb conducted all the research for the memorandum, and her impressions form the bulk of the document. The fact that a woman of British West Indian descent was able to provide her views on the community at large was and remains unprecedented. While the majority of the information discussed in the memorandum is now available in the secondary literature, the document provides further support and a much needed individual first hand account of the life for British West Indians on the Isthmus.

The memorandum containing five sections describes the lives of British West Indians from the French era to 1942. The introduction provides background information regarding Linda Smart Chubb’s ancestry and her own life, making it possible to develop a better understanding of her personal perceptions. The next section entitled “Original Position of British West Indians in Canal Zone” further describes her fathers arrival on the Isthmus as an example of early West Indian workers. The section quickly documents the shift from French employers to the U.S.

⁴ Thwaites, “Introduction” in *The Forgotten People*, 1.

administration. Section two goes on to describe and provide examples of segregation in the Canal Zone. Topics such as living quarters, wages and health care are a few of the major concerns Linda Smart Chubb addresses. The memorandum also explains why segregation was pursued with such vigor and determination by the 'American' workers and administration.

In section three, "Repercussions on the Situation in Panama" Linda Smart Chubb describes the changing racial climate in Panama towards West Indians after decades of U.S. influence. Changing West Indian attitudes towards the British government are also considered. The fourth section then provides insight into the British Consulates approach to complaints brought forth by the British West Indians. Linda Smart Chubb explains the inherent faith West Indians placed in the British Consulate and the shifting of their opinions as discrimination increased. The responsibilities of Consular officers and the requirements of their position are also discussed in this section. The final section considers future "Possibilities for Representation of British West Indians on the Isthmus". By 1942, West Indians were disillusioned with the system of representation provided by the British government and were searching for new ways to provide themselves and their families with a secure life. Linda Smart Chubb provides recommendations to restore the faith of the West Indian community in Britain, through better representation. The conclusion of the memorandum ends off mid-sentence leaving an unknown amount of missing information. Though the memorandum ends suddenly, Linda Smart Chubb's opinions and recommendations provide extensive information about the struggles of British West Indians in Panama.

The memorandum did play a role after its completion which is described in Michael

Conniff's book *Black Labour on the White Canal*.⁵ In 1943 the Anglo-American Caribbean Commission received a copy of *The Forgotten People* report and began an investigation into the allegations raised within it.⁶ The allegations were quickly proved and fear of possible communist conversion led to numerous attacks on Canal Zone policies. Though Linda Smart Chubb's memorandum was only a section of the overall report, her observations and recommendations are an important addition to the history of British West Indians in Panama. This thesis aims to further demonstrate the importance of the memorandum by analyzing and situating its' content within the historical discourse regarding West Indians in Panama. As a unique account, Linda Smart Chubb's memorandum adds a different voice to the extensive historical record, bringing forward a new perspective on the West Indian diaspora.

A review of the literature demonstrates the importance of Linda Smart Chubb's writing in a wider historical context. General histories of Panama focus largely on its pre-colonial and colonial history, as well as its international position, the building of the canal and the involvement of the United States in Panamanian affairs. Two examples of this type of literature are Sandra Meditz and Dennis Hanratty's *Panama: A Country Study* and Gerstle Mack's, *The Land Divided*.⁷ Early historical accounts focus largely on five main events: the landing of

⁵ Conniff, *Black Labour on a White Canal*, 107.

⁶ The Anglo-American Caribbean Commission was established in 1942 to coordinate the defense of the Caribbean. The concerns surrounding communism and its' growing number of supporters, made the dissatisfaction of the West Indian community an important defense issue. Unhappy workers were more likely to convert to communism, which could in turn cause defense issues in the Canal Zone. Conniff, *Black Labour on a White Canal*, 107.

⁷ Gerstle Mack, *The Land Divided: A History of the Panama Canal and other Isthmian Canal Projects* (New York: Alfred A. Knoff, 1944); Sandra W. Meditz and Dennis M. Hanratty eds., *Panama: A Country Study* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1989). Other texts of this nature include Sue Core, *Panama Yesterday and Today* (New York: North River Press, 1945); David Howarth, *Panama: Four Hundred Years of Dreams and Cruelty* (New York: Mc Graw-Hill Book Company, 1966); Jean Gilbreath Niemeier, *The Panama Story* (Portland, Oregon: Metropolitan Press, 1968); Logan Marshall, *The Story of the Panama Canal: The Wonderful Account of the Gigantic Undertaking Commenced by the French, and Brought to Triumphant Completion By the United States with A History of Panama from the Days of Balboa to the Present Time* (L.T.Myers, 1913).

Europeans, the sacking of Old Panama by Morgan, the building of the Panamanian Railway, the construction attempt of the French Canal Company and ultimately the building of the Panama Canal by the United States. More recent works provide information regarding these key events as an introduction to histories written after the completion of the canal.

Panama: A Country Study uses the early history of Panama to provide a framework for examining the Panamanian economy, government, society, environment and national security. Unfortunately while the book provides extensive information in the economic and political arenas, little attention is given to the diverse societal groups living in Panama. Though the author claims that his purpose is “describing, and analyzing its [Panama's] political, economic, social, and national security systems and institutions”, the examination of social aspects of Panama's history are limited. The book describe three main societal groups, the mestizos, Antillean 'blacks' and the tribal Indians. For each group a concise but limited history is provided examining their culture and history in Panama. Although the section covering society is limited the book succeeds in it purpose to describe Panama in the late 1980s. While the authors provide a full historical account the book is limited by it size and scope. A more extensive history of Panama can be found in Gerstle Mack's *The Land Divided*.

Gerstle Mack's *The Land Divided* focuses on historical events but provides a comprehensive history documenting four centuries of Panama's past. The book focuses on discoveries, conquests, wars, raids, explorations, adventures, engineering projects...economics, politics, diplomatic maneuvers, revolutions, disease, labour problems, and the men – heroic, villainous, competent, mediocre, and occasionally absurd – who conceived it, constructed it, quarreled over it, and at times almost wrecked it.⁸

⁸ Osgood Hardy, “Untitled Review”, *The Pacific Historical Review* (Vol. 14, No.1: Mar 1945), 99.

While the historical account provided is exceptional, limited insight into the people of Panama is given. The 'men' the author refers to are not the common people of Panama but the elite men of numerous societies which were interested in building a canal. Even without the common people's voice the book provides an interesting version of Panama's history from the Spanish Era to the completion of the Canal, that still holds value six and a half decades later. Gerstle Mack assembled information from a vast collection of sources focusing on "political, economic, strategic, hygienic and engineering aspects of the canal".⁹ *The Land Divided* when published in 1944 was the most extensive, well balanced account ever written about the Panama Canal.¹⁰ Although the book is now one of many, Mack was the first to attempt a complete history of Panama covering four centuries of interest in the little country's potential as a crossing point of Central America.

The difficult task of providing a comprehensive history of Panama still haunts historians today as much as it did in 1944 when Gerstle Mack published *The Land Divided*. Gerstle Mack and Sandra Meditz and Dennis Hanratty were all challenged by the need to include a vast amount of research into the books they wished to publish. Due to the vast amount of literature surrounding Panama and the Panama Canal, researchers have been required to limit the scope of their research while trying to provide a well rounded historical study.¹¹ Because of the sheer volume of information available researchers must decide what is most valuable to their work. Consequently, many specialized and minutely focused studies have been completed to

⁹ Mack, *The Land Divided*, VI.

¹⁰ Hardy, "Untitled Review", 99.

¹¹ Fessenden N. Otis, *Illustrated History of the Panama Railroad; together with a traveler's guide and business man's hand-book for the Panama Railroad and its connections with Europe, the United States, the north and south Atlantic and the Pacific coasts, China, Australia, and Japan, by sail and steam*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper, 1862); Peter Earle, *The Sack of Panamá: Captain Morgan and the Battle for the Caribbean* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2007).

compliment the general histories which cannot hope to include all the information available.

Panamanian life, the impact of foreign development, politics, the economy of Panama,¹² as well as the construction of the Panama Canal are just a few of the secondary topics addressed by current historical literature.¹³ As the study of social history has grown, many books examining the lives of workers building the canal, and on life in the Canal Zone, have been written. Another important topic of newer historical literature is the description and analysis of the relationship between the United States and Panama.¹⁴ Understanding the evolution of the U.S. and Panamanian relationship is a key component of historical works trying to develop a greater understanding of the history of Panama. Following the example of Lester Langley's book *America and the Americas: The United States in the Western Hemisphere*, Michael Conniff attempts to provide a survey of 170 years of U.S. and Panamanian relations in *Panama and The United States*.¹⁵ By using Langley's approach Conniff is able to "emphasize a broad range of interactions between the countries involved, not just political and military but cultural, economic,

¹² John Biesanz and Mavis Biesanz, *The People of Panama* (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1944).

¹³ This is a limited list of the books available which focus on the building of the Panama Canal. Michael La Rosa and Germán R. Mejía eds., *The United States Discovers Panama: The Writings of Soldiers, Scholars, Scientists and Scoundrels, 1850-1905* (Toronto: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004); Arthur Bullard, *Panama: The Canal, The Country and The People* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1914); David McCullough, *The Path Between the Seas: The Creation of the Panama Canal 1870-1914* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977).

¹⁴ The following are a few examples of the secondary literature available that focus on the relationship between Panama and the United States. Mark Falcoff, *Panama's Canal: What Happens When the United States Gives a Small Country What It Wants* (Washington, D.C.: The AEI Press, 1998); Sheldon B. Liss, *The Canal: Aspects of United States Panamanian Relations* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1967); Thomas D. Schoonover, *The United States in Central America, 1860-1911: Episodes of Social Imperialism & Imperial Rivalry in the World System* (London: Duke University Press, 1991); and Michael L. Conniff, *Panama and The United States: The Forced Alliance* (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1992).

¹⁵ The structure of *Panama and the United States: The Forced Alliance* is based on the approach used by Lester D. Langley when writing *America and the Americas: The United States in the Western Hemisphere*. Langley's book examines the relationship between the U.S. and Latin American from colonialism to 1870 and is an important source when trying to understand the relationship of the United States and Latin America. Thomas M. Leonard's book *Central America and the United States: The Search for Stability* is another book in the series entitled *The United States and The Americas* which provides an in depth look into the U.S. and Central American relationship. Lester D. Langley, *America and the Americas: The United States in the Western Hemisphere* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1989). Thomas M. Leonard, *Central America and the United States: The Search for Stability* (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1991).

migrational, linguistic, and symbolic”.¹⁶ Conniff's inclusion of social history allows the reader to understand more than the political and economic relationship which formed between Panama and the U.S., allowing for a greater overall understanding. The inclusion of social history which was limited in early works is a welcome and important change in the literature.

The inclusion of the West Indians, local Panamanians and other ethnic groups living in Panama is notably absent in early writing, leaving the reader's understanding largely limited to political, military and economic events. Earlier works often focus on the importance of cross continental travel and the construction projects required to make that transportation a reality. Many pamphlets and reports, debate the possible locations of a cross continental canal and focus on labour issues involved with large scale construction.¹⁷ Although early reports provide limited insight into the social history of the people, they do explain the reasons for the United States' interest in Panama which were mainly political, economic and military. Studies about the relationship between the U.S. and Panama have in turn led to literature which examines labour history. As a result of the clear gap in the literature, numerous studies in recent decades have focused on the importance and migration of West Indian labourers working on the canal. Due to early histories that provided little information about the canal workers a large gap was apparent in the literature available.

As historical studies focusing on West Indians have emerged, it has become apparent that their role as labourers was by no means limited to the building of the Panama Canal. West Indians traveled throughout the Central American region often moving from one country to

¹⁶ Conniff, *Panama and the United States: The Forced Alliance*, 1.

¹⁷ *Pamphlets on the Panama Canal, 1886-1928* (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, 1989); Rubén Darío Carles, *Crossing the Isthmus of Panama*, trans. Phyllis Spencer (Panama: 1964); Dwight Carroll Miner, *The Fight For the Panama Route: The Story of the Spooner Act and the Hay-Herrán Treaty* (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1966).

another. Due to the ease of movement between Central America and the Caribbean in the early 1900s little formality was required for immigration. West Indians laboured throughout the region on many different construction projects and in the banana industry, often moving between countries and projects as the wages or the number of positions changed. A collection of labour histories has grown to encompass not only the West Indians working on the Panama Canal but those who worked in other regions of Central America as well.

For instance, recent Costa Rican histories follow a similar trend drawing attention to ethnic minorities while focusing on the impact of immigrant labourers on Costa Rica and transnational corporations.¹⁸ Due to the similarity between transnational corporations and the Canal Zone authority, important comparisons and conclusions can be drawn from both Panamanian and Costa Rican literature. Extensive research has been completed regarding the United Fruit Company, the Canal Zone and other United States corporations producing a large body of literature.¹⁹ The research completed regarding transnational corporations has shown the connection between corporations and Caribbean migration.²⁰ Due to the large scale migration of Caribbean people to Central America as labourers, more recent studies have shifted to encompass ethnic minorities. The most recent works focus on workers rights, cultural assimilation and the daily lives and struggles faced by West Indian migrant labourers.²¹ In

¹⁸ Harpelle, *The West Indians of Costa Rica*; Paula Palmer, "What Happen": *A Folk-History of Costa Rica's Talamanca Coast* (San José: Ecodesarrollos, 1977); Putnam, *The Company They Kept*; Philippe I. Bourgois, *Ethnicity at Work: Divided Labour on a Central American Banana Plantation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989); Chomsky, *West Indian Workers and the United Fruit Company*.

¹⁹ Stacey May and Galo Plaza, *The United Fruit Company in Latin America* (National Planning Association, 1958); Thomas McCann, *An American Company: The Tragedy of United Fruit* ed. Henry Scammell (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1976). Additional sources have been previously listed for literature which focuses on the Panama Canal.

²⁰ Roy Simon Bryce-Laporte, "Jamaican Contribution to the Construction of the Panama Canal: A Circum-Caribbean Overview" in *West Indian Participation in the Construction of the Panama Canal* (Mona, Jamaica: Latin American-Caribbean Centre, June 15-17, 2000), 13.

²¹ See footnote 1 for studies which document the lives of West Indians in Panama and Costa Rica.

contrast to recent writing, early books examining the social history of Panama and Costa Rica have focused on the Spanish residents while only completing a cursory examination of the West Indian population.

A good example of early literature focusing on Panamanians is John and Mavis Biesanz's, *The People of Panama* which attempts to examine the lives of both men and women from a number of different ethnicities and classes. *The People of Panama* identifies four main 'groups' within Panamanian society: the urban Panamanian, the rural Panamanian, 'Americans' [Zonians] and the West Indian 'Negro' immigrants.²² Topics such as family life, recreational interests, education, as well as political activities constitute the bulk of information provided. John and Mavis Biesanz wrote a similar book on Costa Rica with the purpose of providing a survey for the general public. According to the authors, their account "performs an unusual service for North Americans who wish to understand better their southern neighbors. It tells about the ordinary life of ordinary people."²³ While both *Costa Rican Life* and *The People of Panama* were written to provide surveys of society, the purpose of *The People of Panama* became much larger. John and Mavis Biesanz theorized that understanding how the United States and Panamanians dealt with the social challenges caused by the construction of the canal and the large scale immigration of West Indian peoples, would one day be more important than the building of the Canal. The authors believed that it was possible that military and economic success would "in the long run prove less important to our country and to the world than will our handling of the social

²² Biesanz and Biesanz, *The People of Panama*, 7.

²³ John Biesanz and Mavis Biesanz, *Costa Rican Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944) The book *The Costa Ricans* is the second survey of Costa Rica written by Richard Biesanz, Mavis Hiltunen Biesanz and Karen Zubris Biesanz. Richard Biesanz, Karen Zubris Biesanz and Mavis Hiltunen Biesanz, *The Costa Ricans* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1982).

challenges produced by its existence.”²⁴ The large immigration of West Indians into Panama has provided a unique social situation for historians to examine. The coming together of three distinct cultures to build the Panama Canal fundamentally changed the societal composition of Panama and in turn its recent history.

Examining the changes in population as well as being aware of the different 'groups' of inhabitants living on the Isthmus is an important step towards the inclusion of ethnic minorities in the secondary literature. Previously many histories failed to address the topic of ethnic minorities by either completely disregarding them or by making only limited mention of their presence. For example, in *The Panama Story* written by Jean Gilbreath Niemeier in 1968, only a paragraph is devoted to the examination of West Indians who made up a large number of Panama's residents.²⁵ In contrast, later studies, begin to focus individually on distinct ethnic minorities such as the West Indians and Chinese present in Panama.²⁶ Instead of minimizing the existence of West Indians as well as other minorities in the population, authors have begun to investigate the unique contributions of non-native groups to the development and growth of Panama.

Three books that specifically examine West Indians in Panama are *Between Alienation and Citizenship: The Evolution of Black West Indian Society in Panama 1914-1964*, *The West Indians in Panama: Black Labour in Panama, 1850-1914* and *Black Labour on a White Canal:*

²⁴ Biesanz and Biesanz, *The People of Panama*, 10.

²⁵ Niemeier, *The Panama Story*, 256. This is not the only book guilty of disregarding the West Indian population. The first book written by John and Mavis Biesanz about Costa Rica only minimally mentioned West Indians and always in a negative light. In *Costa Rican Life* the authors wrote the following about the West Indians inhabitants of the province of Limon, “Jamaican Negroes were finally brought in to do the job. Today the government has ... a race problem”. Biesanz and Biesanz, *Costa Rican Life*, 153.

²⁶ A number books which focus West Indians have already been listed in previous footnotes. For information regarding the Chinese in Panama see Lok C.D. Siu, *Memories of a Future Home: Diasporic Citizenship of Chinese in Panama* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005).

Panama, 1904-1981. Each author writes about a different period making the three texts complimentary. Lancelot Lewis examines the presence of West Indians in Panama from the building of the Panama railway to the completion of the canal. Trevor O'Reggio's work begins the same year that Lewis' work finishes providing a continuation of the history of West Indians on the Isthmus. Both Lewis' and O'Reggio's books are further enhanced by the contribution of Michael Conniff which specifically documents the history of West Indians labouring on the Panama Canal. The three books provide a solid base of knowledge for any work examining the lives of West Indians in Panama.

Each works highlights different aspects providing a unique contribution to the historical dialog. Lancelot Lewis' introduction provides the reader with the important ability to differentiate "between the native blacks, or former slaves, and the immigrant black, or West Indian".²⁷ As these two groups form distinct populations within Panamanian society it is very important to understand the differences between them. The history of each group is unique and the societal differences are vast. Native 'blacks' speak Spanish and are considered Panamanian. West Indian 'blacks' are English speaking immigrants from the Caribbean. The ability to differentiate between the two is of paramount importance when trying to understand both Panamanian and West Indian society. After defining who the West Indians were, Lewis writes the history of West Indians in Panama from 1850 to 1914 including their contributions to the Panama railway, the French attempt and the U.S. Canal.

Trevor O'Reggio examines the changing culture of West Indian immigrants, beginning his study at the completion of the canal. As a way to sum up the stages of acculturation that

²⁷ Lewis, *The West Indian in Panama*, 2.

occurred O'Reggio writes,

Pressed from both sides, the Black West Indians had to adapt their survival strategies to the various challenges. Initially, they cooperated more with their U.S. employers, even adopting some of their cultural values, and cooperated less with the Panamanian host society. Early resistance eventually gave way to cooperation and, finally, to almost total acculturation.²⁸

The book tracks the changes within the West Indian community from 1914 to 1964 commenting on the negative effects of the West Indian presence on the Isthmus, and the effects of the Isthmus on West Indian identity and culture. O'Reggio demonstrates that both Panamanian and West Indian culture changed due to their influence on each other and that of the United States.²⁹ Therefore the examination of culture without considering the unique influences of location leaves the analysis of ethnic communities lacking.

A book with a similar approach is Ronald Harpelle's *The West Indians of Costa Rica*. In a similar fashion Harpelle strives to explain the development of the Afro and Costa Rican identity within the parameters of academic history. Harpelle explains that it is not enough to share the stories of a community when studying cultural identity; cultural identity must be examined by taking into account the society that the community is located in as well as, their own history and community. Harpelle applies his theory to the research of West Indians in Costa Rica but it is equally applicable when examining West Indians in Panama. When examining the culture of West Indians living in Panama, researchers need to consider the influences of both Panama and the United States. Both countries effected the development and changes which occurred in the West Indian community. Panamanians of West Indian descent are unique because of shared experiences and exposure to the historical events, laws and goals of Panama and the Canal Zone.

²⁸ O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 6.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 159-160.

Michael Conniff continues the examination of West Indians culture in *Black Labor on a White Canal*. Although Conniff recognizes and analyzes the importance of race relations between Panamanians, West Indians and U.S. citizens, the bulk of the book focuses on the daily reality of life as a worker. Prior works have minimally mentioned the fact that West Indians were important labourers, but *Black Labor on a White Canal*, focuses predominately on their role as labourers. Early West Indian immigrants traveled to Panama to work on the railroad which consistently lacked sufficient labourers. Similar labour problems were later faced by the companies struggling to build the Panama Canal. Due to labour shortages the Panamanian government allowed foreigners to immigrate, though companies often were required to provide return transportation to the worker's country of origin. Unlike Lancelot Lewis and Trevor O'Reggio, Michael Conniff's main purpose is to examine the settlement of over 100,000 'black' West Indians in Panama and the labor policy of the U.S. canal authority.³⁰ Huge numbers of labourers arrived to work on the Panama Canal and similarly on the banana plantations of Panama and Costa Rica.

Consequently, the development of transnational corporations and foreign investment altered the societal composition through labour importation. The study of foreign industry and economic climate plays an important role when considering the development of an ethnically diverse population in Panama. While the study of industry and labour are key components in the history of West Indians on the Isthmus, author Roy Simon Bryce-Laporte argues that, "a fuller appreciation of their contributions must extend beyond their work, even their work conditions, habits and skills. It must also attend to their human experiences, personal sacrifices, public

³⁰ Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal*, 3.

actions, creative capital, and cultural enrichment which they brought or developed on the scene” is even more important.³¹ Although Lancelot Lewis, Trevor O'Reggio and Michael Conniff have filled a void by writing the history of the West Indian community in Panama there are still areas of research which need to be completed.

To expand the areas of further study suggested by Roy Simon Bryce-Laporte and Ronald Harpelle, another lost chapter in West Indian history is that of women migrants. West Indians migrated to Panama, Costa Rica and other Central American countries as a way of “escaping unemployment and poverty on the islands of their birth”.³² A key area of study that Trevor O'Reggio's *Between Alienation and Citizenship* and Lancelot Lewis' *The West Indian in Panama* disregard is the role of women. While the literature available provides vast amounts of information regarding citizens, industry, and day to day life, it is apparent that further research needs to be completed. The focus of most books has been men and their role as labourers; relegating women to a supporting position in the literature. In particular, minimal research has been completed which examines the effect of mass migrations on women and children. One very obvious aspect of the nature of work on the Isthmus was that due to the shifting nature of work in both Panama and Costa Rica, men often had to travel between countries to find work, leaving women and children behind.

While there are a large number of resources focusing on migration from the West Indies to Central America, inadequacies are apparent as most accounts only consider the movement of

³¹ Roy Simon Bryce-Laporte was born in Panama of West Indian ancestry and has produced a number of publications which focus on Caribbean immigration. Bryce-Laporte, “Jamaican Contribution to the Construction of the Panama Canal, 14.

³² Phillipe Bourgois, “4.10 Blacks in Costa Rica: Upward Mobility and Ethnic Discrimination” in *The Costa Rica Reader* eds. Marc Edelman and Joanne Kenen (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1989), 162.

male members of the West Indian community.³³ No examinations of West Indian women's lives have been completed to the same scale.³⁴ Although the scope of research has expanded greatly, limited sources have proved a challenge for scholars trying to study the lives of women. The voice of women and their stories are more difficult to include in historical accounts and ethnic examinations due to a lack of primary resources available which mention or are written by women. While the challenge of including women is great, it is possible to further current studies by providing a more in depth examination of how women navigated major shifts in societal composition.

Disregard for half the population of Panama in *Between Alienation and Citizenship* and *The West Indian in Panama* leaves something to be desired in both of these works. In contrast, Michael Conniff attempts to include women by considering their immigration and working roles. Conniff states that the early waves of West Indian immigration were largely male but "Tens of thousands of West Indian women migrated to Panama, and eventually the sex ratio in the immigrant community balanced out".³⁵ Though the inclusion of women is not extensive, the fact that Conniff mentions women at least begins to lend a female voice to labour history. The book also explains that women worked in auxiliary positions and their services quickly became marketable. The inclusion of women even in this small scope helps to fill the huge gap in

³³ The following is a list of migrational studies focusing on the Caribbean region. Elizabeth McLean Petras, *Jamaican Labor Migration: White Capital and Black Labor, 1850-1930* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988); Velma Newton, *The Silver Men: West Indian Labour Migration to Panama 1850-1914* (Mona, Jamaica: Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1984); Milton Vickerman, *Crosscurrents: West Indian Immigrants and Race* (New York: Oxford University, 1999); Elsa Chaney, *Migration from the Caribbean Region: Determinants and Effects of Current Movements* (Washington, D.C. : Georgetown University, Center for Immigration Policy and Refugee Assistance, 1985).

³⁴ Two books which have tried to fill the gap in literature focusing on women are Lara Putnam's *The Company They Kept* and Anne Hayes, *Female Prostitution in Costa Rica: Historical Perspectives, 1880-1930* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

³⁵ Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal*, 29.

history examining the lives of West Indian women in Panama.

Ronald Harpelle's book, *The West Indians in Costa Rica* also addresses the previously neglected issue of women's migration. Though his research was completed in Costa Rica, it is applicable to Panama due to the similar culture of the two societies and the large West Indian immigrant populations residing in both. While statistics for men are commonly provided, Harpelle clearly states that which is irrevocably true,

An important group that is always overlooked is the women who arrived in the region as daughters, sisters, wives, and mothers of the workers. Since they were seldom contracted for work in the West Indies they were not counted as part of the labour drive and the details of their arrival are less clear.³⁶

Likewise the immigration records regarding women in Panama are unclear due to that fact that few women were contracted by the transnational corporations or the Canal Zone. Although not formally documented, it is clear, that women were migrants to both regions along with the men that were recruited as labourers.³⁷ Though few records are available it is apparent that

“thousands of women did make their way to the region, where they too found employment”.³⁸

The increasing number of female migrants changed the predominately male worker society into a community. West Indian migrants developed schools, for their children and associations to improve life while trying to function in a country which was hostile and reactionary. The same conclusions can be drawn regarding West Indians in Panama but the research completed is still very limited outside of *Black Labor on a White Canal* and *The West Indians of Costa Rica*.

In Ronald Harpelle's book, the employment, religious affiliation and economic situation of West Indian women are examined. By including West Indian women in his book Harpelle

³⁶ Harpelle, *The West Indians of Costa Rica*, 14.

³⁷ Ibid., 13.

³⁸ Ibid., 14.

provides much needed information about West Indian women. Harpelle's work is important because many studies in the field do not include women due to the lack of information regarding types of employment and income available. *The West Indians of Costa Rica* bridges the gap between early histories and academic writings by including West Indian women. Women were employed in a number of jobs including prostitution, farming, and domestic labour.³⁹ The in-depth examination of women's working roles is not completed in the book, but it provides some explanation of the role of West Indian who immigrated to Central America.

Lara Putnam furthers the research conducted by examining the issues surrounding gender construction. *The Company They Kept: Migrants and the Politics of Gender in Caribbean Costa Rica, 1870-1960* examines the community structure of West Indians in Costa Rica. The book examines the role that gender stereotypes and racial differences have played in Costa Rica's development. While these two ideas are inextricably linked "both race and gender changed over time, but the chronology and causes of change differed markedly".⁴⁰ Similar changes to gender and race ideals appeared over time within Panamanian society. It is vitally important to realize that while both of these ideas changed, they did so at their own pace and were linked with other social changes and political issues. Another key concept examined by Putnam is how "economic, demographic, and settlement shifts resulted from social processes shaped in part by ideologies of gender and race".⁴¹ The tracking of these shifts becomes the conduit for the Putnam's examination of gender roles from 1870-1960. Lara Putnam strives to examine the roles women assumed within the greater West Indian community and how these

³⁹ Harpelle, *The West Indians of Costa Rica*, 36, 66, 152-154.

⁴⁰ Putnam, *The Company They Kept*, 16-17.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

roles were altered due to changing social processes. Women of different professions, social classes and ethnicities are studied throughout the book providing a diverse examination of women's roles. *The Company They Kept* delves into the employment options available to women, such as prostitution or other work outside the home. Quickly, it becomes apparent that women "had fewer ways to earn income, and fewer means to exit when relationships turn bad".⁴² The same options available to men, were not possible for women due to societal expectations and familial responsibilities. One of the most important things to consider when examining the roles of West Indian women in Costa Rica and Panama is the drastic changes in male female ratio, settlement and economic security of the region due to the shifting nature of employment. Each of these forces altered the working roles, familial roles and gender roles that women assumed.

West Indian women and the roles they assumed were particularly affected by the increasing level of racism and restrictions the West Indian community was subjected to in the late 1910s and early 1930s. Increasing racism and intolerance became an issue as the rate of unemployment rose with the completion of the Canal and then the post war depression. The decrease in employment was not limited to male occupations. As lower numbers of men were employed, the auxiliary jobs filled by women also decreased. In both cases large numbers of West Indians found themselves without work and potentially stranded on the Isthmus. Labourers who were not contracted to work in Panama, were not supplied the funds to return to their home countries and did not necessarily have the money to provide their own passage home. The lack of repatriation funds particularly affected women and children who had immigrated to Panama independent of working contracts. Many of the women and children and men stuck on the

⁴² Putnam, *The Company They Kept*, 211.

Isthmus were destitute. Not only that, but very few of the children born in Panama possessed either Panamanian or British Citizenship. Families who wanted to return to their home countries were told to leave their older children who lacked citizenship behind in Panama, as they were not welcome in the British Islands. At the same time the Panamanian government revoked their children's citizenship and told West Indians to return with all members of their families to the British Islands. The options available to West Indians were limited causing much distress and concern in the West Indian community.

In Panama when the option of citizenship was offered to West Indians it was with the condition that they speak Spanish and were educated in Panamanian culture. The protection of the state was a dominant factor when West Indians chose to accept Panamanian citizenship. What first appears as cultural assimilation is shown to be acceptance of a foreign culture for protection from future state persecution. West Indians did not necessarily wish to adopt the Spanish culture; many may have simply wanted the security citizenship offered. Citizenship provided the documentation necessary to live within Panama, while allowing West Indians to maintain some of their own culture.⁴³ Children were required to be educated in Spanish but the surrounding West Indian inhabitants helped to maintain a level of West Indian culture. West Indians in Panama faced hostile governments and were left to cope without the support, their nationality should have provided them. Faced with blatant racism and restricting societal values, West Indians were forced to fight to secure a life for themselves and their children.

Glimpses of the difficulties faced by the West Indian community in Panama are available

⁴³ Not all women maintained their West Indian culture after application of citizenship. Ronald Harpelle writes that, "Independence from the West Indian community and family ties meant that women were both in need of the security that citizenship afforded and freer to act according [to] their wishes". Harpelle, *The West Indian of Costa Rica*, 153.

within primary documents and secondary literature. While the primary documents may not provide all the answers, it is a historians job to find and analyze those that are available. The memorandum "*The British West Indians and the British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama*" housed in the National Archives of the United Kingdom and written by a West Indian woman in 1943, provides an opportunity to examine the hardships faced by the West Indian community through the examination of Linda Smart Chubb's report.

An examination of who the author was, and consideration of the social, economic and political climate in Panama during the early 1940s provides the information needed to analyze the writing in regard to the contemporaneous situation and past interactions between the British and West Indians in Panama. Linda Smart Chubb was a West Indian British subject born in the Canal Zone.⁴⁴ Her father was a marine engineer who migrated to the Canal Zone in the time of the French Canal Company. As a marine engineer, her father was a well paid member of the work force. It is important to note that her family was well off and not part of the labouring class. Nevertheless, she would have had contact with the labouring class through her work. Both of the writer's parents were British West Indian and must have been legally married as common law unions were not accepted within the Canal Zone. Couples receiving zone benefits and living in the Canal Zone had to be legally married.⁴⁵ The marriage of her parents also provided Linda Smart Chubb with British citizenship which granted her some security after the racist legislation of the 1930s and 1940s was passed. In particular is it important to note that during the 1930s debate about second generation West Indian's citizenship, Linda Smart Chubb

⁴⁴ Thwaites, "Introduction" in *The Forgotten People*, 1.

⁴⁵ Biesanz and Biesanz, *The People of Panama*, 316. There was a considerably higher number of legally recorded marriages within the Canal Zone. Within the zone 43% of people were married, where as in Panama proper only 20% were recorded as legally married. Consensual unions were more common in Panama but proper statistics are not available because consensual unions were not recorded within the Canal Zone.

did not have to worry about her position as she was legally a British subject. In this she was a rarity, as many second generation West Indians did not qualify due to the lack of a formal marriage between their parents. Most West Indian labourers did not obtain either British or Panamanian citizenship for their children because they assumed they would be British subjects.

However on the street Linda Smart Chubb was directly affected by the issues of immigration, racial laws, and, the problems involving nationality, and the author was very aware of the problems faced by the West Indian community. The 1930s and 40s were a particularly difficult time for West Indian immigrants. She was aware of the debates about West Indian citizenship and the concerns aired by the British representative as well as the Panamanian and the United States governments. Linda Smart Chubb was in a unique position to document the hardships of the West Indian community during her career in the Consulate, especially in 1943 after thirty years experience. To explain why Linda Smart Chubb wrote the memorandum in 1943, Vice-Consul Thwaites provides a short introduction to the memorandum.

Working on the Canal and construction projects in Panama became a cyclical process. The West Indians who went to Panama for work were required to return to their home countries when the work was completed. The workers who went to Panama did so to pursue the high wages which were available on the construction site. However large numbers of workers did not secure repatriation contracts. Labourers who traveled to the Isthmus without contracts were often left destitute and stranded after the project was complete. Government concerns regarding the large number of workers stranded on the Isthmus date back to the early French attempt to build the canal and the same concerns arose when unemployment sky rocketed again after the completion of the U.S. canal in 1914, then again during the 1930s and during the early 1940s

when the war in Europe interrupted international trade. Vice-Consul Thwaites requested that Linda Smart Chubb compose a memorandum on West Indians of the Isthmus at a time when British influence in Central America was waning and when Panamanian nationalism was becoming a significant political factor. These factors are key when examining the representation provided by the British Consulate to the large numbers of British West Indians who were on the Isthmus. As is made clear in "The Forgotten People" the British authorities 'forgot' that they were responsible for all British subjects regardless of race.

Citizenship was one of the most pressing issues which British representatives failed to address for British West Indian workers. Though the United States and Panama were not known for their kind and fair treatment of West Indians, the lack of representation provided by the British Consulates represented a betrayal of loyal subjects in need. The exact number of British subjects residing in the Canal Zone, and Panama during 1940 is hard to estimate. Based on information provided in the 1940 Panamanian Census it is possible to estimate that more than 50,000 West Indians were present in Panama.⁴⁶ Vice-Consul Thwaites suggests that the general estimates still "omit hundreds of thousands who are British in education and feeling".⁴⁷ Under the Panamanian immigration law of 1941 Vice-Consul Thwaites estimates that as many as 50,000 British West Indians were left without citizenship of any kind. Similar laws caused great concern in the 1930s and represented a clear failure of the British government to provide security to the West Indians they represented.

The difficult situation faced by West Indians came to a head in the early 1940s when

⁴⁶ "Table No. 10, Negro, Mestizo and White Civil Population of Republic of Panama with increase from 1911 to 1940", *Panama Census 1940*, PCS 018. The exact number given in the census is 88,871 but some of the listed population is most likely Panamanian.

⁴⁷ Thwaites, "Introduction" in *The Forgotten People*, 1.

President Arnulfo Arias instituted numerous racially motivated laws which focused on immigration and citizenship.⁴⁸ The new laws came into effect during WWII at a time when there was an increase in the number of British West Indians due to the construction of the canals extensions. The racial and social climate after approximately 100 years of working on the Isthmus was influenced by the U.S. and subsequently Panamanian attitudes towards West Indians. The West Indians were not welcome on the Isthmus and President Arnulfo Arias tried to permanently remove their community. Unfortunately when the need for protection from racist laws and attitudes was at its height, the British West Indians were left to deal with the situation themselves. Britain, already embattled in WWII and struggling to maintain its empire and the island governments of the Caribbean did not want the responsibility of dealing with their citizens in Panama. Though the plight of the British West Indians was given more attention after the early 1940s, the British West Indians of Panama were largely 'The Forgotten People' of the Empire.

As a result of the decrease in British attention and the neglect of British West Indians on the Isthmus, the work of British representatives was in dire need of change. The memorandum by Linda Smart Chubb was requested by Vice-Consul Thwaites as a means of demonstrating the poor representation provided by the British Consulates in Panama. Vice-Consul Thwaites collected four memorandums to document and assess the situation in Panama which were compiled in the report entitled *The Forgotten People*. Linda Smart Chubb's memorandum was supplemented by three other memorandums which were provided by Samuel Whyte, the president of the Panama Canal West Indian Employee Association, the Dunbar Cultural League and the H.M. Minister in Panama. While all four of these memorandums are important, Linda

⁴⁸ Thwaites, "Introduction" in *The Forgotten People*, 2.

Smart Chubb's memorandum provides unique insights into the struggle of West Indians in Panama. The following thesis analyzes Linda Smart Chubb's memorandum to demonstrate the vast insight and knowledge provided by the primary document entitled "The British West Indians and the British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama." The purpose of this work is to provide the clarity of hindsight through the support of primary and secondary sources that were not available to Linda Smart Chubb. The expansion and explanations provided regarding the main statements and assertions in the memorandum will shed light on the "Forgotten People" and Linda Smart Chubb's first hand account.

In the thesis which follows, the structure of Linda Smart Chubb's writing is divided into five sections plus an introduction which coincides with the divisions in the memorandum. The first chapter entitled "The History of British West Indians in the Panama" provides a history of early canal building attempts and the migration of workers to Panama.⁴⁹ The section further offers a short account of the United States canal building, as well as a minimal discussion of the positions of British West Indians and the changes caused by the completion of the Canal. Due to the limited explanation provided by the memorandum, the thesis has been supplemented by the extensive secondary literature available to allow for an in depth understanding of the migration of British West Indians and their importance in the construction of not only the canal but also the railway in Panama.

The second chapter examines "Segregation and Its Purpose in the Canal Zone", during not only the United States construction phase but the later years of the canal's operation.⁵⁰ The chapter discusses racism and segregation in terms of payroll, housing, education, health care,

⁴⁹ Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 1-2.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 2-6.

justice and representation. In each area of discussion an active policy of racism and segregation was clearly operating within the Canal Zone, even if racism was not the original reason for the divisions. The difficulties faced by the West Indian community under racist policies is best summed up by Linda Smart Chubb when she wrote: "In short, the intention of the American administration of the Zone toward the British West Indian community here was correctly seized by the artist who decorated the rotunda of the Administration building. He pictured the negro labourers in chains."⁵¹ The racially motivated policies of the Canal Zone maintained West Indian workers in a position of inferiority and successfully decreased their chances for improvement. The negative attitude of the U.S. and the mistreatment of British West Indians effected the citizens of Panama and their treatment of West Indians.

The third chapter, entitled "Repercussions of U.S. Influence and Situation in Panama", focuses on the effects of nationalism and racism on the West Indian community and the 'American' influence on the Panamanian peoples and government policy's towards West Indian immigrants.⁵² By examining the legislation, and the changes in racial beliefs it is possible to demonstrate the changing Panamanian attitude towards the British West Indians. As the decades passed an outspoken dislike of the British West Indians increased and was eventually supported by legislation during President Arnulfo Arias term. The reaction of both the British representatives and the Canal administration to the changing social climate under the racially hostile government lead by President Arias, further demonstrates the difficult position British West Indians found themselves in. Lack of representation, matched by increasingly racist policies in both the Canal Zone and Panama placed the British West Indian community in

⁵¹ Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 5-6.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 6-7.

desperate need repeatedly between the early 1920s and the 1940s.

The thesis continues to build on earlier chapters with the examination of “The Responsibilities of British Representatives” to the British West Indian community in chapter four.⁵³ The section delves into why the West Indian community was disheartened and disappointed in British representation and what they did to improve their situation. In particular it focuses on racism, elitism, and a general lack of understanding which was commonly demonstrated by the consular officers. One of the most important issues to examine concerning British representation is the debate surrounding children's citizenship in the 1930s. Though Linda Smart Chubb fails to mention the debate over citizenship during the 1930s, it is an amazing example of Britain's failure to protect the West Indian community. Britain's negligent response to the crisis demonstrates one of the most controversial debates involving the British representatives and the British West Indian community to ever cross the Isthmus. Possible solutions, or alternative choices to those made by the representatives at the time are mentioned which show that the situation in 1943 may have been altered by simple changes over time. Unfortunately, the years of neglect and the lack of interest, on the part of the Consular representatives left a damaged relationship between British West Indians and the British governments representatives.

The final chapter, “Conclusion: The Future of British Representation” demonstrates that the West Indian people were disheartened by the response of their mother country, but that their faith was not entirely lost.⁵⁴ Linda Smart Chubb provides a possible solution to repair the relationship between the Consular representatives and the British West Indian community. This thesis examines these suggestions by considering the following question. Did these changes

⁵³ Chubb, “The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama” in *The Forgotten People*, 7-10.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 10-12.

occur and did Linda Smart Chubb's report and others like it inspire the British Consulate and Legation to change their approach to representation? An examination of post 1943 Panama provides insight into the actions of British representatives after the completion of Linda Smart Chubb's memorandum. The final chapter of this work examines the representation provided by Britain and the British West Indies post 1943. The affects of the changing world are apparent. World War II left an irreversible mark on the once great and far reaching nation of Britain. But how did it affect the British West Indian community still working and trying to live on the Isthmus of Panama?

The effects of time and over 100 years of working on the canal are summed up by “The British West Indians and the British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama”. This thesis strives to enhance Linda Smart Chubb's work by providing information which is now available through both secondary and primary literature. Although Linda Smart Chubb does not examine the situation of British West Indians in depth, she does provide a well written and interesting overview of the situation. Linda Smart Chubb's document is both enhanced by and enhances the diverse collection of secondary literature available written about the Panama Canal and the West Indian community. As demonstrated by the provided historiography the importance of this work lies in its personal voice. Many primary sources are used to compile the extensive writings surrounding West Indians but the inclusion of Linda Smart Chubb's memorandum provides an individual, personal and female voice to the struggles of the British West Indian people of Panama.

The History of British West Indians in Panama

The history of Panama is a colourful mosaic of different cultures, clashing, blending and developing into the diverse community that is present in modern Panama. A newsletter written by the Canal Zone Pythian's¹ lists the five most important incidents in Panama's history both as a province and a country.² The list was developed by 'Americans' living in Panama but its validity is not decreased because each of the events is documented in numerous secondary sources which write the complete history of Panama.³ The first two events are the discovery of Panama and the Pacific Ocean, followed by the sacking of old Panama by the Privateer Morgan. While the earliest events occurred many years before the building of the Panama Canal, it is important to recognize that Panama's international importance has a far reaching history. The other three events listed are the construction of the Panama railroad, followed by the French attempts to build the canal and the U.S. intervention and building of the Panama Canal which coincided with Panama's independence.

While all five of the events are important, Linda Smart Chubb begins the first section of

¹ The Order of Knights of Pythias is an international fraternity founded in 1864 in Washington D.C. Lodges exist in the U.S., Canada and at times have been formed in other countries. The Canal Zone housed one of the international houses of the fraternity although it may not have been listed as one due to the Canal Zone designation as sovereign U.S. territory. The Knights of Pythias maintained a newsletter in Panama. Though the group were not historians or necessarily scholars their understanding of the main events in Panama are supported by any number of books which focus primarily on these five events in Panama's history. A list of books focusing on these events is provided in the introduction in footnote 1. *The Pythians: The Order of Knights of Pythias* under "About the Order: The Pythian Story", http://www.pythias.org/index_files/About.htm, (accessed April 17, 2008).

² *Canal Zone Pythian* (Las Cascadas, Canal Zone: Knight of Pythias, vol.2, no.6 January, 1912), 4. The independence of Panama first as a province and then a country spanned over 82 years. In 1821 the province of Panama and its Spanish American neighbours declared independence from Spain. The independent countries formed Bolivar's Gran Columbia consisting of Venezuela, Ecuador and Columbia of which Panama was a province. In 1830 the republic dissolved and Columbia became New Granada of which Panama remained a province. In 1863 the title of New Granada become obsolete as the title Columbia was instituted of which Panama remained a province until it declared independence in 1903. Newton, *The Silver Men*, 111.

³ The following is a list of a some of the general history of Panama which are available. Mack, *The Land Divided*; Meditz and Hanratty, *Panama: A Country Study*; Core, *Panama Yesterday and Today*; Howarth, *Panama: Four Hundred Years of Dreams and Cruelty*; Niemeier, *The Panama Story*; Marshall, *The Story of the Panama Canal*.

her account by stating that her parents migrated to Panama in the time of the French Canal company. Her memorandum also reveals that “during the construction period many thousands of coloured British West Indians came and settled on the Isthmus of Panama.”⁴ While the statement is very true the author fails to mention the West Indians who immigrated to Panama during the time of the railway. It is possible to situate the author's assessments within a broader context by examining the approximately ninety years of West Indian interaction with Panama, before the writing of the memorandum. The early immigration of British West Indians to assist in building the railway demonstrates their longstanding importance to Panamanian transportation and national development. By including a brief history of Panama since the mid-nineteenth century it is possible to enhance the contents of the document by providing essential background information about Panama's history, the history of foreign investment and the involvement of British West Indians.

As the economic and geographic importance of Latin America increased during the nineteenth century, lack of transportation networks inhibited further development. Latin America's potential for economic expansion was initially reliant on the development of transportation and infrastructure.⁵ Businesses required railroads, docks, and roads to import and export necessary equipment and products.⁶ The impetus for the majority of transportation proposals “came from foreigners, especially British and North American”.⁷ Prior to the building

⁴ Chubb, “The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama” in *The Forgotten People*, 1.

⁵ Ralph Lee Woodward Jr., *Central America: A Nation Divided*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 160.

⁶ Thomas Skidmore and Peter H. Smith, *Modern Latin American*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 40.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 40.

of the Panama railroad many attempts were made to secure permission to build either a railroad or a canal across Central America.⁸ Though not all of these attempts were official, each failed for similar reasons. The difficulties such monetary issues, engineering problems and legal permission could not be overcome and what were initially setbacks became insurmountable obstacles. In 1835 President Andrew Jackson of the United States developed a commission to search for a suitable location to construct an inter-oceanic railway across Central America.⁹ Unfortunately the official findings were never to be presented to the United States government because the lead commissioner, Charles Bridle died in 1837. Despite much interest in transportation development, it was not until 1848 that the Panama railway project began.¹⁰ For the province of Panama, the building of the railway provided a much need economic boost. A writer in 1840 wrote to his friend that “any one who wants to get acquainted with Panama had better come quickly because it is almost done for”.¹¹ The Panamanian railroad provided Panama with economic benefit as it was the only railway across Central America at its completion.¹²

In 1848 a joint stock company from the United States was granted a 49 year contract which included; “the gratuitous use of all public lands on the railway line, a gift of 250,000 acres of land, creation of free ports at both the Pacific and Atlantic terminals, and the privilege of establishing toll rates.”¹³ Transportation contracts of the future mimicked the terms of the

⁸ Mack, *The Land Divided*, 135.

⁹ La Rosa and Mejía, eds., *The United States Discovers Panama*, 2.

¹⁰ Bullard, *Panama: The Canal, The Country and The People*, 421-422.

¹¹ Darío Carles, *Crossing the Isthmus of Panama*, 29.

¹² Bullard, *Panama: The Canal, The Country and The People*, 421-422.

¹³ Petras, *Jamaican Labor Migration*, 59. The concession granted in 1848 by New Granada had to be renegotiated when the Republic of Columbia was formed in 1886. The company had to pay 1,000,000 dollars upfront and then 250,000 annually for 99 years. *The Panama Canal: Twenty-fifth Anniversary, August 15, 1914-August 15, 1939* (Mount Hope, C.Z.: Panama Canal Press, 1939), 43.

Panamanian railway, eventually granting huge tracks of lands to foreign agencies. Between the years 1848 and 1855 the railway was developed in bits and pieces as construction was affected by the loss of labourers and natural obstacles, such as poor terrain, landslides, floods and hurricanes.¹⁴ Though only 47 miles of track needed to be laid, the challenges of building a railroad through the interior of Panama became apparent in October of 1851, when after twenty months of construction only eight miles of track were laid from the Panama City to Gatun.¹⁵ As the company struggled to find labourers for the difficult and dangerous task of building the railroad, investors in the United States began to doubt the possibility of success.

Meanwhile the 1840s brought a new attitude to the forefront of United States policies. Manifest Destiny, the idea that the United States was destined by fate to cover the North American continent coast to coast, had far reaching effects around the world.¹⁶ Coupled with the idea of Manifest Destiny, was an increasingly common rhetoric about the superiority of the Anglo Saxon race. Not only were 'Americans' supposed to conquer North American but the idea of shaping other 'lesser peoples' and nations came to the forefront of national ideology after the Mexican War.¹⁷ As the 1840s proceeded a growing number of U.S. citizens migrated to the

¹⁴ Lewis, *The West Indian in Panama*, 16.

¹⁵ Bullard, *Panama: The Canal, The Country and The People*, 421-422.

¹⁶ John A. Garraty, *A Short History of the American Nation* 7th ed. (New York: Longman, 1997), 207. Ellen Churchill Semple, *American History and its Geographic Conditions* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1903), 224. The term 'Manifest Destiny' was first coined by John O'Sullivan who was a newspaper editor. O'Sullivan used the term to describe the claim the U.S. had on Oregon, "The right of our manifest destiny is to overspread and to possess the whole of the continent of the great experiment of liberty and federated self-government entrusted to us." Reginald Horsman "Anglo-Saxon Racism" in *Major Problems in American Foreign Policy Volume I: To 1914* 3rd ed., ed. Thomas Paterson (Toronto: D.C. Heath and Company, 1989), 271. The idea of what the two words would represent grew from Jacksonian expansionism which "exalted the pioneer as the epitome of man". The importance of the pioneer and the expansionist idea that 'America's' mission was to build a great nation became encompassed by the term 'Manifest Destiny'. Thomas R. Hietala, "Empire by Design, Not Destiny" in *Major Problems in American Foreign Relations Volume I: To 1920* 5th ed., eds. Dennis Merrill and Thomas G. Paterson (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 248.

¹⁷ Horsman "Anglo-Saxon Racism" in *Major Problems in American Foreign Policy Volume I: To 1914* 3rd ed., 266.

West Coast expanding the nation. Although U.S. citizens were living on western lands, many of the settlers were technically residing in Mexico.¹⁸ As the 1840s unfolded the expansionist aims of the United States, became increasingly important.¹⁹

The Mexican-American War began in 1846 and lasted until 1848 at which time large northern portions of Mexico were lost to the United States.²⁰ The territory gained became California, Nevada, Utah, and parts of New Mexico, Colorado and Wyoming.²¹ President Polk's approach to gaining the previously Mexican territory has been described as a "carrot and stick" method.²² The 'carrot' was the 1845 diplomatic mission John Slidell was sent on to negotiate the purchase and annexation of California. The mission did not succeed because only Texas was annexed before all diplomatic relations ceased.²³ The 'stick' was a series of events which included the encouragement of the formation of a revolutionary government in California, the placement of troops along the U.S.-Mexican border and the instructions to Naval officers to seize San Francisco's and San Diego's harbours should war breakout.²⁴ On January 13th of 1846 President Polk instructed troops along the border to proceed into disputed territory within range of a Mexican town. The movement of General Zachery Taylor's troops is the event which has caused historians to refer to the War as "contrived and provocative, designed to win by force

¹⁸ Charles A. Beard and Mary R. Beard, *A Basic History of the United States* (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1944), 190.

¹⁹ Richard Hofstadter, William Miller and Daniel Aaron, *The United States: The History of a Republic* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1959), 277.

²⁰ John Tutino, *From Insurrection to Revolution in Mexico: Social Bases of Agrarian Violence, 1750-1940* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 249.

²¹ Wayne S. Cole, *An Interpretive History of American Foreign Relations* rev. ed. (Georgetown, Ontario: The Dorsey Press, 1974), 137.

²² Lloyd C. Gardner, Walter F. La Feber and Thomas J. McCormick, *Creation of the American empire: U.S. Diplomatic History* (New York: Rand McNally & Company, 1973), 149.

²³ Cole, *An Interpretive History of American Foreign Relations* rev. ed., 131.

²⁴ Gardner, La Feber and McCormick, *Creation of the American empire*, 149.

what diplomacy could not obtain”.²⁵ As a result of the U.S. troops threatening Mexican territory, Mexican forces stationed near the town attacked and killed a number of the United States soldiers. As a result of the attack, President Polk quickly approached Congress and had them declare war on Mexico.

By February 12, 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe and Hidalgo was signed and the United States increased greatly in size.²⁶ With the addition of California and the surrounding territory migration to the Western United States grew. Migration to the West further increased when gold was found in California. Between 1848 and 1850, 100,000 people migrated to California.²⁷ While the opening of California permitted increased settlement and access to trading ports, the most significant long term effect was the growing sense of racial superiority which provided the United States with an excuse to intervene in numerous countries around the world.²⁸ The paternalistic attitude of the U.S. would continue to grow throughout the nineteenth century and blossom in the early twentieth century. Mexico was just the first example of the expansionist and imperialistic attitude of the United States.

The California gold rush and expansionist rhetoric became a major factor in the success of the Panamanian railroad.²⁹ Travelers had three choices of route when migrating from the East coast to the West. Settlers could travel by land through the interior of the United States, take a ship around Cape Horn, or travelers could decrease the distance traveled by crossing the jungles

²⁵ Richard W. Leopold, *The Growth of American Foreign Policy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), 64.

²⁶ Cole, *An Interpretive History of American Foreign Relations*, rev. ed., 37.

²⁷ Beard and Beard, *A Basic History of the United States*, 191.

²⁸ Horsman “Anglo-Saxon Racism” in *Major Problems in American Foreign Policy Volume I: To 1914* 3rd ed., 267.

²⁹ Mack, *The Land Divided*, 136.

of Panama.³⁰ When the Gold rush began the fastest route from the eastern coast of the United States to California was through Nicaragua, but the high cost of travel drove many immigrants to take the much cheaper route through the jungles of Panama.³¹ Without a railway travelers were reliant on the Royal Road and Charges River as the only developed ways to cross the Isthmus. The trip took from two to five days and was not considered satisfactory by the travelers.³²

During the early years of the gold rush people purchased transportation on any vessel capable of carrying passengers and many found themselves in deplorable situations, “The hold... was cleared out and bunks of boards were arranged in tiers along the sides so that each cube of space, measuring six feet high, wide and deep respectively, should contain nine persons”.³³ Other travelers would become stranded for months on the Atlantic coast of Panama waiting to secure transport across the Isthmus. Those who escaped the dangers of yellow fever while waiting found themselves in a more precarious position traveling through the interior. Smaller groups of travelers were in danger of being robbed and murdered by the highway men who frequented the trails between the Atlantic and Pacific coasts.³⁴ In 1851, a hurricane caused all water travel to the interior via the Charges River to cease due to torrential rain and subsequent flooding. The eight complete miles of track to Gatun provided an alternative means of transportation to the interior. The use of the railway to transport passengers to Gatun reassured foreign investors that the project was going to be successful.³⁵ Though the hurricane solved the

³⁰ Beard and Beard, *A Basic History of the United States*, 191.

³¹ George Pendle, *A History of Latin America* (London: Penguin Books, 1976), 176.

³² Newton, *The Silver Men*, 28.

³³ Mack, *The Land Divided*, 143. and Lewis, *The West Indian in Panama*, 13.

³⁴ Mack, *The Land Divided*, 145-146.

³⁵ Bullard, *Panama: The Canal, The Country and The People*, 419.

problems of the company with its foreign investors, the issue of labour was still an obstacle to the possible success of the railway.

The issue of labour was paramount from the first days of construction. During the early phases of construction the people of Panama were deemed unsuitable for the heavy labour required and the struggle to import employees began,

but who could withstand Panama's climate and virulent tropical disease? Chinese and Irish labourers fell sick and died like flies soon after they arrived. The promoters finally found that Caribbean Negroes were the hardiest laborers, and initiated the large-scale importation of Jamaicans and other Antilleans.³⁶

The importation of West Indian workers became the norm for U.S. enterprises in Central America causing much friction with the local inhabitants. The notion of people of African descent being more resistant to disease and climate of the tropics persisted into the twentieth century. Even Linda Smart Chubb supports the idea that Panamanians were unfit labourers by stating that the French and the British looked down on native Colombians.³⁷ The native inhabitants were considered to be poor labourers and generally untrustworthy. The British West Indians also believed that they were superior to the locals in education, bearing and in background.³⁸ Linda Smart Chubb's memorandum states what many other sources do concerning labourers, "the Americans tried Italians, Spaniards, Chinese, American negroes,

³⁶ Biesanz and Biesanz, *The People of Panama*, 38. and Mack, *The Land Divided*, 155-156. The local labor pool was limited and the U.S. company deemed "the native population were to indolent and unaccustomed to labor to be depended on to any great extent". Petras, *Jamaican Labor Migration*, 62.

³⁷ Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 1.

³⁸ Biesanz, Biesanz and Biesanz, *The Costa Ricans*, 66. Though this is written regarding West Indians in Costa Rican society, the idea of racial division is equally applicable in reference to West Indians living in Panama. The division between West Indians and the Spanish speaking population was very similar across Central America.

British Indians and native Panamanians, but finally preferred British West Indians to them all.”³⁹

It is important to understand the reason that British West Indian labourers were available.

Without emancipation in the British West Indies the vast labour pool available in the 1840s would not have existed in the Caribbean.

The emancipation of slaves in the British West Indies in 1833 helped to provide a large number of West Indian contract workers for building projects and agricultural industries.⁴⁰

Though the Emancipation Act of 1833 was enforced in 1834, slaves were forced to continue labouring on plantations due to the two stage implementation of freedom.⁴¹ Freed slaves over the age of six were forced to continue labouring through the apprenticeship program which lasted until 1838.⁴² The full emancipation of slaves did not greatly improve labour conditions on islands such as Jamaica because plantation owners continued to pay low wages to the workers.

Labour problems escalated with the introduction of the Sugar Duties Act of 1846 which left high rates of unemployment and lower wages in its wake.⁴³ As the rate of unemployment rose, increasing numbers of rural inhabitants flocked to urban areas searching for work.⁴⁴ Population dynamics also caused increased stress on islands such as the Barbados due to increasing

³⁹ Chubb, “The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama” in *The Forgotten People*, 1. Velma Newton suggests that the actual reason for the higher number of British West Indian labourers was a reluctance to disturb the Panamanian labour dynamics already in place. Newton’s work also suggests a concern of desertion by Panamanians, and the possibility of the government of the United States and Panama being drawn into labour disputes. Newton, *The Silver Men*, 38.

⁴⁰ Bonham C. Richardson, *Caribbean Migrants: Environment and Human Survival on St. Kitts and Nevis* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1983), 16.

⁴¹ Petras, *Jamaican Labor Migration*, 26.

⁴² Richardson, *Caribbean Migrants*, 16.

⁴³ Barry B. Levine, *The Caribbean Exodus* (New York: Praeger, 1987), 18. The Sugar Duties Act put an end to the preferential duties on sugar that the British Colonies had previously enjoyed. The late 1840s also represented a time of difficulty for sugar producers as prices dropped and plantations and merchants were left destitute. In turn those who had previously worked in the sugar industry found themselves jobless. Newton, *The Silver Men*, 7-8. For a more complete understanding of the importance of sugar refer to Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness And Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985).

⁴⁴ Harpelle, *The West Indians of Costa Rica*, 13.

populations. Opportunities for “advancement such as learning new job skills, obtaining capital and acquiring land” decreased after 1846, putting pressure on residents to relocate.⁴⁵

As labour pools formed in the urban West Indies, contractors suffering labour shortages in Central America took advantage of the situation. West Indian workers quickly became indispensable contract labourers due to an apparent natural resistance to disease, though accidents still claimed numerous lives. The relatively large numbers of workers available made it easier for recruiters to replace those who died or became ill.⁴⁶ The economic hardship in the West Indies provided the large labour force needed by foreign contractors to complete projects such as the Panama railway, other Central American railways and in later years the Panama Canal. While West Indians appeared more resistant to disease, they were not immune to the terrible working conditions in the swamps and jungles of Panama.⁴⁷ Despite the constant influx of labour, construction of the railway periodically came to a standstill due to the lack of workers available.⁴⁸ No solution was found to decrease the effects of the severe climate and poor working conditions. As work progressed the number of deaths from disease and accidents grew from the hundreds up into the thousands.⁴⁹

Panama's reputation as one of “the most pestilential sections of the world” was supported by the ever increasing death rate due to disease during construction.⁵⁰ Death tolls of as high as 25,000 have been estimated. Rumors stating that every railway tie represented a dead worker are

⁴⁵ Newton, *The Silver Men*, 37.

⁴⁶ Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal*, 17.

⁴⁷ La Rosa and Mejia, *The United States Discovers Panama*, 13.

⁴⁸ Lewis, *The West Indian in Panama*, 13.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵⁰ *The Panama Canal: Twenty-fifth Anniversary*, 31.

commonly quoted though their validity is unlikely.⁵¹ The Panama Canal Twenty-fifth Anniversary publication directly challenges the rumor that each railway tie equals a dead worker. The publication states that a ratio of 1 death to every 50 ties of the 150,000 required is more accurate.⁵² There is an obvious discrepancy in the numbers of deaths as this second estimate accounts for only 3000 deaths, compared to Rubén Darío Carles book which estimates the death toll to be as high as 25,000 workers. Though the exact number of deaths is difficult to estimate it is apparent that an appalling loss of life occurred during the construction of the railroad. Although the challenges of building the railway were enormous, by 1855 the railroad was completed, with one third of the construction cost already collected from fares charged for travel between Panama City and Gatun.⁵³ The Panama railway became the first railroad to cross Central America and would set the stage for future transportation developments.

For more than half a century the Panama railroad was one of the best options for crossing between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans.⁵⁴ As shipping traffic increased and a more globalized world began to emerge, the idea of building a canal became increasingly popular. The building of the Suez Canal in the 1870s further encouraged nations bordering the Atlantic ocean to pursue the idea of a transcontinental canal.⁵⁵ While the impetus to begin the project in earnest grew during this era, it is important to note that the idea of a canal through Central America already had a long history. The earliest suggestions of a transcontinental canal are attributed to Vasco

⁵¹ Darío, *Crossing the Isthmus of Panama*, 31.

⁵² *The Panama Canal: Twenty-fifth Anniversary*, 31.

⁵³ Donald Marquand Dozer, *Latin America: An Interpretive History* (New York: McGraw-Hill Cook Company, Inc., 1962), 424.

⁵⁴ La Rosa and Mejía, *The United States Discovers Panama*, 1.

⁵⁵ Helen Miller Bailey and Abraham P. Nasatir, *Latin America: The Development of Its Civilizations* (London: Constable and Company Ltd, 1960), 684.

Núñez de Balboa.⁵⁶ In 1513 he “discovered a previously unknown great ocean separated from the Atlantic by only a narrow bridge of land forty miles wide”.⁵⁷ Though Rodrigo de Bastidas was the first European to reach Panama in 1501, Balboa was the first to survey the route between the coasts in 1513. The first official survey, also completed by Balboa was ordered by Charles the V of Spain in 1524.⁵⁸ Though interest in building a canal was present as early as 1513 it took until the late 1800s for the project to move forward.⁵⁹

With the opening of the Panamanian railway and its’ monetary success, it quickly became apparent to numerous world powers that the development of a canal across Central America would be advantageous. The United States, France and Britain were all deeply invested in the Caribbean and Central America. France, Britain and the United States were all interested in building a canal, but worries of political issues haunted the world powers. Whoever built and operated the canal would control the most accessible crossing from the Pacific to the Atlantic Ocean, which militarily and commercially would be a great advantage. Neither Britain or the United States wanted the other to independently build the much sought after canal project and to remain neutral both signed the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty on April 19th, 1850.⁶⁰ The treaty stated that neither country would build a canal, “to the exclusion of the other”, which succeed in sufficiently stalling either country’s ability to build a canal for fifty years.⁶¹ While Britain and the United States were busy tying each others hands, Ferdinand de Lesseps of France had completed

⁵⁶ Bullard, *Panama: The Canal, The Country and the People*, xix.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, xix.

⁵⁸ Liss, *The Canal: Aspects of the United States and Panamanian Relations*, 11.

⁵⁹ Pendle, *A History of Latin America*, 176.

⁶⁰ Miner, *The Fight For the Panama Route*, 16.

⁶¹ Bailey and Nasatir, *Latin America: The Development of Its Civilizations*, 684.

the Suez Canal, setting the stage for a canal across Central America.

Before the decision was made to build the canal in Panama, there was extensive debate about the most viable location to build in Central America. As shown in Figure 1.0 twenty possible routes were surveyed and considered when determining the best route for building a canal.⁶²

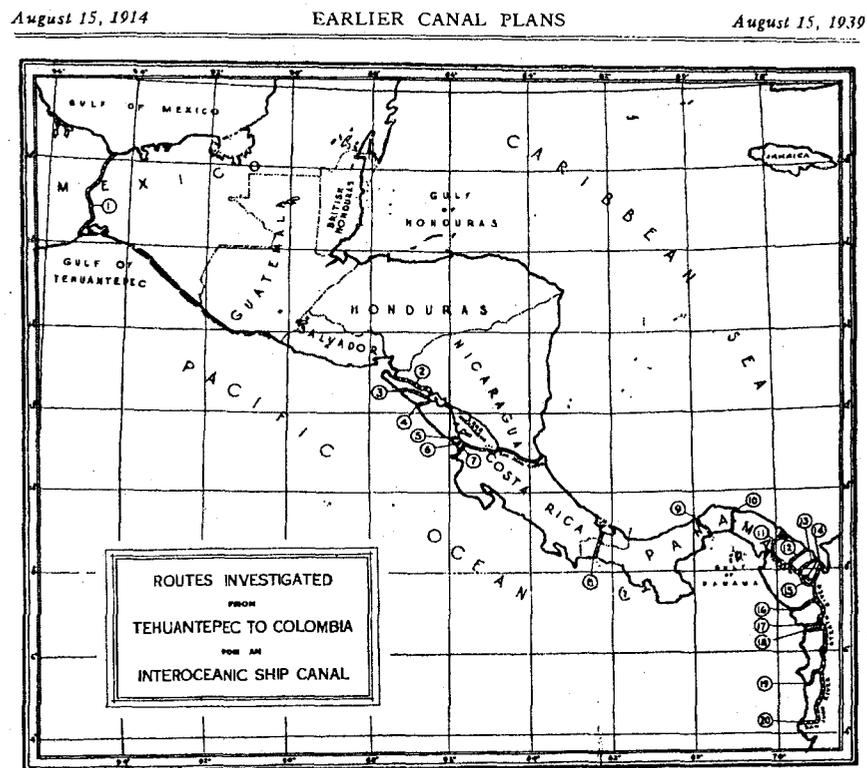


Figure 1.0: Possible Routes for the Transcontinental Canal⁶³

The U.S. Navy surveyed many of the possible routes between 1870 and 1875 and unanimously decided in favor of a Nicaraguan route.⁶⁴ Before 1870, the United States had already developed a controversial relationship with Nicaragua after an American citizen named William Walker

⁶² *The Panama Canal: Twenty-fifth Anniversary*, 11.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁶⁴ David Howarth, *The Golden Isthmus* (St. James's Place, London: Collins, 1966), 176-177.

declared himself President of the Republic. The Walker incident demonstrates the growing expansionist ideals and the idea of racial superiority which the United States was operating under. While the Walker event of the early 1850s was not supported by the government, the failure of the United States to quell Walker's reign caused increasing resentment and distrust of 'Americans' throughout Central America.⁶⁵ The situation in Nicaragua was unstable and as would happen often in the future, U.S. assistance which was first requested became overpowering.

In 1838 Nicaragua became an independent sovereign state, but civil fighting between the two groups of the privileged class caused havoc in the newborn Republic.⁶⁶ The Liberals of the country residing in the city of León fought the Conservatives who were living in the city of Granada. During the first six years of independence control shifted back and forth, resulting in the rule of fifteen presidents.⁶⁷ In 1854, the struggle between Liberals and Conservatives seemed to be drawing to a close when the Liberals received assistance from Honduras.⁶⁸ Unfortunately for the Liberals the tide turned drastically when the Conservatives invaded and the Hondurans fled. Certain of defeat, Liberal leader Francisco Castellón decided to seek foreign assistance.⁶⁹ With a promised payment of land and gold, U.S. filibuster William Walker took up the challenge of winning Nicaragua for the Liberals.⁷⁰ To circumvent the neutrality laws of the United States, William Walker and his 58 men travelled to Nicaragua on May 3rd, 1855 under the guise of

⁶⁵ Conniff, *Panama and The United States*, 37.

⁶⁶ Thomas W. Walker ed., *Nicaragua in Revolution* (New York: Praeger, 1982), 12.

⁶⁷ Mack, *The Land Divided*, 194.

⁶⁸ Richard Millett, *Guardians of the Dynasty: A History of the U.S. Created Guardia Nacional De Nicaragua and the Somoza Family* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1977), 18.

⁶⁹ Mack, *The Land Divided*, 194.

⁷⁰ Millett, *Guardians of the Dynasty*, 18.

'colonists'.⁷¹ Within months of his arrival, the Conservatives were defeated and the city of Granada was captured.⁷² During the months of fighting Liberal leader Castellón died and Walker promoted himself to Chief of the Armed Forces. On June 29 of 1856 Walker went one step further and declared himself President of Nicaragua.⁷³

Based on his prior attempt to conquer a portion of Mexico, the placement of William Walker as President of Nicaragua was not totally unexpected. In 1853, just two years before going to Nicaragua, Walker and 45 men tried to establish a U.S. State on the western peninsula of Mexico.⁷⁴ After landing in Mexico, Walker declared the land a republic and proclaimed himself President. United States officials arrested Walker and tried him for breaking the neutrality laws which were in place. After being fully acquitted of any wrongdoing, Walker laid low until his departure for Nicaragua. After his appointment to President, Walker proceeded with his racially motivated agenda.⁷⁵ Pursuing what he believed was the Anglo Saxon destiny, 'President' Walker began the replacement of Indo-Hispanic people and culture by encouraging white settlement in Nicaragua.⁷⁶ The 'President's' other main goals included, seizing all aspects of government, building a canal and taking possession of waterways, all the while turning Nicaragua into a bustling metropolis. The two most radical of Walker's presidential decrees involved changing the official language to English and the reintroduction of slavery to promote capitalism and industrialization.⁷⁷ Though Nicaraguans were unable to defend themselves

⁷¹ Mack, *The Land Divided*, 195.

⁷² Millett, *Guardians of the Dynasty*, 18.

⁷³ Mack, *The Land Divided*, 199.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 195.

⁷⁵ Donald C. Hodges, *Intellectual Foundations of the Nicaraguan Revolution* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986), 110.

⁷⁶ Hodges, *Intellectual Foundations of the Nicaraguan Revolution*, 111.

⁷⁷ Walker ed., *Nicaragua in Revolution*, 12.

against their new President, other Central American countries and the British helped to remove Walker from his position.

The surrounding Central American countries as well as Britain and the Accessory Transit Company of Cornelius Vanderbilt rallied together to oust Walker from the Nicaraguan presidency.⁷⁸ The decision to fight Walker is best explained by Thomas Walker. The “bizarre turn of events not only catalyzed both parties but all of the other Central American Republics into a virtual holy war against the Yankee interloper”.⁷⁹ As of May 1st, 1857 William Walker surrendered to U.S. officials, but the impact and fear aroused in the surrounding nations did not disappear. Walker was tried in U.S. courts but instead of being convicted he was acquitted again. Before the end of his life, Walker tried yet again to conquer both Nicaragua and Honduras. The impact of Walker's exploits was a distinct resentment on the part of Central American peoples and governments toward the imperialistic and domineering nature of the United States' expansionist ideologies.

While the U.S. was focusing on Nicaragua, Lucien Bonaparte Wyse saw an opportunity to negotiate with the Columbian government securing a concession to build a canal across Panama.⁸⁰ Though Wyse was able to obtain the concession, it was worthless to him unless he could sell it to a company interested in building a canal across Panama. As an individual there was no way he could develop the concession himself. Wyse needed to find a qualified builder who could raise the capital required for the monumental task of building a canal. Ferdinand Lesseps was just the type of man that Wyse needed to buy his concession. Lesseps had already

⁷⁸ Millett, *Guardians of the Dynasty*, 19.

⁷⁹ Walker ed., *Nicaragua in Revolution*, 12.

⁸⁰ Howarth, *The Golden Isthmus*, 181.

completed one major canal and was the perfect man to build another across Central America.

Lesseps completed the Suez canal in 1869 demonstrating the possibility of large scale successful canal building but it was apparent that the topography and climate of Panama would be a challenge.⁸¹ The difficulties associated with building in Panama did not alter Lesseps intentions to building a sea level canal. In 1879, he was quoted as saying, "Panama will be easier to build, finish and easier to maintain than the Suez Canal."⁸²

Unfortunately for Lesseps, his predictions did not come true. The Suez canal was built across flat sandy terrain, while the surveyed route for the Panama Canal was forested, mountainous, swampy and disease ridden. After in-depth surveying, that conflicted with earlier surveys of the route, it was determined that a sea level canal was the best choice when building across Panama.⁸³ Unfortunately, the concession did not come without conditions. Wyse's concession gave him permission to build the canal across the province of Panama but only if the owners of the railway consented.⁸⁴ To acquire the consent of the railway, Lessep's company was forced to purchase the railroad for twenty-five million dollars in 1883.⁸⁵ After the railway became a subsidiary of the French company, work could finally begin. Unfortunately the early setbacks faced by the French company were only the beginning of the numerous difficulties to come.

One of the most difficult tasks for the French company was securing and maintaining a

⁸¹ Pendle, *A History of Latin America*, 176.

⁸² Howarth, *The Golden Isthmus*, 176.

⁸³ Darío, *Crossing the Isthmus of Panama*, 32. In *Crossing the Isthmus of Panama*, the author states that Bonaparte Wyse was involved with extensive surveying of the area but in Denison Kitchel's book *The Truth About the Panama Canal* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Arlington House, 1978) the exact opposite is written.

⁸⁴ Howarth, *The Golden Isthmus*, 182.

⁸⁵ *The Panama Canal: Twenty-fifth Anniversary*, 44.

steady labour force. Similar to the building of the railroad, canal workers laboured in terrible conditions, which caused high death and injury rates during construction.⁸⁶ Estimates of the number of workers on the canal during the French attempt range from as low as 400 in the early years to a maximum of 20,000.⁸⁷ According to Linda Smart Chubb the French Canal Company, treated British West Indians with equality and “the majority of positions of trust were filled by them”.⁸⁸ Although she states that the relationship between the French and the British West Indians was positive, other authors have written of the terrible conditions that the labourers faced while digging the canal. Elizabeth Petras states that as cost cutting measures were enacted the “superexploitation” of labourers became apparent.⁸⁹ Some support for Linda Smart Chubb's statement of good treatment can be found in David Howarth's book *The Golden Isthmus*, where he writes about the wonderful hospitals and good housing provided for the labourers by the French Canal Company.⁹⁰ Unfortunately this did not prevent the deaths of many of the labourers caused by yellow fever and malaria. It is estimated that during the time of the French attempt that a quarter of the work force was struck down by disease every year.⁹¹

The continuously high rates of death caused labour shortages throughout the project's duration.⁹² Thousands of workers migrated to Panama and thousands died digging the canal.

⁸⁶ Bullard, *Panama: The Canal, The Country and the People*, xvi.

⁸⁷ Howarth, *The Golden Isthmus*, 189; *The Panama Canal: Twenty-fifth Anniversary*, 15-16.

⁸⁸ Chubb, “The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama” in *The Forgotten People*, 1.

⁸⁹ Petras, *Jamaican Labor Migration*, 86.

⁹⁰ Howarth, *The Golden Isthmus*, 186.

⁹¹ *The Panama Canal: Twenty-fifth Anniversary*, 32. The estimate that a ¼ of the labourers died yearly may be too high but it is possible. The death rate in Panama during the time of French construction is listed as 180 out of every 1000. It is important to note that while this number does not equal ¼ it is an average for the entire province and includes the native inhabitants as well. It is reasonable to assume that the death rate in the construction zone was considerably higher than in the province, and due to that factor ¼ may not be highly exaggerated. Carles, *Crossing the Isthmus of Panama*, 34.

⁹² Pendle, *A History of Latin America*, 176.

The death rate was very high and continued to rise after 1885 due to both disease and accidents. S.W. Plume while giving testimony before the House of Representatives stated, "I never saw anything like it. It did not matter any difference whether they were black or white, to see the way they died there. They die[d] like animals."⁹³ The conditions workers lived and died in were horrific and little changed as the project progressed. The overall number of deaths during the French Canal Company's operation ranges in estimates from 16,500 to 22,000 of which approximately 2,000 were French employees.⁹⁴ The remaining 14, 500 to 20,000 deaths were all listed as labourers. Though the loss of the labourers and engineers was devastating to the potential success of the canal, the choice to build a sea level canal also played an important role in the failure of the French attempt.

The choice to build a sea level canal meant that extensive digging was required to cut through the hills and mountains of Panama. Natural disasters, in the form of mudslides, floods, heavy rains and storms, constantly stopped or reversed the work completed. It was not uncommon for the project to come to a standstill for weeks because "it was all they could do to clear out the mud from the excavations they had made."⁹⁵ Though progress was made between 1882 and 1888, it was at a great cost and a slow pace. It became more apparent as the months passed that the idea of a sea level canal was not the best choice for Panama.⁹⁶ Lesseps had an estimate drawn up to switch the canal from a sea level design to a lock system but decided to continue on course with the sea level canal.⁹⁷ It is often speculated that if the design had been

⁹³ Petras, *Jamaican Labor Migration*, 110-111.

⁹⁴ Howarth, *The Golden Isthmus*, 186.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 192.

⁹⁶ *The Panama Canal: Twenty-fifth Anniversary*, 15.

⁹⁷ Howarth, *The Golden Isthmus*, 192.

changed the French may have succeeded. The choice to continue building a sea level canal has been labeled the gravest of Lessep's errors.⁹⁸

In 1899, at the age of 83, the French engineer was forced to admit defeat and stop the project.⁹⁹ Many of France's inhabitants had invested in the Canal Company and were outraged when it went bankrupt. Accusation of mismanagement and lavish spending led to charges against Lesseps and other high ranking officials within the company.¹⁰⁰ Many inhabitants thought that the government might continue the project, but to avoid any difficulties with the United States the French government decided not to continue.¹⁰¹ When construction began in 1880 the future looked bright, but by 1889 after eight years of construction and 400 million dollars, the project was only one third complete and bankrupt; "with broken hearts and empty purses they were forced to give up the idea of ever completing their great undertaking."¹⁰²

With the failure of the French Canal Company the United States' need to build the canal for both military and commercial reasons increased.¹⁰³ The development of the western United States, coupled with long trip made by the U.S.S Oregon to join the rest of the fleet against Spain in the Spanish American War demonstrated yet again the military and "commercial advantages of transisthmian transportation".¹⁰⁴ In the pamphlet "The New Panama Canal" by Brig.-Gen. H.L. Abbot, the U.S.S. Oregon's difficulties were the primary reason for wanting a canal:

⁹⁸ Dario, *Crossing the Isthmus of Panama*, 34.

⁹⁹ Howarth, *The Golden Isthmus*, 196.

¹⁰⁰ Dario, *Crossing the Isthmus of Panama*, 33.

¹⁰¹ Howarth, *The Golden Isthmus*, 196.

¹⁰² Liss, *The Canal: Aspects of United States Panamanian Relations*, 15; *Canal Zone Pythian*, 4.

¹⁰³ E. Bradford Burns and Julie A. Charlip, *Latin America: A Concise Interpretive History*, 7th ed. (Upper Saddle River, N.J: Prentice Hall, 2002), 174.

¹⁰⁴ Dozer, *Latin America: An Interpretive History*, 424.

The delays and risks experienced in bringing the “Oregon” eastward from the Pacific Coast, at the outbreak of the war with Spain, have drawn the attention of the whole country to the importance of an early construction of a ship-canal across the isthmus now obstruction free communication between our Atlantic and Pacific coasts. The route by Cape Horn is entirely too long to meet present demands, either commercial or military.¹⁰⁵ As the U.S. became one of the world powers it was clear that the ability to move naval ships coast to coast in a more timely fashion was necessary.¹⁰⁶ During the French construction period, the United States placed its focus on a possible canal route across Nicaragua.

The need to build a canal for military reasons was apparent as the United States became involved with Cuba's struggle for independence. By the 1890s Spain had already lost most of its' colonial possessions but Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines and Guam were still part of the empire.¹⁰⁷ Cuba, after years of neglect, corruption, and broken promises coupled with the economic hardships caused by the U.S. tariff of 1894, rebelled against its' colonial position.¹⁰⁸ As the fight for independence proceeded the rebels found themselves in a winning position, taking control of two thirds of the island by 1896.¹⁰⁹ Spain, in an attempt to quell the rebels, implemented the “reconcentrado policy” which placed native Cubans in concentration camps. The camps were crowded and unsanitary causing the deaths of many, while bringing the Cuban rebel's struggle to the forefront of international affairs.

The institution of concentration camps allowed the United States to demonstrate interest

¹⁰⁵ Brig.-Gen. H.L. Abbot, “The New Panama Canal,” in *Pamphlets on the Panama Canal, 1886-1928* (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, 1989) 341. The Oregon had to travel approximately 13,000 miles from San Francisco, around Cape Horn to the Caribbean. By the time the ship arrived the conflict was ending and the need for the ship was not longer there. If a Canal had been available the distance could have been decreased to as little as 4,600 km and the ship could have played an integral role in Spanish American War. Peter English, *Panama and the Canal Zone in Picture* (New York: Sterling Publishing Co. Inc., 1975), 32.

¹⁰⁶ Pendle, *A History of Latin America*, 176.

¹⁰⁷ Cole, *An Interpretive History of American Relations*, rev. ed., 212.

¹⁰⁸ Gardner, La Feber and McCormick, *Creation of the American empire*, 243.

¹⁰⁹ Dennis Merrill and Thomas G. Paterson, eds., *Major Problems in American Foreign Relations Volume I: To 1920* 5th ed. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 346.

in the Cuban revolution “in the name of humanity and self interest”.¹¹⁰ Whether the U.S. intervened for humanitarian reasons or for the more commonly attributed ideals of expansionism and capitalist gain is unknown. The United States, Cuba and Spain tried to address the problems through diplomacy to avoid war. Key events in 1898 destroyed the possibility of a diplomatic agreement.¹¹¹ The first event was the publication of a letter written by a Spanish diplomat calling President McKinley a “weak bidder for the admiration of the crowd” and “a would-be politician”.¹¹² The second was the sinking of the U.S.S. Maine in the Havana harbour on February 15th, 1898.¹¹³ The United States claimed that an external explosion, most likely a Spanish torpedo, was responsible while the Spanish government identified an internal explosion as the cause. Regardless of Spain's findings, the sinking of the U.S.S. Maine was the final event leading up to the declaration of war by the United States. The United States formally entered into the Spanish-American War but it did not side with the Cuban rebels as expected. Instead the U.S. took up a position of “neutral, enforced pacification”.¹¹⁴ During the war direct help was never given to the rebels and on victory the U.S. continued its pacifying role; insisting that it would maintain control in Cuba until the formation of a “stable, pro-American Regime”.¹¹⁵

The Treaty of Paris which ended the war granted Cuba independence under United States supervision. As a result of U.S. involvement in the Spanish-American War, Cuba signed the Platt Amendment in 1903 which gave the United States the authority to intervene “for the preservation

¹¹⁰ Leopold, *The Growth of American Foreign Policy*, 167.

¹¹¹ Cole, *An Interpretive History of American Relations*, rev. ed., 215.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 216.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 217.

¹¹⁴ Gardner, La Feber and McCormick, *Creation of the American Empire*, 249.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 251.

of Cuban independence, the maintenance of a government adequate for the protection of life, property, and individual liberty".¹¹⁶ The Platt Amendment became representative of the United States' intervention policy for much of Latin American. The other Spanish colonies of Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines became imperial possessions of the U.S..¹¹⁷ Richard Leopold argues that the attitude of the U.S. changed upon the gaining of colonial possession, the United States "departed from its vaunted course of not interfering in internal affairs of other peoples and also abandoned its traditional antipathy to possessing colonies".¹¹⁸ The U.S. claimed it was content to release the colonial nations as soon as their ability to rule themselves in a democratic and reasonable manner was established. Until that time the paternalistic United States intended to protect and lead the budding nations.¹¹⁹ The success of the Spanish-American War gave the United States a new foothold in Latin American and supported its expansionist and capitalist goals. Upon the completion of the war in 1898, the need to build a canal to better access military installations in both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans was even more important.

To achieve military security and faster travel between coasts, the United States began to seriously consider building a canal across Nicaragua. In 1899 a canal route across Nicaragua was approved even though it was longer than the Panama route.¹²⁰ Though longer the amount of digging required was far less than that in Panama. An attempt was made to begin the canal by an 'American' company but a fate similar to the French company occurred. Denison Kitchel describes the Nicaraguan attempt as follows; "far less money, far less world attention and far less

¹¹⁶ "The Platt Amendment, 1903" in *Major Problems in American Foreign Relations Volume I: To 1920* 5th ed. eds. Dennis Merrill and Thomas G. Paterson (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 356.

¹¹⁷ Cole, *An Interpretive History of American Relations*, rev. ed., 222.

¹¹⁸ Leopold, *The Growth of American Foreign Policy*, 167.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 189.

¹²⁰ English, *Panama and the Canal Zone in Pictures*, 32.

accomplishment were involved. But it was, after all, another failure.”¹²¹ Both canal attempts were failures but the United States continued to focus on Nicaragua. The 1901 negotiations to end the Clayton-Bulwer treaty resulted in the signing of the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty.¹²² The new treaty allowed the United States to contract the canal themselves and gave the U.S. permission to build, operate and develop a trans-isthmian canal.¹²³ With much of the senate in support of Nicaragua, how did the U.S. decide to pursue building in Panama?

The story behind the decision to build in Panama is rumored to have been caused by the distribution of a Nicaraguan postage stamp. Rubén Darío Carles related the stamp story in his book *Crossing the Isthmus of Panama*. Darío stated that the stamp depicted the volcano Momotombo erupting and stated “due to this eruption great damages were suffered.”¹²⁴ There was much truth behind the stamp and Nicaragua did suffer from earthquakes and tremors which could potentially cause damage to a canal.¹²⁵ Panama on the other hand did not suffer from earthquakes and would provide a stable environment once the canal was built. While the story of the stamp provides a good anecdote, other factors were in play.¹²⁶

The battle for the Panama route traced back many decades. As early as 1825, the U.S. was considering both Nicaragua and Panama as possible canal routes.¹²⁷ Nicaragua was considered the more favourable position after a semblance of governmental stability was demonstrated. After the failure of the French attempt, the New Panama Canal Company

¹²¹ Kitchel, *The Truth About the Panama Canal*, 40.

¹²² Burns and Charlip, *Latin America: A Concise Interpretive History*, 174.

¹²³ Kitchel, *The Truth About the Panama Canal*, 41.

¹²⁴ Darío, *Crossing the Isthmus of Panama*, 38.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹²⁶ Kitchel, *The Truth About the Panama Canal*, 45.

¹²⁷ Marshall, *The Story of the Panama Canal*, 28.

requested the completion of a report which reassessed the cost of completing the Panama Canal.¹²⁸ Engineers from around the world worked on the Comité Technique report.¹²⁹ Though it was never published, William Nelson Cromwell ensured that President McKinley was given a copy to guarantee that he was aware of the Panamanian option. The report placed Panama back on the list of locations but the Senate still supported and preferred the Nicaraguan route. On March 3rd 1899 a law was passed that required the President to name a commission which was to determine the most feasible and practical location for a canal.¹³⁰ Once the commission was established they decided to travel to both Panama and Nicaragua to look at the routes and to Europe to study other canals.¹³¹ In 1901, when the commission gave its decision, it was in favour of Nicaragua. The New Panama Canal Company had listed the selling price of the property and equipment as 109,141,500 dollars which the commission deemed made the cost of pursuing a canal in Panama too high.¹³² It was also believed that the Nicaraguan route was better for shipping and would be favoured by shipowners. Nicaragua could be built for both a lower cost and was thought to possess better shipping lane ways than Panama.

For Panama to be considered it needed to be the better option both geographically and monetarily. Two events helped to secure the approval that the New Panama Canal Company sought. The first was a personal investigation completed by Senator Marcus (Mark) Hanna of Ohio.¹³³ By requesting the opinion of eighty shipowners, captains, officers and pilots he was

¹²⁸ Miner, *The Fight for the Panama Route*, 76.

¹²⁹ Marshall, *The Story of the Panama Canal*, 115.

¹³⁰ Miner, *The Fight for the Panama Route*, 90.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹³² Marshall, *The Story of the Panama Canal*, 117.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 118-119.

able to determined that Panama was the preferred route. Nicaragua was considered disadvantageous for sailing crafts because it did not possess the naturally deep harbors found on both the Pacific and Atlantic sides of the proposed Panama Canal route. Senator Hanna solved the first problem but the directors of the New Panama Canal Company had to find a way to make the Panama route affordable.

Once the commission announced that it would not pursue the Panama route due to the high cost being asked by the directors of the New Panama Canal Company, the directors resigned leaving stockholders to find a solution. The stockholders quickly realized that without the purchase of the canal rights and equipment by the U.S. government no money could be regained from the failure of the French Canal. Suitable arrangements needed to be made between the New Panama Canal Company and the United States government.¹³⁴ To recoup some of the lost income, and to entice the United States to pursue Panama's route, the French sold the right to build and the abandoned equipment to the U.S. for 40,000,000 dollars.¹³⁵ Despite owning equipment and the French building concession, the United States had to negotiate with the Columbia Senate to acquire the necessary approval to start building again. Though there was interest in building the canal and the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty was abrogated; without the support of the Columbian government the United States could not begin.

The United States tried to negotiate a new agreement with the Columbian government but according to Helen Bailey and Abraham Nastir, factionalism and the hope of a better offer prevented the Senate from granting the concession to the U.S.¹³⁶ In contrast the collection, “I

¹³⁴ Dozer, *Latin America: An Interpretive History*, 424.

¹³⁵ Bailey and Nasatir, *Latin America: The Development of Its Civilizations*, 684.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 685.

Took the Isthmus” Ex-President Roosevelt's Confession, Colombia's Protest and Editorial Comment By American Newspapers on “How the United States Acquired the Right to Build the Panama Canal” argues completely different reasons for the treaty's failure. The first reason stated in the foreword is that the surrender of the right of sovereignty over the canal zone, violated Columbian constitution, and that furthermore the transfer of the Railroad negated Columbia's right to the railway.¹³⁷ The Columbian senate wanted to negotiate on the two points of concern but President Roosevelt stated that “any change would be in violation of the Spooner law and not permissible”.¹³⁸ Due to the United States’ argument which prevented negotiation the Columbian senate was unable to grant the U.S. the right to build in Panama. In response to the denial of the building request, a group of revolutionists instigated by the Panama Canal Company began the revolution with the foreknowledge of President Roosevelt in November of 1903.¹³⁹

As tensions between Columbia and its’ Panamanian province escalated, 500 soldiers were sent to quell the rebellion. The soldiers never arrived in Panama because the “American owned Panama railway refused to transport the 'army' across the Isthmus to Panama City, the center of 'revolt’”.¹⁴⁰ Though it is unclear whether the soldiers could have ended the revolt, U.S. intervention clearly played an important role in the success of the Panamanian revolution. The only other way for the Columbian government to reach Panama was via the sea, which was cut

¹³⁷ *“I Took the Isthmus” Ex-President Roosevelt's Confession, Colombia's Protest and Editorial Comment By American Newspapers on “How the United States Acquired the Right to Build the Panama Canal”* (New York: M. B. Brown Printing, 1911), 4.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹³⁹ Dozer, *Latin America: An Interpretive History*, 425.

¹⁴⁰ Bailey and Nasatir, *Latin America: The Development of Its Civilizations*, 685.

off by the arrival of U.S. Naval ships.¹⁴¹ A statement by President Roosevelt in 1911 during a speech for students at the University of California, demonstrates his determination to build the canal. He said, “I took the canal zone, and let Congress debate”.¹⁴² The assistance given by the U.S. military ensured the success of the revolution and U.S. support of Panamanian sovereignty enabled canal negotiations to move forward.¹⁴³ The establishment of a revolutionary government on November 6th 1903, marked the beginning of Panama's existence as an independent nation and the continued involvement of the United States for decades to come.¹⁴⁴

With independence assured the United States began negotiations for the concessions needed to build the Panama Canal. The result was the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty of 1903 that not only recognized but “guaranteed the independence of the Republic of Panama”.¹⁴⁵ The guarantee however, came at a high cost. The United States was given “in perpetuity, [to] a zone of land and land under water 10 miles in width and extending 3 miles into the Caribbean...” as well as “the control of any other lands and waters outside of the Zone which may be necessary and convenient for the construction, maintenance, operation, sanitation, and the protection of the Canal”.¹⁴⁶ The treaty also acknowledged that the United States now controlled all the rights, privileges, properties, and the concession of the Panama Railroad and the New Panama Canal Company. Sheldon Liss states that “the United States took advantage of chaos and instability in Panama in 1903 to extract advantages which still exist. There can be no doubt that the treaty

¹⁴¹ Pendle, *A History of Latin America*, 176.

¹⁴² “*I Took the Isthmus*”, 7.

¹⁴³ Liss, *The Canal: Aspects of United States Panamanian Relations*, 18.

¹⁴⁴ Dozer, *Latin America: An Interpretive History*, 424.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 424.

¹⁴⁶ Margaret D. Wilde, *The Panama Canal and Social Justice* (Washington: Office of International Justice and Peace, United States Catholic Conference, 1976), 24.

between the United States and the newly emerged Republic of Panama favoured the Americans".¹⁴⁷

The building of the Canal was a "vivid demonstration of a new kind of United States, casting off its historical aversion to imperialism and aggression on the international stage".¹⁴⁸ While the building of the canal was a new beginning for the United States, it was simply a continuation of what had come before for the labourers. As stated in Linda Smart Chubb's report the U.S. agreed to continue with British West Indian labourers filling many of the trusted positions which they had held under the French Canal Company.¹⁴⁹ As many as 45,000 West Indian contract labourers were working on the U.S. canal.¹⁵⁰ Linda Smart Chubb provides a number of examples of British West Indians working in 'trusted' positions. A friend of hers "was chief Telegraph Operator. Another coloured Britisher was Receiving and Forwarding Agent of the railroad. Almost all the station-masters were British, as were most of the dock foremen".¹⁵¹ Many British West Indians held important jobs within the Canal Zone, but racism and segregation eventually stripped many of their positions. National policies passed in Panama eventually removed many West Indians from their positions, replacing them with Panamanian

¹⁴⁷ Liss, *The Canal: Aspects of United States Panamanian Relations*, 20. The signing of the Hay-Bunau-Varilla treaty would become a thorn in the side of Panama. When the U.S. negotiated and agreed to the treaty not a single Panamanian national was present. The negotiations were completed by an expatriate French businessman without any consultation with the newly formed Panamanian government. In future years as nationalism surged in Panama the situation surrounding the signing of the treaty caused upset, as Panama felt it had been unfairly treated by the United States Government. The lack of representation and the clearly favorable terms granted to the U.S. caused renegotiations and much national disquiet. Charles John Chasten, *Born in Blood and Fire: A Concise History of Latin America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), 201; Falcoff, *Panama's Canal: What Happens When the United States Give a Small Country What It Wants*, 27.

¹⁴⁸ Bullard, *Panama: The Canal, The Country and The People*, xix.

¹⁴⁹ Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 2.

¹⁵⁰ Biesanz and Biesanz, *The People of Panama*, 55.

¹⁵¹ Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 2.

workers. The guarantees of equality promised to the British West Indians did not last for long. Racism, segregation and improving health conditions quickly provided a safer work environment and white United States citizens began to replace the British West Indians in the highest of positions.

The threats of malaria and yellow fever had long posed the greatest threat to workers but Colonel Gorgas almost completely destroyed malaria and yellow fever. This was one of the most important advantages to emerge during the U.S. stage of building.¹⁵² Cuban Carlos Finlay and an American doctor working in Havana linked mosquitoes to malaria and yellow fever contraction. Through a series of experiments they discovered that by killing the mosquitoes the virulent disease's transmission could be stopped.¹⁵³ Prior to the beginning of construction and during the building of the canal, sanitary expert Colonel Gorgas was sent to clean up Panama.¹⁵⁴ Colonel Gorgas, working with U.S. Army Surgeon William Crawford, was able to wipe out yellow fever and to almost eliminate malaria.

Upon Gorgas' arrival in 1903 numerous cases of yellow fever were reported each year, but by 1906 yellow fever was annihilated.¹⁵⁵ The percentage of workers suffering from malaria demonstrated a similar trend of decline. In 1906 as much as 86 percent of the work force suffered with malaria, but by 1913 the number was below eight percent of the working population.¹⁵⁶ The drastic improvement in the quality of life and the decrease in disease meant

¹⁵² Bailey and Nasatir, *Latin America: The Development of Its Civilizations*, 686.

¹⁵³ Philip D. Curtin, *Death by Migration: Europe's Encounter with the Tropical World in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 132.

¹⁵⁴ Pendle, *A History of Latin America*, 177.

¹⁵⁵ Ian Cameron, *The Impossible Dream The Building of the Panama Canal* (New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc, 1972), 134.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 141.

that the labour force suffered less setbacks and shortages and was healthier overall. Another result was an increasing number of 'Americans' who wanted to work on the Isthmus and a decreasing need for new labourers. These two facts lead to the openly hostile replacement of West Indian labourers in higher positions.

With health concerns addressed, "There began a slow weeding-out of the old and trusted British employees, without regard to length of service. They were demoted to lower positions or dismissed without compensation".¹⁵⁷ Many of the West Indians were skilled craftsmen and professionals but their U.S. co-workers and supervisors reduced the British West Indians to jobs far below their skill levels.¹⁵⁸ According to Linda Smart Chubb not all British West Indians lost their jobs. The option to take U.S. citizenship and remain in their positions was available to some, but many West Indians refused to give up their British citizenship. Linda Smart Chubb also mentions the unequal rates of pay given to West Indian workers completing the same tasks a higher paid 'white' employees.¹⁵⁹ One example of inequality is the different treatment given to European workers brought in to work during the construction of the canal. The European labourers worked the same jobs as the West Indians but the rate of pay for 'white' workers was two or three times higher.¹⁶⁰ The demotion of West Indian workers to the position of 'helper' was a common occurrence, though they would still perform the same jobs. By labeling the West Indian worker as a helper, a lower rate of pay could be given.

¹⁵⁷ Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 2. The term "British employees" refers to British West Indians working in the Canal Zone.

¹⁵⁸ E.A. Gaskin, "Principal Address" at *Final Canal Zone Commemorative Program Honoring West Indian Oldtimers From Panama Canal Construction Years 1904-1914* (Rainbow City High School Ground: U.S. Archives, 15 August 1979), 4.

¹⁵⁹ Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 2.

¹⁶⁰ E.A. Gaskin, "Principal Address", 4.

The demotion and degrading changes applied during the U.S. construction period continued for decades. With the completion of the canal many British West Indians were dismissed or given lower positions, so that the now extraneous number of U.S. citizens could remain in the Canal Zone occupying the positions once held by British West Indians. Labour uncertainty and a high turn over rate were common on the canal even during peak production periods. As racism took hold in the Zone, the harsh and inconsiderate treatment meted out by American supervisors caused many West Indians to leave their jobs.¹⁶¹ West Indian workers who had been integral in the process of building the canal were not given proper credit or compensation for their years of labour. Nor was their treatment during their employment held to an acceptable standard.

The issues faced by British West Indian workers during the building and later additions to the Panama Canal were many faceted and interconnected. To truly understand the world that the British West Indians resided in while labouring on the canal it is necessary to examine the many facets of life in the Canal Zone. Though the history of Panama has provided an answer to how the West Indians arrived on the isthmus an exploration of their role on the isthmus and the difficulties of everyday living is required to understand their struggles. In the second section of Linda Smart Chubb's memorandum she describes the Canal Zone and the use of segregation to allocate West Indians to inferior positions.¹⁶² Chapter two examines the Canal Zone's use of segregation to maintain a lower standard of living for West Indian workers. Topics such as schooling, housing, health care, the legal system and the types of food and services available to

¹⁶¹ Biesanz and Biesanz, *The People of Panama*, 56.

¹⁶² Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 2.

British West Indian workers provides a snippet of the daily routine and lives of canal workers.

Segregation was always present in the Zone and was a key component of many Canal Zone policies. While the examination of segregation policy demonstrates the harsh reality of racism on a daily basis; it is through the examination of the social issues faced by workers that it is possible to push the study of the canal workers further. Segregation had a social impact on the West Indians lives, placing their community in a difficult position. The lack of advancement and equal treatment as workers, placed West Indians in a lower class bracket and attempted to permanently relegate them to an inferior positions. By examining the concerns presented by Linda Smart Chubb the West Indian labourers are given a voice. The second chapter examines Linda Smart Chubb's concerns in a greater depth enhancing her statements and arguments. Chapter two demonstrates why the West Indian community struggled to succeed and how greater representation could have improved their lives.

Segregation and Its Purpose in the Canal Zone

The role of segregation and racism are well documented by scholars writing about both Panama and the Canal Zone. Issues of racism and segregation were widespread and common throughout Central America during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Many transnational corporations had policies which supported and perpetuated racism and discrimination of not only West Indians, but of everyone not of European descent. Even Hispanics were discriminated against in their own country. Philippe Bourgois provides an examination of the diversity and extent of racism in *Ethnicity at Work: Divided Labor on a Central American Banana Plantation*. Though the book focuses on the banana industry in the Bocas Del Toro and Talamanca Valleys, the apparent divisions and the extent of racism is applicable to the Canal Zone and Panama at large.¹ The type of racism instituted by corporations, United States citizens and the United States government in Central America was representative of that practiced in U.S. society; specifically that of the southern states. The belief in Anglo-Saxon superiority, 'Negro' inferiority and the implementation of Jim Crow laws were all aspects of U.S. racism in the tropics.² These attitudes extended to aboriginal groups, people of mixed descent and all except the most elite members of the host country.

When the United States began the canal project, U.S. citizens working on the canal transferred their societal ideals to Panama. During the late 1900s and well into the twentieth century, Americans of African descent in the United States were actively placed in the position of second class citizenry by the Jim Crow Laws, which were prevalent throughout the southern

¹ Bourgois, *Ethnicity at Work*, 3. While Bourgois' field work was completed largely in Costa Rica, the Bocas Del Toro region has long been a disputed region between Costa Rica and Panama.

² Jim Crow laws in the United States maintained a strict rule of segregation. Schooling, public facilities and institutions were divided to serve only 'white' or 'black' patrons. The divisions were not only societal norms but actual laws discriminating against U.S. citizens of African descent.

U.S..³ According to Trevor O'Reggio, "Blacks were rigidly confined to their "place" in the society, which of course was inferior and humiliating".⁴ Jean Gilbreath Niemeier states that all English speakers were welcome in the Canal Zone but their participation was limited by race and colour.⁵ Employees were placed into 'Silver' and 'Gold' rolls, which were largely based on skin colour to maintain the 'proper' divisions.⁶ The Gold roll was largely made up of white 'Americans' while the silver roll was occupied by 'black' labourers. Each roll had separate facilities, as well as different privileges and pay scales. Overall the rolls were used as a means to institute policies which were reflective of the Jim Crow laws of the southern United States. Segregation, was an essential component of life in the Canal Zone for decades.

Secondary literature has long debated the reasoning behind the installation of a policy of segregation within the Canal Zone. Older sources often argue that Gold and Silver rolls were used to differentiate between 'American' and 'non-American' labourers, or skilled and unskilled workers.⁷ The argument of nationality holds some weight as the Gold roll employees were largely 'American'. A few 'non-Americans' were placed on the Gold roll but by 1906 nationality became a requirement for Gold status.⁸ Lack of skill, is another reason given for the division of labour but the fact is that many of the British West Indians were professionals, and artisans and they remained on the Silver roll. In *The Land Divided, The World United*, Paul Rink argues that in the early years of construction skilled labour was predominately white, and the division of

³ Herbert Knapp and Mary Knapp, *Red, White and Blue Paradise: The American Canal Zone in Panama*, (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1984), 155.

⁴ O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 50.

⁵ Niemeier, *The Panama Story*, 256.

⁶ Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 2.

⁷ Core, *Panama Yesterday and Today*, 251; Marshall, *The Story of The Panama Canal*, 149.

⁸ Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal*, 32.

labour into two rolls caused little concern.⁹ Even if the early division of pay did not cause discontent, the continued division of the labour force caused increasing friction among workers and with the company that employed them. Immigration to the Isthmus of both skilled and unskilled labour increased during the U.S. construction phase, but it is important to acknowledge that skilled West Indians were also present during the early years of construction. West Indians had previously traveled to Panama to work on both the Panama railroad and the French Canal.

Although the Gold roll was predominately made up of white 'Americans', early on there were exceptions to the rule.¹⁰ Up until 1905, the chance of being transferred to the Gold roll was used as an incentive to encourage workers of African descent to produce outstanding work.¹¹ As of 1906 over 100 skilled workers of African descent were on the Gold roll.¹² A prime example of a skilled West Indian is Linda Smart Chubb's father who laboured as a marine engineer on both the French and the U.S. canals.¹³ The example of her father also demonstrates that the division was not based purely on nationality since he himself was a British subject, on the Gold roll.¹⁴ While placement on the Gold roll was used as an incentive, full acceptance into Gold society and facilities was not included. Linda Smart Chubb cites an example of a 'coloured' woman registered on the Gold roll being refused service at the Gold postal outlet.¹⁵ Gold employees of African descent were also not permitted to reside in the 'white' or 'American' areas of the Zone.¹⁶

⁹ Paul Rink, *The Land Divided, The World United* (New York: Julian Messner, Inc., 1963), 154.

¹⁰ Rink, *The Land Divided*, 154.

¹¹ Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal*, 32.

¹² *Ibid.*, 32.

¹³ Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 2.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁶ Biesanz and Biesanz, *The People of Panama*, 83.

Gold status for employees of African descent simply did not apply to all aspects of their lives because Gold status did not negate skin color, which in turn points to the true reason that the system of a divided labour force was maintained.

In 1906 the transferring of employees to the Gold roll was no longer allowed and all 'non-American' employees of African descent were demoted to the Silver roll. In 1908 a further restriction was applied allowing, only 'American' citizens to be on the Gold roll. Michael Conniff states that “after 1908 the Gold roll increasingly became an exclusive white American club to which a few Panamanian and West Indian trustees might be admitted”.¹⁷ Secondary literature, such as Conniff's, *Black Labour on a White Canal*, labels the division of the labour force as a racist mechanism used to maintain 'white' workers in a superior position. Although it is apparent that the Gold and Silver rolls were used as a means to maintain segregation, the Canal Zone needed to provide a different justification.

The Canal Zone was sovereign U.S. territory, which meant that all the laws of the United States applied to the ten mile wide stretch of land, making the division of labour based on race illegal.¹⁸ Linda Smart Chubb suggests that many of the reasons given to explain the labour division were supplied to avert legal problems. The distinction between the rolls was “useful in many ways but chiefly in allowing the Commission to draw the color line as it could not do directly, because of the United States Constitution”.¹⁹ The excuses of nationality, skill and the fact that employees of the early construction era were paid in both Gold and Silver coins were respectively used to legally explain the enforced segregation and the differences of treatment

¹⁷ Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal*, 33.

¹⁸ Core, *Panama Yesterday and Today*, 246.

¹⁹ Marshall, *The Story of The Panama Canal*, 150.

between Gold and Silver employees.²⁰ Though men were at times paid in different currency, this excuse does not account for the implementation of racial segregation in the Canal Zone.²¹ The reasons given for the division of employees within the Zone were simply excuses used to continue the racist practices started during the building of the Panama railway a half century before.

The designation of Silver and Gold were not only applied to payment and salary. The division of Gold and Silver was all encompassing including the division of living quarters, commissaries, health care, and every other aspect of life.²² In all aspects Silver employees were given inferior service and products in the Canal Zone when compared with Gold members. The Gold roll employees received paid home leave, sick leave and spacious furnished housing.²³ While Silver employees were granted neither sick or home leave and lived in cramped conditions. Linda Smart Chubb suggests that if the division inflicted by the labour rolls had only been applied at a social level the discontent expressed by West Indian workers would have been limited to resentment.²⁴ But the roll system was more than that, it placed the workers of African descent in the lowest social positions and worked at all cost to maintain the status quo. Linda Smart Chubb elaborates on her assessment of the Gold and Silver system by examining eight different aspects of canal life. In each section she compares that treatment of Silver workers to that of Gold. The different opportunities in working conditions, benefits and lifestyle

²⁰ Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 2.

²¹ Rink, *The Land Divided*, 153.

²² Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 2.

²³ Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal*, 32.

²⁴ Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 3.

demonstrate a consistent effort on the part of the Canal Zone administration to keep Silver workers in an inferior position. The eight aspects list by Linda Smart Chubb include, education, health care, housing, food, the court system, labour organizations, employee status and pay as well as discriminatory policies. To enhance Linda Smart Chubb's writing an examination of all eight areas is needed.

Before examining the specific concerns raised in the document it is important to understand what the Canal Zone truly was. Geographically, the Canal Zone consisted of a stretch of land reaching from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean across Panama with a five mile wide strip of land on either side of the canal.²⁵ The inhabited areas contained eight decent sized towns but there were also two dozen military posts as well as, hundreds of isolated mountain anti-aircraft, searchlight and other war defense installations both within the Zone and outside in the surrounding Panamanian territory.²⁶ Towns within the Zone contained, commissaries, medical facilities, post offices and recreational facilities.²⁷ All of the facilities were operated by the U.S. government through the Canal Zone authority, as no private enterprise was allowed within the Canal Zone boundaries.²⁸ Racially divided facilities with differing policies were found everywhere; on the railway, in commissaries, and in eating houses.²⁹ For example, 'Gold' employees could ride the trains for free, while marine and local transport were provided at a much reduced cost.³⁰ In contrast, 'Silver' employees were required to pay for the use of any form

²⁵ Core, *Panama Yesterday and Today*, 245.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 246.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 246.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 246.

²⁹ Marshall, *The Story of The Panama Canal*, 150.

³⁰ Garciela Dixon, "The Contribution of West Indians to the Construction of the Panama Canal 1910-1914" in *West Indian Participation in the Construction of the Panama Canal* (Mona, Jamaica: Latin American-Caribbean Centre, June 15-17, 2000), 68.

of transportation.

Similar to all other facilities both 'white' residents and those of African descent inhabited towns that were racially segregated. The white towns were representative of white suburban life in the United States. While Silver quarters were held to a much lower standard. The true nature of the 'white' section of the Canal Zone is best demonstrated by the illustration “Not America-But American”, “it is not America but is American; is in a foreign country but is not foreign!”³¹



Not America—but American!

Figure 2.0: Not America – but American!³²

The illustration demonstrates the attempt of the canal authorities to make white living areas in

³¹ See illustration, Core, *Panama Yesterday and Today*, 243.

³² Core, *Panama Yesterday and Today*, 242.

the Canal Zone representative of suburban 'America'. Alongside the white towns were towns made for the employees of African descent. The towns for employees of African descent had smaller dwellings and were not representative of suburban life in the U.S.. They were more crowded with multiple families living in combination housing. The streets were not tree lined and manicured like those found in the 'white' section. Overall, the Canal Zone was a self sufficient and separate entity divided along racial lines.

Another important aspect of canal life was religion, which was fully supported by the canal authority.³³ Religion was seen as a means to promote good behaviour and values in the labouring class. Labourers were encouraged to bring their families to Panama and to attend church. Initially, religious ceremonies were not segregated, but similar to other facilities, the perceived need to divide not only the ceremonies but the actual structures eventually lead to racially segregated churches. As demonstrated by the following quote, white canal authorities felt that it was “not ... practicable ...to use the same church for both blacks and whites...the color line should be drawn.”³⁴ And so it was, white churches were built first, leaving the West Indian community to use alternative venues for worship. By 1908, the canal authority had invested 100,000 dollars into the construction of churches and the maintenance of clergy and staff, most of which went to support 'white' congregations.³⁵

In the early years of construction a large portion of the West Indian community attended the Anglican Church. With thirty West Indian congregations, the Anglican denomination was the

³³ Core, *Panama Yesterday and Today*, 250.

³⁴ Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal*, 38.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.

largest on the Isthmus.³⁶ The popularity of the Anglican Church is attributed to the fact that Barbadians, who were nearly all Anglican, made up a large portion of the working population. As time passed other denominations took root in the Canal Zone but the Anglican-Episcopalian church remained the most popular with the West Indian community. The chosen religion of the West Indians was one of the reasons Panamanians discriminated against them because the established church in Panama was Roman Catholic.

Religion played an important role in the lives of the West Indian workers. Michael Conniff quotes the following statement from Lancelot Lewis to demonstrate the importance of the church in the lives of West Indian workers, "religion means very much to the West Indian. He prefers his Church to everything else."³⁷ The Annual Reports (Foreign Office) on Cuba, Panama and Canal Zone, 1925 further supports Lewis' statement when providing a summary of the Wesleyan Methodist Church of the British Conference.³⁸ The report states that the Wesleyan Church was a centre of "British life and influence". The report also claimed that West Indians involved in the church were unlikely to become involved with the Universal Negro Improvement Association which was considerably more popular with non-religious members of the West Indian community.³⁹ Hazel Scarlett, suggests that the church provided a safe environment for the West Indian workers away from the terrible working conditions and constant social degradation inflicted on them. The importance of the Church in West Indian lives helped to minimize the involvement of community members in alternative forms of social organization which were

³⁶ Hazel Scarlett. "The Religious Influence of West Indians in the Building of the Panama Canal" in *West Indian Participation in the Construction of the Panama Canal* (Mona, Jamaica: Latin American-Caribbean Centre, June 15-17, 2000), 91.

³⁷ Conniff. *Black Labor on a White Canal*, 38.

³⁸ Annual Reports (Foreign Office) on Cuba, Panama and Canal Zone, 1925. Jamaica Archives IB/5/79, pg. 10.

³⁹ The Universal Negro Improvement Association was led by Marcus Garvey and played an important role in many West Indian's lives.

considered problematic by the Canal Zone authorities. The role of the church stretched beyond the requirements of religion extending to social welfare and community caring. Churches represented one of the only places which provided social welfare services such as soup kitchens and emergency shelters for the West Indian community.⁴⁰ In later years as employment opportunities became scarce many hungry and destitute West Indians looked to the Church for help.

Though the church provided a safe environment, it did not challenge the status quo. The Canal Zone supported the church because it helped to maintain good workers, and non-resistant labourers;

The church of these people favored passive acceptance of one's worldly condition and, indeed, saw it as its main function in providing escape and consolation to those tropical "ditch diggers". Throughout the period of slavery, White spiritual guides emphasized the life in the future world rather than life in this world. Negroes were taught that the church is an end in itself and its dogmas should be accepted without question, lest the wrath of God descend on the congregation. To this day many West Indians are wedded to this concept of the church.⁴¹

Although the church prescribed contentment West Indians challenged the status quo in the Canal Zone as the decades passed. For West Indians the church provided a place of happiness, laughter and song, making "this community humane and livable."⁴² The church was a sanctuary in an area that for all intents and purposes resembled the segregated Southern United States. Though religion played a positive role, it did not change the racially segregated community surrounding West Indian workers.

Although religion had a special place in the lives of West Indian workers it did not help to

⁴⁰ O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 70.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁴² Scarlett. "The Religious Influence of West Indians in the Building of the Panama Canal" in *West Indian Participation in the Construction of the Panama Canal*, 91.

improve their position in the Canal Zone. Religion did not make up for the discrepancy in salary and limits imposed by the existence of Silver and Gold rolls. The first concern the memorandum mentions is the low salaries given to labourers of African descent for equal work, and the limitations placed on the promotion of West Indian employees. In 1908, a wage ceiling of fifty cents per hour was placed on West Indian employees and the number of 'grades of Silver classification' were reduced.⁴³ The West Indian workers, even those skilled and valuable, were not promoted above the lowest positions and at all times were kept in a subordinate position.⁴⁴ U.S. supervisors and 'white' canal workers purposely forced West Indian employees into menial tasks maintaining their superior positions.

Velma Newton's *The Silver Men: West Indian Labour Migration to Panama, 1850-1914* lists the different levels of Silver workers and documents the different levels of pay based on designated positions.⁴⁵ The workers were divided into the categories of, boy, labourer, artisan and monthly paid. Each designation is further divided by a letter grade. Newton states that "several of the so-called 'helpers' in the Labourer B category were in fact, good artisans who assisted other skilled West Indians or white Americans".⁴⁶ Occasionally these helpers could be promoted to the Labourer C category, but they were never properly recognized as the skilled artisans they were. The mislabeling of skill level and the policy of minimal promotion helped the Canal Commission maintain West Indian workers in low paying positions.

The disparity in pay was not limited to the divisions of the Gold and Silver rolls. Skilled

⁴³ Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal*, 31.

⁴⁴ Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 3. Linda Smart Chubb's assertion is supported by E.A. Gaskin in his memorial speech regarding West Indian labourers in the Canal Zone. E.A. Gaskin, "Principal Address" at *Final Canal Zone Commemorative Program Honoring West Indian Oldtimers From Panama Canal Construction Years 1904-1914*, 4.

⁴⁵ Newton, *The Silver Men*, 139.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 139.

West Indian artisans were paid less than European labourers listed as general workers.⁴⁷ Though Europeans were listed as Silver employees, they were given a special payment package because they were 'semi-white'.⁴⁸ Europeans did not have the privileges of the Gold roll but they were paid considerably better than the West Indian workers and the same wage limits and promotion rules did not apply to them. The wage ceilings and the reduction of Silver employee promotion opportunities, helped to ensure that West Indian workers could not truly succeed. Wages on the Canal and the limitations on promotion were so strict that many of the most skilled West Indian workers left the employ of the Canal to work for private firms which did not impose the same limitations.⁴⁹

Coupled with low wages and lack of promotion, was the well documented fact that supervisors had "coloured helpers" complete work which they themselves were responsible for.⁵⁰ Any number of West Indian workers who were clerks, arbitrarily became 'office helpers' and 'messengers' at the insistence of the Gold employee's union representatives. By decreasing the level of positions held by Silver workers the Gold union was able to maintain and increase the disparity between the working rolls.⁵¹ Silver workers worked ten hours a day while their counterparts on the Gold roll worked only eight.⁵² Silver workers, no matter their ability or the amount of work completed were paid 1/3 or as low as 1/4 of the pay given to comparable

⁴⁷ Newton, *The Silver Men*, 140.

⁴⁸ Velma Newton, "Making a Difference: The Jamaican Contribution to the Construction of the Panama Canal" in *West Indian Participation in the Construction of the Panama Canal*, (Mona, Jamaica: Latin American-Caribbean Centre, June 15-17, 2000), 52.

⁴⁹ Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal*, 31.

⁵⁰ Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 3.

⁵¹ O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 65.

⁵² Dixon, "The Contribution of West Indians to the Construction of the Panama Canal 1910-1914" in *West Indian Participation in the Construction of the Panama Canal*, 68.

workers on the Gold roll.⁵³ The differences in salary and lack of promotion were only two ways that the Canal Zone used to increase the disparity between the two labour rolls.

There were also differing standards applied to Silver and Gold living quarters. 'Silver' employees lived in 'markedly inferior' conditions.⁵⁴ The space per person and the quality of the buildings were greatly diminished compared to that of Gold employees.⁵⁵ Both Silver and Gold housing were divided into two types; married and bachelor. Although permanent housing for Silver employees was not built until after 1913.⁵⁶ Bachelor housing for the Gold roll, was a dormitory type of building without cooking facilities. Two to three men would share a room that contained one bed and one chest of drawers for each.⁵⁷ For married Gold employees, housing was based on salary.⁵⁸ Gold employees making two hundred dollars a month were entitled to a five room cottage, while the highest paid Gold employees lived in a two story home with porches on both levels.⁵⁹ All Gold quarters were constructed to be mosquito proof and came fully furnished.

In contrast Silver families, professionals and bachelors were housed in barrack like, small and inadequate quarters.⁶⁰ Silver bachelor quarters consisted of dormitory style buildings dating

⁵³ Biesanz and Biesanz, *The People of Panama*, 79-80.

⁵⁴ Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 3.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁶ Marshall, *The Story of The Panama Canal 150*; Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal*, 29.

⁵⁷ Newton, *The Silver Men*, 148.

⁵⁸ A complicated mathematical system was used to determine the housing given to each Gold employee and their family. The system was developed by Jackson Smith, who was given the nickname of 'square foot' based on the equation for determining the appropriate amount of space for Gold families. The housing allotment for married Gold employees was determined as follows: 1 square foot for each dollar of the employee's salary, plus an additional squared foot allotment for his wife and 5% of the fathers allotment for all children times their age, another 75% could be allotted for other adult occupants and 50% for white servants. Mack, *The Land Divided*, 546.

⁵⁹ Figure 2.0 depicts the family homes of the highest paid Gold workers.

⁶⁰ David S. Taylor to Mr. L.W. Lewis, (Cristobal, Canal Zone: August 5th, 1948).

from the time of the French Canal, which housed 72 men, sleeping on three tier bunks. The average space per person was 20 square feet.⁶¹ Silver men had limited space to house their personal belongings as the Zone required that living areas for Silver employees be “in good order, no baggage or effects of any kind being allowed on the floor.”⁶² Prior to the establishment of permanent Silver housing in 1913, many of the West Indian workers lived in shacks they built or in tenement districts in Panama City.⁶³ Housing for the Silver families was similar to bachelor quarters; “barracks, each divided into five or eight compartments, were constructed ...each apartment usually contained two small rooms”.⁶⁴ As with the bachelor quarters, space was not sufficient and many families were forced to live outside the Zone.

Silver artisans lived in slightly better quarters as they were usually allocated an additional room and pantry. Unlike the Gold quarters, neither furnishing or mosquito screening were provided for Silver employees. To make matters worse, non-permanent 'Silver Roll' employees for which adequate housing was rarely available, were housed in boxcars converted into sleeping quarters.⁶⁵ To decrease the amount of housing needed, the Canal Zone implemented the regulation that only legally married couples could reside within the boundaries of the Canal Zone.⁶⁶ Unmarried employees living in consensual unions were forced to live outside of the Zone, usually in tenement housing in Panama. With the completion of the Canal in 1914 new rules were applied to those living within the Zone. The standards for Gold employees remained the same and they continued to be housed for free as living quarters were included in their job

⁶¹ Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal*, 29.

⁶² Marshall, *The Story of The Panama Canal*, 150.

⁶³ Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal*, 29.

⁶⁴ Newton, *The Silver Men*, 149.

⁶⁵ Chubb, “The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama”, 3.

⁶⁶ Newton, *The Silver Men*, 148.

descriptions. However, Silver employees did not have the same privileges which was demonstrated as the payment of rent in Silver quarters was required. For 35 years Silver inhabitants paid rent for canal housing while Gold employees did not.⁶⁷

After the completion of canal construction Silver quarters did not improve significantly. In 1929, ten new twelve family houses were built as Silver quarters. While the accommodations were better than previously built homes, the housing lacked porches which are important in a tropical climate. The houses quickly became run down due to the lack of maintenance. Even with the new housing approximately two-thirds of employees of African descent were still without company housing causing them to live outside the Zone. The same problems with housing were still rampant in 1942 when the Chief Health Officer, M.C. Stayer filed a report which addressed the abysmal overcrowding conditions in Silver contract employee housing.⁶⁸ On both the Atlantic and Pacific sides of the Canal, contract employees were living in barrack like houses which were approximately 200 people past capacity. Each man had only 26.8 square feet of floor space for sleeping and recreation. The Health Officer suggested that the number of men in the barracks should be reduced so that each man could have 25.7 square feet of sleeping space and 12.9 square feet of recreational space.⁶⁹ Following the precedent set by decades of neglect few improvements were made to Silver employee housing. The concerns of inadequate housing brought forth in Linda Smart Chubb's report are supported by the historical treatment of West Indian workers and the concerns put forth in the Canal Zone report by M.C. Stayer.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 49.

⁶⁸ M.C. Stayer, "Memorandum to the Governor: Silver Housing Conditions in the Canal Zone" written June 20, 1942, 1.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

Another concern raised by Linda Smart Chubb in regard to housing was the Canal Zone administration's disregard for societal division within the West Indian community. Though the administration was greatly concerned with the proper social division of white employees, it was not concerned with the same social divisions between workers of African descent. Professionals, such as teachers were mixed with families, single workers and unskilled labourers.⁷¹ The Canal Commission also grouped all 'coloured' workers together with no regard for nationality.⁷² The West Indians hailed from both the French and British West Indies. The two groups spoke different languages and differed in religious affiliation. West Indians hailing from the French West Indies were largely Catholic, while British West Indians were Protestant. There were also division between inhabitants coming from big or small islands. By placing the groups together the Canal Zone authorities demonstrated their lack of understanding or caring in terms of Silver employee placement. The disregard of inherent social divisions within the Silver labour force and inferior housing were a further demonstration of the social inequality rampant within the Canal Zone.

Already away from home and their culture West Indians found themselves discriminated against yet again when it came to commissaries. The differences in quality of food available to Gold and Silver employees was as common concern.⁷³ Prior to 1905 many West Indians procured food in Panama, but by 1905 the high prices charged inspired the Canal authorities to develop their own stores.⁷⁴ The Panamanian government protested the development of the canal

⁷¹ Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 3.

⁷² Newton, *The Silver Men*, 156.

⁷³ Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 4.

⁷⁴ Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal*, 30.

commissaries, because of the negative impact they would have on the Panamanian economy. To appease the Panamanian government the Canal Commission agree to only allow employees residing within the Zone to purchase goods at the commissaries.⁷⁵ Food was available from the commissaries for those who had access to cooking facilities and restaurants catered to the single men of the Zone. Daily as many as 65,000 employees and dependents counted on the commissary to supply food, clothing and anything else needed. While families could purchase foodstuffs to prepare at home, single men could purchase prepared meals at the hotels and eateries within the Zone. Of course, like all other facilities, eateries and commissaries were divided by ethnicity and colour.

The cheapest meals were available in the West Indian kitchens at a cost of 27 cents for three meals.⁷⁶ Since the money was taken out of their pay many of the workers ate what they described as barely palatable food.⁷⁷ The Zone instilled the policy of directly taking the cost of food out of West Indian's pay because they believed that the high rate of sickness among workers was due to an inadequate diet.⁷⁸ The higher quality food available to Europeans cost 40 cents for three meals, while Gold roll members could purchase a much higher quality meal in Gold hotels for 30 cents. The cost of the food was not the only disparity between the eateries. The Gold hotel eateries provided patrons with chairs and tables, while the European mess halls provided tables and benches.⁷⁹ The West Indian eateries supplied no seating and forced workers to stand outside, which was humiliating and a slight to their pride.

⁷⁵ Newton, *The Silver Men*, 149.

⁷⁶ Marshall, *The Story of The Panama Canal*, 155.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁷⁸ Biesanz and Biesanz, *The People of Panama*, 55.

⁷⁹ Newton, *The Silver Men*, 147.

Though the cost differential between West Indian, European and 'American' eateries was not substantial. The difference in the cost of running the different eateries was.⁸⁰ Lancelot Lewis documents the differences between the cost of operations in *The West Indian in Panama: Black Labour in Panama, 1850-1914*. The cost of operating 18 Gold hotel restaurants a year was 61,331.18 dollars, the cost for the 36 European messes was 44,444.72 dollars and finally the cost of operating the 31 West Indian eateries was 26,461.95 dollars. As a result of these numbers Lewis poses the question, “how was it possible to feed three times as many people for one-half the cost of feeding the Gold employees in thirteen fewer feeding areas?”. The answer to Lewis's question has been repeatedly addressed by the many complaints documented in regard to food quality by West Indians. A West Indian worker described the food as, “cooked rice which was hard enough to shoot deer; sauce spread all over the rice; and a slab of meat which many men either spent an hour trying to chew or eventually threw away”.⁸¹ Though Sue Core states in *Panama Yesterday and Today* that the food was always of the highest quality, many authors contradict the statement with their documentation of inferior and deteriorated foods being offered at Silver commissaries and eateries.⁸²

Another way to save money implemented by the canal authority was the transfer of food to the Silver commissaries as it spoiled. As food spoiled it was moved to Silver commissaries and sold to the West Indian workers. The Silver workers also complained that the tropical vegetables they liked to eat were not available.⁸³ Vegetables and fruits commonly found in the islands were not initially sold at the commissaries inhibiting Silver workers from obtaining the

⁸⁰ Lewis, *The West Indian in Panama*, 46.

⁸¹ Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal*, 30.

⁸² Core, *Panama Yesterday and Today*, 247.

⁸³ Newton, *The Silver Men*, 146.

types of food they were used to. Another disparity between the designations of Gold and Silver arose when employees wanted to purchase food from the opposite commissary.⁸⁴ Gold employees could purchase from the Gold or the Silver commissary, whereas Silver workers needed special permission to purchase commodities from the Gold commissary. Often if desirable goods became available in the Silver commissary the Gold families would buy up all of the available stock. Linda Smart Chubb states that the problem with Gold employees buying all of the Silver goods was not moderated until the newspapers reported the issue. As shown, the Canal Commissions food supplies lacked quality, variety and the distribution of products were racially motivated.

Other aspects of the Canal Zone which were fundamentally racist were the hospitals and medical care. The Canal Zone policy surrounding hospital visitation, allowed white 'Americans' to visit daily during an array of hours, whereas the policy for Britishers of African descent limited visitation to only two days a week and required visitors to obtain tickets. Furthermore visiting West Indians could only enter the hospital one at a time.⁸⁵ Linda Smart Chubb states that the reasoning behind the policy was that the West Indians were too talkative and jolly to be allowed to enter in greater numbers. While Linda Smart Chubb admits that this may have been a valid concern, she suggests that a less humiliating approach could have been found. Another concern at the forefront of hospital care in 1942 was space. In an assessment of the Silver hospital conditions in 1942 the Chief Health Officer in the Canal Zone, M.C. Stayer states that the Silver section was "much overcrowded".⁸⁶ The increasing number of patients with malaria in

⁸⁴ Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 4.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁸⁶ M.C. Stayer, "Memorandum to the Governor: Silver Housing Conditions in the Canal Zone".

1942 caused hospitals to become overcrowded. Further overcrowding was feared as the Canal Zone authority continued to import more workers to replace those which were already ill. In turn those workers often fell ill themselves due to the lack of screened living quarters for Silver workers. M.C. Stayer linked the increasing patient numbers to the large numbers of improperly housed employees. Employees living in non-screened housing were more likely to develop malaria as their exposure to mosquitos was considerably higher than those living in proper housing. Lack of hospital space and the discriminatory treatment of workers were just two health care issues faced by West Indians on the canal.

Treatment for infectious diseases was another area in which the treatment of West Indian workers was negligent. Due to the high incidence of malaria, yellow fever and other infectious diseases in the early stages of construction, workers were commonly treated with quinine.⁸⁷ While treatment was important and a positive choice the improper administration of medication caused other health concerns. Workers who were given excessive amounts of quinine suffered from hearing loss, mental disorders and loss of their eyesight. No compensation was given to affected employees and hospital staff were not held accountable for their mistakes. Overall the treatment of Silver workers in health care facilities and policies was inadequate and inferior to that provided to Gold roll employees.

Another concern in regard to health care was the ineligibility of Silver employees to receive paid sick leave until 1911.⁸⁸ Healthcare was available to them for free but until they could return to work they were sent home without pay. Even less consideration was given to workers who were disabled in accidents. No compensation was available, until after 1911 and

⁸⁷ Dixon. "The Contribution of West Indians to the Construction of the Panama Canal 1910-1914" in *West Indian Participation in the Construction of the Panama Canal*, 69.

⁸⁸ Newton, *The Silver Men*, 142.

then only if the employee could prove that the injury was not their fault.⁸⁹ The availability of relief funds and rest periods were issues which the Panama Canal West Indian Employee Association (PCWIEA) lobbied for during the decades it was in operation. As late as 1940 the PCWIEA was still appealing to the Canal authorities for rest periods without success. The following excerpt written by the President of the PCWIEA demonstrates the lack of progress:

We get no time to rest and we need it. From 1918 we have been asking for the rest, not confinement to hospital or having to report every day with sometimes hundreds on the waiting list, but rest when we can relax and forget our labor for a few days, returning to our work refreshed. At that time we suggested a minimum service of five years in a special effort to induce a favorable action. The board, however, recommended that it would not be fair to accept that principle, that all the employees should be entitled or none, and that as the government is not in a position to grant it to all, then all should go without. Of course it is quite fair to grant it to the other class from the first month of service.⁹⁰

In this quote the displeasure of the writer is apparent and the differences in the treatment of Gold and Silver employees is demonstrated. No employees of African descent were granted leave yet Gold roll employees were given rest days after only one month of work, as well as the promise of compensation if injury should occur.

Pensions were another form of compensation that the West Indian employees were denied. The PCWIEA fought the canal authorities to receive recognition and compensation for long time West Indian employees.⁹¹ The railway workers received a minimal pension in 1933 which was followed in 1936 by a similar pension being offered to former canal employees. The institution of a standard pension plan was important but the regulations surrounding distribution marginalized the significance of the change in policy. The pension was distributed by a policy

⁸⁹ Newton, *The Silver Men*, 142.

⁹⁰ O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 113.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 114.

based on economic need which had to be assessed by an inspector, who would then recommend the appropriate amount of pension. The distribution policy continued to place undue restrictions on a pension that long term West Indian workers deserved. The lack of respect shown to longtime employees by the Canal Zone's refusal to honour their years of work was the final act of disrespect and discrimination before retirement for West Indian employees.

Another form of discrimination operating in the Canal Zone was the refusal by the official body to refer to "coloured" workers by the titles of Mr., Mrs. and Miss.⁹² Labourers of African descent were subjected to further degradation by the official employment title of 'office helper'.⁹³ The discrimination was not limited to the canal zone in this case as correspondence to people of African descent in the Republic of Panama was similarly written. Linda Smart Chubb states that the use of proper titles when referring to West Indian employees, only recently came into practice. The use of proper titles was only instituted after the PCWIEA fought for a change in policy. Linda Chubb states that 'the wish to make a division into first and second class citizens could hardly be more clearly marked'.⁹⁴ The formal disregard of 'coloured' workers rights to proper forms of address is yet another demonstration that the Canal Zone actively attempted to maintain a class differential based on skin colour, which was reinforced by excessive disrespect.

The Canal Zone court system continue to institute the active policy of racial discrimination practiced in the Canal Zone.⁹⁵ The court system was operated by the U.S. government and failed to provide equal treatment under the law. From the inception of the U.S.

⁹² Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 4.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

canal until 1908, juries were not used in the canal courts “because of their ineffectiveness in handling racial violence in the South”.⁹⁶ While the concern of ineffective juries may have been valid, the ability of the Canal Zone justice system to provide colour blind justice was minimal. In 1908 the court began to use juries, but as feared impartial verdicts were not rendered. Michael Conniff writes that during 1908 alone several white men “were acquitted after murdering blacks”.⁹⁷ Linda Smart Chubb mentions that numerous times West Indians were given lengthy sentences for stealing articles worth a few dollars, while 'Americans' were given suspended sentences for embezzlement as long as they left the isthmus.⁹⁸ The memorandum also explains that public hostility was heightened by the fact that, numerous cases against West Indian people would be tried in one day. Linda Smart Chubb reveals that the press was an enthusiastic participant in the promotion of hostility towards the West Indians. Though injustice was common within the Zone, discrimination in the legal courts was by no way limited to the Canal Zone. West Indians in Costa Rica and other Central American countries were suffering under similarly discriminatory courts.

Helping to perpetuate the injustice committed in the courts were the police forces in both the Canal Zone and Panama. Lancelot Lewis argues that “the foremen, policemen, and the officials always won out, in or out of court, against the blacks”.⁹⁹ The police forces were particularly hard on labourers of African descent and often arrested them on trumped up charges because of discrimination.¹⁰⁰ The court supported the unjust arrests by commonly prosecuting

⁹⁶ Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal*, 38.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁹⁸ Chubb, “The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama”, 5.

⁹⁹ Lewis, *The West Indian in Panama*, 57.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 60.

and extracting unequal justice from the 'coloured' community. Lack of proper legal representation for West Indians further enhanced the injustices which commonly occurred. In a letter from the British Consulate in Limón the Consular Officer stated that, "there is nothing wrong with Spanish law here, but rather with the way it is locally administered".¹⁰¹ The letter further describes that even if a West Indian complainant won a case, all funds granted were taken by the local lawyers. The Consul suggested that if no protection was offered by the British Government the situation would become increasingly difficult.

Moreover the lack of adequate legal protection provided by the consulate was a universal cry heard throughout Central America. West Indians made up a large number of labourers abroad and the British Consulate regularly failed to truly represent their legal rights. Linda Smart Chubb provides a number of specific incidents when British West Indian's rights were either disregarded or not protected by the representation provided to them. Many injustices were caused by the discriminatory practices of representatives and the overall lack of representation provided.

Lack of representation stretched beyond legal bounds to the formation of labour unions. Until the 1940s and 50s, labour unions in the Canal Zone pursued an active policy of discrimination against the West Indian labourers. Linda Smart Chubb suggests that the Canal Zone administration allowed "negrophobic policies" to be pursued by associations such as the Metal Trade Workers Union and the American Federation of Labour (A.F.L.).¹⁰² The main objectives of the Panama Metal Trades Council, a representative of the A.F.L were; "(1) to

¹⁰¹ T.L.H. Gaeyle, "Emigration-Costa Rica-Labour Relations" from *Jamaican Archives* IB/5/77/42 (September 24 1929).

¹⁰² Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 5.

maintain or increase at all costs the privileges, benefits, and salaries (as well as the number) of Gold employees, and (2) to decrease the privileges, benefits, salaries and number of Silver employees.”¹⁰³ In 1909, 'American' labour unions gained the support of President Taft when he agreed that in the future, engineers of African descent would not be hired by the railroad. Michael Conniff argues that the President's support, “signaled the start of a decades long vendetta in which white Americans identified blacks or Europeans in skilled positions and had them demoted or fired”.¹⁰⁴ The memorandum states that one of the Unions main objectives was to maintain the wage differential between 'white' workers and those of African descent. The goals of the Union were not limited to wages by any means, as the removal of West Indians from all but the lowest positions was the ultimate goal of the A.F.L.¹⁰⁵

In June of 1921, Brigadier General William Connor was given the task of assessing the workings of the Canal Zone and providing recommendations for changes that would improve functionality. Much to the disapproval of the Panama Metal Trades Council, Connor suggested the 'silverization' of many positions held by Gold workers.¹⁰⁶ It was apparent to General Connor that many of the positions filled by high paid 'Americans' could be done by “cheap tropical labor”.¹⁰⁷ When the Connor Report's recommendations were not implemented, the A.F.L. was encouraged to pursue its racist agenda. Linda Smart Chubb states that the Union has seen fit to 'stir up racial hatreds' by exploiting negative reports of West Indian misconduct while hiding any

¹⁰³ O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 63.

¹⁰⁴ Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal*, 33.

¹⁰⁵ O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 63.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁰⁷ John Major, *Prize Possession: The United States and the Panama Canal, 1903-1979* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 93.

misconduct perpetrated by their own members.¹⁰⁸ The memorandum also noted that reports written by the “negrophobic organizations” contained racially motivated writing. For example all criminals of African descent were referred to as ‘a big burly negro’.¹⁰⁹ Aside from negative reports, the Panama Metal Trades Union requested that the government give 3,000 Silver jobs to Gold workers to maintain U.S. standards, limiting West Indians to the position of common labourers and messengers.¹¹⁰ Although the “negrophobic policies” suggested by the A.F.L. were not all implemented; West Indian workers were constantly being attacked and degraded by the Union representatives. Linda Smart Chubb's concerns were well placed as it has been repeatedly documented that the elimination of West Indian workers was the single minded purpose of ‘white’ Unions.

The efforts to ‘keep down’ West Indians were completed by the implementation of a discriminatory educational policy within the Canal Zone. Schools were designed to “promote the growth of American ideas and American patriotism”.¹¹¹ Initially, like the churches of the Zone, schools were racially mixed but by 1908 with an increasing number of schools being built, ‘white’ and students of African descent were separated.¹¹² ‘White’ schools had low class numbers, and the curriculum was tailored to supply an education equal to that of schools in the United States. ‘Black’ schools, in contrast, had large class numbers and the curriculum focused on manners, discipline, oration and rote memory. Another important difference was the length of

¹⁰⁸ Chubb, “The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama” in *The Forgotten People*, 5.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹¹⁰ O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 65.

¹¹¹ Newton, *The Silver Men*, 155.

¹¹² Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal*, 39. In 1906 there were 30 schools operating in the Canal Zone. Of the thirty schools there were 4 white schools and 26 which were mixed, though the majority of students in the mixed schools were ‘Negroes’. George W. Westerman, “School Segregation on the Panama Canal Zone,” *Phylon* 15, no. 3 (3rd Qtr. 1954): 276.

the school year. 'White' children attended school for 10 months, while the students of African descent who were considered "intellectually deficient" attended 12 months a year.¹¹³ Linda Smart Chubb suggests that with the influence of the Metal Trades Union, schooling for 'Silver' students was inadequate. Whoever influenced the school system did so to ensure a continued disparity between 'white' students and those of African descent.

In 1929 the Canal had 2,762 'white' students under the care of 95 teachers while the 'coloured' schools with 3,105 students were cared for by 61 teachers.¹¹⁴ The difference in the number of teaching staff illustrates the disparity between 'white' or 'American' and 'coloured' schools in the Canal Zone. The differences in education came under further scrutiny the following year when a survey of the school system was completed by Columbia University. The Columbia University study, referred to as the Englehardt survey, offered numerous suggestions for the improvement of 'coloured' schools, both physically and to the curriculum. The survey stated the following: "the coloured schools offer nothing more than a bare academic training, with no opportunity for self-expression, appreciation, or training for the task of earning a livelihood. Inefficiency and discontent....are inevitable under such universal maladjustments".¹¹⁵ Unfortunately the recommendations were not implemented, but the report did provide the West Indian community with the evidence needed to continue fighting against the inferior schools supplied for their children.

The purpose and types of school available to West Indian children were influenced by the idea that West Indian children were only required to learn the skills for becoming clerks,

¹¹³ Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal*, 39. George Westerman states that 'white' students attended school for 8 months while 'coloured' students attended for 10 months. Westerman, "School Segregation on the Panama Canal Zone," *Phylon*, 276.

¹¹⁴ O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 115.

¹¹⁵ Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal*, 76.

domestic servants and artisans.¹¹⁶ The education policy continued to prevent West Indians from attaining secondary schooling.¹¹⁷ After much protest against the lack of secondary schooling, the Canal Zone decided to provide the West Indian population with the chance to attend vocational schools, allowing them to acquire the skills necessary to perform the lowest paying jobs.¹¹⁸ Advanced learning in subjects such as carpentry, gardening, agriculture, sewing, cooking and domestic labour prepared students to fulfill the roles they were expected to within the segregated community of the Canal Zone.¹¹⁹ Linda Smart Chubb points out the further irony of this policy when stating, “all this has especial importance when it is considered that the chief excuse for racial discrimination locally is that West Indians are under-educated, untrained, and so unfitted for equality of treatment”.¹²⁰ The fact that most of the clerical positions are filled by West Indians with secondary educations, demonstrates the attempt to limit the futures of the next generation of West Indians on the canal.

Yet again the Canal Zone attempted to keep West Indians in the lowest positions possible. Though the zone tried to limit the schooling of West Indian children, many West Indian parents understood the value of proper schooling. A number of private schools were formed outside of the Canal Zone which offered further vocational training and academic courses.¹²¹ Another option available to some West Indian parents was sending children back to their country of

¹¹⁶ Chubb, “The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama” in *The Forgotten People*, 5.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹¹⁸ Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal*, 39.

¹¹⁹ Newton, *The Silver Men*, 155.

¹²⁰ Chubb, “The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama” in *The Forgotten People*, 5.

¹²¹ Dr. Simon A. Clarke, “The Evolution of the Status of the W.I. Worker in the Panama Canal Zone and Some Personal Reflections” in *West Indian Participation in the Construction of the Panama Canal* (Mona, Jamaica: Latin American-Caribbean Centre, June 15-17, 2000), 77.

origin. The education system in Jamaica for example had a good reputation and provided schooling at the secondary level. Although the Canal Zone authority tried to limit the education of West Indians, they were not always successful.

Though unsuccessful at times, Linda Smart Chubb provides her own examples of the canal authorities continued attempts to dishearten the West Indian students and workers.¹²² Linda Smart Chubb uses the 'rabid racialism' of the Canal Zone Director of Schools to demonstrate the demeaning nature of working within the Zone for those of West Indian descent. The director referred to principals and teachers of African descent as 'boys' and 'girls' and, threatened to fire teachers for 'sabotage' when they complained of the limited curriculum. While many of the West Indian teachers were of a high quality their treatment and salaries were not representative of their skill.¹²³ West Indian teachers earned only half in 1919 and then a third in later years as much as white teachers.

The above examples demonstrate the poor treatment suffered by West Indian teachers. Another prime example of racially driven mistreatment was the dressing down of a teacher for being 'too well dressed'.¹²⁴ The Director felt that he should wear "overalls or the like" in view of his position. Linda Smart Chubb's final and most revealing example is as follows; "When the negro Captain of the U.S.S. "Booker T. Washington" was introduced to the Schools Director, the latter remarked "my father owned slaves." "That" the Captain replied "is not credit to you".¹²⁵ It is clear from the attitude of the Director that employees and students of African descent were not

¹²² Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 5.

¹²³ O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 72.

¹²⁴ Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 5.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 5. The U.S.S. Booker T. Washington was the flagship of the Black Star Line operated by Marcus Garvey and the U.N.I.A.

considered equal by important administrative workers within the Canal Zone. Supplies given to the 'black' schools were used and second rate, while the teaching staff was belittled and only allowed to teach the limited curriculum approved by the Canal Zone.¹²⁶ The discriminatory and negative attitudes, fostered by slavery and the idea of white superiority were rampant and applied to the segregated school system of the Canal Zone.

In short Linda Smart Chubb concluded that the American administration of the Canal Zone planned to maintain a lower quality of life, respect, and services for the British West Indians that it saw as people of a lower class.¹²⁷ The extensive secondary literature about the Panama Canal demonstrates that Linda Smart Chubb's assertions were valid concerns as research has supported her statements. All eight areas of concern; wage and promotion discrepancies, housing, food, healthcare, basic forms of address, justice, unions and education were all used by the Canal Zone to limit the futures of the West Indians labouring on the Canal.

The longstanding policy of segregation maintained by the implementation of the Gold and Silver rolls was used to marginalize a large portion of Canal Zone employees. The racism found in the Canal Zone policies extended to all areas of life. West Indian workers were paid a fraction of the salaries which Gold workers received when completing the same jobs. The possibility for promotion was limited to the lowest positions available to ensure the constant subjugation of the West Indian community. Housing and food were at all time inferior to that provided to Gold employees as was the level of healthcare available to West Indian employees.

The lack of respect and caring shown towards workers of African descent was further demonstrated by the refusal of the Canal Zone authority to use proper forms of address for

¹²⁶ O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 72.

¹²⁷ Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 5.

employees of African descent. The poor treatment of West Indian workers by the Canal authority inspired the further mistreatment of West Indian workers by white labour unions operating in the Canal Zone. Both the Metal Trades Council and the American Federation of Labor pursued active policies of discrimination while lobbying for the eradication of all labourers of African descent. With little or no protection West Indians suffered under the policies implemented due to the Metal Trade Council and the American Federation of Labor. Lack of protection was also an issue when dealing with the court system in the Canal Zone and in Panama. West Indians were often mistreated by the justice system and those who attacked them were often set free, further encouraging discrimination and violence towards the West Indian community.

To maintain the status quo substandard schooling was provided to the West Indian inhabitants of the Zone. Limited curricula and overcrowding decreased the opportunities available to the next generation of West Indian labourers. Linda Smart Chubb's memorandum documents many of the injustices suffered by West Indian workers. Her statements are well supported by the vast amount of secondary literature which addresses these same concerns. The Canal Zone practiced a policy of active discrimination which treated West Indian workers as second class people because of the colour of their skin. The repercussions of the mistreatment of West Indians stretched beyond the everyday policies of the Canal Zone into Panama. As the decades passed Panamanian nationalism continued the discriminatory policies of the Canal Zone, adopting a strong anti-West Indian approach to governance. The racist policies perpetrated by the Canal Zone and Panama were further enhanced by the lack of proper representation supplied by the British Consulate. Without the protection and the protest of British representatives Panamanian discriminatory policies reached an all time high during the 1941 Presidential term of

Arnulfo Arias. The role played by British representation and the Canal Zone authorities in the continuation of racially motivated policies in the Canal Zone and Panama is an important aspect of the history of West Indian people on the Isthmus.

Repercussion of U.S. Influence and the Situation in Panama

By 1943 when Linda Smart Chubb wrote her memorandum, the United States had been actively involved in Panama for approximately 100 years. U.S. enterprise in Panama was not limited to the construction of the Panama Railway and the Panama Canal. United States companies owned and operated banana plantations in Panama as well as throughout Central America.¹ Because of extensive U.S. economic interests in Panama, the United States held considerable influence over the small Central American country. On a daily basis, the Panamanians were aware of the U.S. presence. Panamanians could not cross from one side of the country to the other without crossing sovereign U.S. soil. The effects of the close proximity of a U.S. 'state' could be seen in governmental policy and attitude. For example, though Panamanians did not wish to allow West Indians to immigrate, many were permitted to appease the U.S. authorities.² Trevor O'Reggio explains the relationship between migrants, Panama and the United States; "American capitalism became wedded to Black West Indian labor, a phenomenon that would have profound social, political and economic implications, especially in Costa Rica and Panama".³ Though the Panamanian government often accommodated the United States requests, nationalistic fervor caused disagreements between U.S. and Panamanian officials.

Beyond policy and governmental decree were the social effects of U.S. proximity. As the younger generations of Panamanians were schooled in U.S. operated institutions, the cultural

¹ Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 5.

² O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 35. This concept is further supported by the following quote "Panama had little influence on immigration policy, and immigrants came by the thousands, bringing with them strange languages, cultural values, and religions. The Panamanians felt overwhelmed by the sheer number of new immigrant, fearing their language, culture, and identity as a unique Hispanic nation were at stake, and having to compete for scarce Panamanian resources."

³ *Ibid.*, 36.

influence of 'America' was apparent in Panama. Linda Smart Chubb is correct when she argues that the "colour and national prejudice introduced by the Americans in the Canal Zone was bound to have repercussions in Panama."⁴ Panama was not simply a passive bystander as transnational companies operated within its borders. Being exposed to foreign influences in many different formats affected Panamanian policy and the people. By examining the changing attitudes and policies in Panama it is possible to develop a better understand of the effect of U.S. influence. The repercussions of the U.S. presence can be seen as both positive and negative, but the effects of more than a century of 'American' involvement in Panama are undeniable.

Historically, Panamanians have a mixed heritage of "white, cairb and negro" origins, which are similar to its neighbour Costa Rica.⁵ Though Panama is similar to its surrounding neighbours, the population has always been representative of its' geographic position. Panama's population differs from other Central American countries that have largely mestizo populations, though Panama did have a high number of mestizo inhabitants during the colonial era.⁶ As time passed, Panama's population changed due to its role as a crossing point for Central America. The population became increasingly different as it was "of mixed ancestry – black, white, and Indians, and the pure black population has also always been larger than those in the surrounding countries."⁷ Though the population of Panama was diverse, the elite members of Panama maintained a 'myth of whiteness' similar to that of Costa Rica. The myth extended only to the upper class and was out of necessity, to a great extent colour blind. In truth, Panama's population

⁴ Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 6.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶ Falcoff, *Panama's Canal*, 24.

⁷ Newton, *The Silver Men*, 111.

was largely of mixed ancestry.⁸ The ability to maintain the myth was hindered further by Panama's designation as Columbia's, "black province". The idea that Panama was filled with 'black' inhabitants was furthered as many 'white' colonial families left the Isthmus after the colonial era.⁹ The early class divisions as stated by John and Mavis Biesanz were simple the "adentro's" or insiders and the "afuera's" or the outsiders.¹⁰

The mixed ancestry of Panama has an interesting history which is important to understand before examining the country's reactions to the United States and immigrant minorities. It is estimated that the first slaves were brought to Panama as early as 1513 because of an agreement between the King of Spain and Diego de Nicuesa.¹¹ The lives of slaves in Spanish America were similar to those around the world, difficult and cruel. The transportation of precious metals was labour intensive brutal work. Slaves transported goods across the Isthmus from Peru to the Atlantic coast of Panama. Due to the long stretches of jungle and untamed wilds many slaves escaped. Panama became known for its freed slaves and Maroon/

⁸ Costa Rican society has long promoted the myth of being composed of a 'white settler' race. The myth of a homogeneous egalitarian society has been historically accepted by Costa Ricans and foreigners. The theory states that when Spaniards arrived the indigenous population was too small to support haciendas. Consequently, the conquerors became poor immigrant farmers themselves. Due to the lack of indigenous peoples and African slaves, interracial relations did not prosper, hence the 'pure' Costa Rican race developed as 'white settlers'. The use of the 'white settler' theory to explain Costa Rica's unique history has caused the identity of Costa Rica to be directly related to the myth. Consequently the non-white immigrants who have arrived during the last century have disrupted Costa Rica's image of an all white society. The same disruption has occurred in Panama and national policies in the 1940s reflected an attempt to limit the 'bad influence' of 'non-white' minorities. Harpelle. *The West Indians of Costa Rica*, xiii; Biesanz, Biesanz and Biesanz, *The Costa Ricans*, 70. Bourgois, "4.10 Blacks in Costa Rica: Upward Mobility and Ethnic Discrimination" in *The Costa Rica Reader*, 161.

⁹ Biesanz and Biesanz, *The People of Panama*, 221.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 207.

¹¹ The agreement reached in 1508 involved the transportation of 40 slaves to Urruba and Veragua. Another agreement was reached for the transportation of 36 more slaves to help in colonizing efforts. Based on these agreements a number of secondary sources list 1511 or 1513 as the years that slaves first arrived in Panama. Lewis, *The West Indians in Panama*, 3. Trevor O'Reggio lists a similar date of 1514 as in beginning of slave arrivals in Panama. The slaves were brought to complete roadways which were needed to transport the precious metals mined Peru to the Atlantic coast of Panama. O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 27.

Cimarrone communities.¹² Maroon communities were commonly made up of runaway slaves and were often located in the jungles of Panama. These groups fought against the 'white' slave owners and provided a safe haven for runaways. The groups of illegally free people of African descent made up one of the two main groups of "black" people in Panama.

A colony of people of African descent which were not escaped slaves existed in Panama, but their origins are unknown.¹³ Lancelot Lewis suggests that they may have been shipwrecked Ethiopian pirates, who settled in Panama. Whether pirates, or not, they lived in the Darien province and were part of the Panamanian population in the 1500s. Outside of the Maroon and the independent community near Darien, the people of African descent present in Panama were slaves. After emancipation which occurred in 1821, the former slaves became part of the Panamanian population.¹⁴ They spoke Spanish and had customs similar to their fellow Panamanians. It is important to note that the freed slaves and free peoples of African descent were part of the Hispanic populace and should not be confused with later 'black' immigrants.

Author John Lindsay-Poland states, that as of 1900 Panama's population could be divided into five groups; "White residents of the capital; Mestizo peasants from the savannas on the Pacific slope; a merchant class in the provinces; and poor Blacks or Mulattos, ...Indigenous

¹² The two most famous Cimarrones are Felipillo and Bayano. Felipillo escaped and formed a community in 1549. The community caused the Spanish authorities problems when they began raiding settlements. Bayano "King of the Blacks" was another well know Cimarrone looter who successfully led his group of Cimarrones against the Spanish authorities for two years before he was capture and shipped to Spain. Though theses are only two examples of the Cimarrones resistance, Maroon communities continued to form and were seen as a threat by Spanish authorities for four centuries. O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 28-29.

¹³ A similarly independent community of 'black' inhabitants formed on the Talamanca Coast of Costa Rica. The community formed in 1828 and is traced back to Panama. Whether these are the independent blacks Panama is unknown, but it is important to note that 'black' inhabitants in Central America were not all slaves. Palmer, "What Happen": *A Folk History of Costa Rica's Talamanca Coast*, 21-22.

¹⁴ *Biesanz and Biesanz, The People of Panama*, 221.

people".¹⁵ The group referred to as 'blacks' is then further divided into emancipated slaves and West Indian immigrants. As stated above 'black' Panamanians were nothing like the West Indian migrants. They spoke Spanish, were largely Catholic and were active members of Panamanian society while the West Indians spoke English, were Protestant and were British subjects.¹⁶ The influx of West Indians of African descent began with the construction of the Panama railway. In 1853, 1,200 of the 1,590 men working on the railway were listed as 'black'.¹⁷ During the construction of the railway approximately 5,000 West Indians immigrated to Panama to fill the labour needs of the project.¹⁸ After completion some of the workers returned home or traveled to other areas of Central America, but not all of the West Indians left Panama. The remaining West Indians were later joined by their countrymen due to the immigration of large numbers of West Indians as a result of the initiation of the French Canal works. In 1883, 84% of the employees were listed as 'black', which equaled approximately 10,000 black workers.¹⁹ Between the years 1880-1889, it is estimated that approximately 50,000 West Indian labourers struggled to build Lesseps' sea level canal.²⁰ With the closing of the French Canal, workers again found themselves unemployed without many other options in Panama. Workers traveled back to their home islands or to other jobs across Central America and the Caribbean. Traveling to find work was a common aspect of labour in both the Caribbean and Central America. As construction projects or seasons changed, men would travel to different countries in search of new jobs. Migration

¹⁵ John, Lindsay-Poland. *Emperors in the Jungle: The Hidden History of the U.S. in Panama*. (London: Duke University Press, 2003), 12.

¹⁶ Falcoff, *Panama's Canal*, 26.

¹⁷ Petras, *Jamaican Labor Migration*, 75.

¹⁸ Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal*, 1.

¹⁹ Petras, *Jamaican Labor Migration*, 97.

²⁰ Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal*, 1.

studies of Central American and Caribbean labour have been written because of the huge importance travel played in the lives of West Indian labourers.

Elizabeth Petras suggests that during both the French canal building and the construction of the Panama railway a three step process of labor migration occurred.²¹ As each project began the recruitment and importation of workers was necessary to develop a large labour pool. The next step in labour migration is the period of time during which the project is in full swing and labour needs are being met by the influx of workers. After a large labour pool was formed, the availability of work spread by word of mouth which helped to maintain the large number of workers needed. The third and final step is the dispersion of the accumulated labour pool as the required number of labourers decreases. Each of the three steps would then be repeated as the next large project began. All of the construction projects on the Isthmus followed this pattern and cycled through it repeatedly as economic and construction needs changed. The U.S. canal project's labour force clearly demonstrates a number of peaks and lulls in labour needs as the initial project was finished and additions were added.

With the beginning of construction, the canal authorities imported labour from the Caribbean, Asia and Europe. Though each of the locations were represented on the Isthmus, high numbers of West Indians made up the largest group. Between the years 1904 and 1914 as many as 150,000 West Indian labourers participated in the initial construction of the Panama Canal.²² To acquire a vast labour pool an increase in immigration from the Caribbean was necessary. The second stage of Petras' three stage immigration theory existed until 1911 when

²¹ Petras, *Jamaican Labor Migration*, 205.

²² Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal*, 1. The number of non-West Indian Panamanians working during any given time of the construction is 500. This estimate is provided by Elizabeth Petras book *Jamaican Labour Migration*, page 136.

the Canal authority began to consider the decrease and stabilization of the workforce. With the completion of the canal a few years away the Canal Zone authorities needed to start the slow dispersal of the large labour pool they had drawn to the Isthmus. Three approaches were used to achieve lower employee numbers and to stabilize the work force.²³ The first task was for the U.S. to assume the cost and to make preparations for the repatriation of all unnecessary labourers.²⁴ The second step involved the facilitation of recruitment of excess labor by other enterprises, particularly those which had U.S. investors.²⁵ The third tactic used by the Canal authorities was the lowering of wages, which in turn caused workers to look for employment elsewhere. A bonus for the canal authorities was connected with the last approach; the labourers who did stay now worked for a lower wage. Petras immigration model continued to repeat itself post completion as the canal still experienced a number of highs and lows, during the depression, both world wars and with the addition of more locks.

Post and pre-completion of the canal had another group of labourers and residents that are disregarded by the above statistics. All of the statistics refer to the men who immigrated to the canal disregarding their families who emigrated to join them or formed once they arrived on the Isthmus. The census of the Canal Zone in 1912 demonstrates the large numbers of women that immigrated to Panama and the Canal Zone. (See Table 1.0) Prior to 1904 only 1, 191 Jamaicans, both male and female were in residence in the Canal Zone. Based on Table 1.0 Sir C. Mallet, HBM Consul in Panama determined that, "The proportion of Jamaicans in the Republic I estimate at 70% of the total, or 16,143 men and women, making a grand total of 28,347

²³ Petras, *Jamaican Labor Migration*, 205.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 206.

²⁵ One of the main companies involved in taking excess labour is the United Fruit Company. Petras, *Jamaican Labor Migration*, 206.

Jamaicans in the Republic and the Canal Zone. The number of Jamaicans employed by the Isthmian Canal Commission and Panama Railroad Company was 6,031 men and 28 women, a total of 6,059 persons”.²⁶ Though the numbers provided demonstrate that West Indian women were working and living in both Panama and the Canal Zone, the lack of information about Panamanian born children does not allow for a true count. The choice of the British government not to count Panamanian born children would also cause much concern and trouble in later years when West Indians were being persecuted by the Panamanian government.

Table 1.0: 1912 and 1911 Census of the Canal Zone and Panama

Sex	Location	
	Canal Zone (Jamaicans)	Panama (British West Indians)
Male	8132	14148
Female	4072	8914
Total population	12204	23062

NB: Children of Jamaicans born in Panama are counted as natives

Source: Sir C. Mallet, HBM Consul in Panama, *Census: Jamaicans in Canal Zone*, Colonial Office 137/694 (1912)

As of 1914 approximately 42,868 labourers of African descent were working for the Panama Canal and railway.²⁷ Of the 42,868 it is estimated that 31,352 were of British West Indian heritage. The British West Indians accounted for roughly 60% of the labour force. As large numbers of West Indians moved to the Isthmus many problems arose that involved discrimination and racial prejudices which continued to change with the added influence of U.S. citizens.

The racial discrimination present in Panama was different from the discrimination faced by the West Indians at home, though ‘race’ had been determined in similar ways in both

²⁶ Sir C. Mallet, HBM Consul in Panama. *Census: Jamaicans in Canal Zone*, Colonial Office 137/694 (1912).

²⁷ Newton, *The Silver Men*, 46.

countries.²⁸ In Spanish America race was the primary determinant in a persons social position. Historically, the ranking consisted of four groups; Spaniards, racially mixed groups, Indigenous people and African slaves.²⁹ Panamanians traditionally judged 'race' by skin colour and hair type but there were no clear colour lines. The influx of British West Indian immigrants and U.S. citizens changed the Panamanian's definition of 'race'. Panama was influenced by attitudes held in the U.S. and in the British West Indies.³⁰

The definition of race in Jamaica and Panama was similar but both were distinctly different from that of the United States. In colonial and post-colonial Jamaica a number of factors were used to determine ones 'race'. "Ancestry, skin color, hair type, facial features and socioeconomic status", occupation and educational level, were all factors considered when negotiating 'race' in Jamaica.³¹ It was also possible for people's 'race' to change due to the inconsistency of a number of the criteria. In contrast the designation of 'black' in the United States basically included anyone not 'white'. All shades of darker skin are lumped into one category. Similar discrepancies are seen in the attitudes held towards free or freed 'black' men before emancipation. In the United States freed 'blacks' were feared, as citizens believed they would lead the slaves into revolt. Contrastingly, the 'white' British subjects in Jamaica viewed

²⁸ Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 7.

²⁹ O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 30.

³⁰ Biesanz and Biesanz, *The People of Panama*, 221-222.

³¹ Vickerman, *Crosscurrents: West Indian Immigrants and Race*, 42. Similar divisions are described by Velma Newton in *The Silver Men: West Indian Labour Migration to Panama 1850-1914*. Newton divides the population into three groups the "the pure Indians, includ[ing] the fiercely independent Guaymis...the Chocoos of Darien, and the Cuñas", the rural Panamanians of mixed ancestry, and urban Panamanians including a larger number of pure whites and blacks. Newton, *The Silver Men*, 112.

the freed 'blacks' as support in case of an uprising.³²

Racial designations were more flexible within Jamaican society. Milton Vickerman describes the fundamental difference between 'race' designation as follows; "they [Jamaicans] disaggregate what Americans compress".³³ Because of the different criteria used to determine race, racial discrimination was very different before the United States became involved in Panama. The racial discrimination present in the Canal Zone and Panama was affected by the presence of U.S. citizens and the societal makeup of Panama. British West Indians especially those from Jamaica came from a society where the 'black' population was a majority. Being a majority provided the inhabitants of African descent with potential power which was actualized post emancipation through the democratic political system.³⁴

The reverse was true in the U.S. because the majority of the population was white. The majority was able to institutionalize racism through their control of the political system. The 'American' southerners who came to work on the Canal brought a distinct colour consciousness with them because of the societal composition of the United States.³⁵ The attitude of southerners from the U.S. was summed up in *The People of Panama* as follows, "The American came with his belief in Negro inferiority, his attitude that a Negro was a Negro even if his white admixture was considerable, and his desire to keep the Negro "in his place"". ³⁶ The 1925 Annual Report of

³² There was a greater affinity between freed-'blacks' and white Jamaicans because both were commonly slave owners. David, Lowenthal. *West Indian Societies*. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1972), 19. Freed 'Blacks' in Panama held yet another position as they were considered third class citizens. Limitations on their involvement in trade, the fact that they could not hold public office and lastly that black women had to dress less luxuriously than Spanish women to avoid offending them are just a few of restrictions placed on third class citizens. *O'Reggio, Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 34.

³³ Vickerman, *Crosscurrents: West Indian Immigrants and Race*, 42.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

³⁵ Niemeier, *The Panama Story*, 256.

³⁶ Biesanz and Biesanz, *The People of Panama*, 222.

the British Foreign Office on Cuba, Panama and the Canal Zone comments of the consequences of many 'Americans' inability to treat workers of African descent decently:

The Americans, amongst whom such a huge population of coloured people reside, are actually a danger when, as at Panama, they are living among a large British native population. They have little or no idea how to treat backward races. They appear to be incapable of according them either justice or fair play. At one time they treat them with gross familiarity, and at another with injustice and contempt. It is a lamentable fact that, whenever the American comes into contact with a negro, the latter deteriorates, casts aside his better and more respectful manners, becomes familiar, and soon appears to lose not only whatever respect he might have had for the "white man," but learns to look on him with contempt. This is, unfortunately, being demonstrated over and over again in this country and elsewhere.³⁷

The difference in American attitudes towards people of African descent caused much unrest on the Isthmus and had a negative impact on the West Indian community.

Although the British West Indians faced discrimination in their home countries, racism was never supported by the state post-emancipation. While discrimination was a part of life in Jamaica, state supported discriminatory laws were not a part of society. Another key difference cited by Milton Vickerman was the lack of hate groups in Jamaica. Due to the white population being in the position of a minority, hate groups such as the Ku Klux Klan did not operate on the island which in turn affected the degree of organized violence perpetrated against the black population in Jamaica. Panamanian racism was a combination of the ideas perpetuated by the U.S. and other Central American countries. Similar to Jamaica, Panama's racial distinction were based on a number of features such as hair type, skin colour, language and economic situation. These distinctions and nuances did not apply to West Indians in Panama as all West Indians were considered as part of the "Antillean menace".³⁸ Though the state was not officially supporting

³⁷ Annual Reports (Foreign Office) on Cuba, Panama and Canal Zone, 1925. Jamaica Archives IB/5/79, pg. 7.

³⁸ Knapp and Knapp, *Red, White and Blue Paradise*, 161.

racism like the U.S., a nation wide dislike of West Indians for cultural, economic and ethnic reasons was present in Panama.³⁹

In turn a dislike of Panamanian nationals was maintained by many in the West Indian community for similar reasons. West Indians resisted Panamanian attempts to assimilate them and their children. West Indian children were raised in English speaking schools, with British customs and all things Panamanian were considered inferior and unimportant. Linda Smart Chubb states that British West Indians also kept property in their countries of origin so that they could one day return to their homes. Many British West Indians never intended to stay in Panama indefinitely. Unfortunately, as decades passed changing policies and a lack of proper representation placed many British West Indians in a position which required them to remain on the Isthmus. Where British nationality had at one time offered a semblance of protection against discrimination, Linda Smart Chubb asserts that in Panama, British nationality no longer guaranteed any type of protection.⁴⁰ The true failure of British representation to protect West Indians was demonstrated by President Arnulfo Arias in 1940. Prior to the West Indians loss of faith, their nationality was not only embraced but continued by their determination to remain British. The loss of faith in the British Empire is one of the main reason Linda Smart Chubb penned the memorandum.

Before it is possible to fully understand the plight of the British West Indians it is imperative to understand the relationship between the United States and Panama which directly affected the West Indian workers. The Panamanian people shifted back and forth in the

³⁹ Newton, *The Silver Men*, 171. Similar to Newton's assessment Conniff supports the assertion that Panamanian racism towards West Indians was primarily based in economic frustration and cultural differences. Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal*, 11.

⁴⁰ Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 7.

acceptance of U.S. involvement. The relationship between the U.S. and Panama was difficult from the very beginning. As noted earlier the original treaty negotiated between Panama and the United States to build the canal was negotiated and ratified without any Panamanians being present.⁴¹ Furthermore the 'Americans' placed themselves socially above the local Panamanians. Authors Biesanz and Biesanz wrote the following about the feelings of resentment Panamanians had:

With Americans acting as if the Zone were their particular private preserve and Panamanians smarting under wounds to their sovereignty, one could hardly expect close and harmonious relations between persons of the two nations. Add to this the language barrier, differences in customs, the economic self-interest of each group, the contrasts in political systems, economic organizations, levels of living, and racial composition of the two groups and we can see that resentments, friction, and conflicts are inevitable.⁴²

Following the signing of the treaty the U.S. took over the Panamanian ports, applying their own tariffs and customs charges to products entering and leaving Panama.⁴³ Immediately the Panamanian government expressed their displeasure with the application of tariffs on Panamanian goods. The U.S. and Panama entered negotiations and agreed on the reduction of tariffs as well as the free passage of goods between the Republic and the Canal Zone.

United States interventions in Panama were another form of U.S. influence that strongly affected relations between the two countries. Although the interventions were commonly initiated by one Panamanian political party against another, the inclusion of the United States in Panamanian affairs caused resentment. Between 1904-1920 the United States intervened in Panamanian affairs four times. Though intervention was a product of both U.S. decision and some level of Panamanian invitation, the U.S. technically had the right to "act against any threat

⁴¹ Falcoff, *Panama's Canal*, 26-27.

⁴² Biesanz and Biesanz, *The People of Panama*, 178.

⁴³ Meditz and Hanratty eds., *Panama : A Country Study*, 27.

to the Canal Zone or the lives and holdings of non-Panamanians in the two major cities".⁴⁴ The first intervention was caused by a request for help supervising an election by the incumbent governments.⁴⁵ The second occurred when U.S. citizens and their property in Chiriquí was threatened, resulting in the installment of an occupation force for two years. Yet another intervention was a result of the 1925 rent riots. The intervention during the rent riots was one of the most strongly resented. U.S. intervention in Panamanian life and politics had a lasting influence on Panama and its inhabitants.

Through the use of treaties and numerous interventions the U.S. became inextricably involved in Panamanian politics. In 1908 U.S. President Taft supported a Liberal candidate who won unopposed after the Conservative opposition withdrew from the election.⁴⁶ The United States had strongly encouraged the Conservatives to resign from the election as only the Liberal candidates were considered viable options by the U.S. government. Just two years later when both the President and Vice Presidents of Panama died the U.S. again intervened in the ensuing juggle of candidates. A strong and well supported candidate named Carlos Mendoza was considered the new favourite for President. Much to the displeasure of the United States he was a candidate of African descent. In 1910 a prominent U.S. citizen working to undermine Mendoza's bid for presidency wrote the following to the Secretary of State, "As for Mendoza personally, I believe him to be an able, clever and comparatively high-minded politician, but I consider the unfortunate circumstances of his race will produce more harm if he succeeds in

⁴⁴ Meditz and Hanratty eds., *Panama : A Country Study*, 28.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

office then his able qualities will produce good".⁴⁷ Again the U.S. government at the request of the Conservatives intervened and persuaded Mendoza to resign his candidacy.⁴⁸ As a result, the resentment of Panamanians, particularly those of African descent towards the U.S. rose as it became apparent that Mendoza was forced to resign because of his skin colour. 'American' racism was apparent to many as they supported the white Panamanian elite in the removal of Mendoza from the race for president.

In 1925 the Kellogg-Alfaro Treaty was yet another treaty which clearly favoured the United States. The United States gained a number of security concessions which enhanced U.S. control over Panama. Included in the treaty was an agreement that Panama would automatically join any war the U.S. was involved in.⁴⁹ The treaty also granted the United States the right to supervise and control the Republic's military operations. Both of these clauses were strongly objected to and the clause of automatic participation could not be included based on international law. In favour of Panama, the 1955 treaty placed increasing restrictions on private commercial operations in the Canal Zone coupled with stronger regulations surrounding commissary privileges.⁵⁰ Canal Zone commissaries were one of the institutions which the Panamanian government strongly resented and fought against from their implementation in 1905.⁵¹ Increased regulations in terms of commissary privileges would hopefully increase the commercial spending of non-Canal Zone residents in the Republic.

Panama also felt that Panamanian employees deserved pay equal to the 'Americans' and

⁴⁷ Marsh to Secretary of State, 28 July 1910, Goethols Papers, LCMC, Gen' Corr. "M" September-October 1910, pg. 8.

⁴⁸ Meditz and Hanratty, *Panama: A Country Study*, 42.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 40.

there was a considerable amount of resentment over the Canal's independent stores which decreased the potential economic improvements in Panama.⁵² The relationship did not become more equal as time passed for Panama was commonly affected by its U.S neighbour. Governmental policy was often influenced by the U.S. as Panama had little grounds to resist. The influence of the United States government was clearly demonstrated when Panama changed its policy regarding West Indian immigration at the onset of WWII. The Panamanian government was strongly anti-West Indian and had prohibited the immigration of West Indians in 1926. When the United States began a large expansion of the canal locks, they wanted to employ West Indian immigrants as they had before.⁵³ The Panamanian government encouraged the U.S. to recruit 'non-coloured' workers from the surrounding area but the U.S. insisted that they needed to secure an appropriate worker force as quickly as possible. The Panamanians eventually permitted the limited migration of West Indian workers under the condition of prompt repatriation after the work was completed.

Michael Conniff includes the following quote from a Panamanian politician which clearly demonstrates the amount of control the U.S. had over Panama, "When you hit a rock with an egg, the egg breaks, or when you hit an egg with a rock, the egg breaks. The United States is the rock. Panama is the egg. In either case the egg breaks."⁵⁴ For a time fierce resentment and dislike of U.S. customs and involvement on patriotic grounds was prevalent in Panama.⁵⁵ In *Panama's Canal*, author Mark Falcoff quotes two students opinions about the continued

⁵² Falcoff, *Panama's Canal*, 27.

⁵³ O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 95.

⁵⁴ Conniff, *Panama and The United States*, 3.

⁵⁵ Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 6.

resentment of the U.S.;

“Nationalist sentiments have been catered to in varying degrees by all who have held positions of leadership or have sought popular support.” And they assert, rather more boldly, that national leaders have “alternately responded to and contributed to an explosive climate of public opinion. They have carefully kept popular resentment narrowly focused on the United States presence, lest discontent turn on the Panamanian elite”.⁵⁶

The formation and increase in nationalistic goals and ideals caused an increasing amount of discrimination to be directed at the West Indian workers who were seen as alien.⁵⁷ Although Panama at times resented U.S. involvement there were also positive aspects to the relationship between Panama and the United States that were highly valued.⁵⁸ Panama had access to technology, improved roadways, financial aid, and economic benefits due to the U.S. presence.⁵⁹ Over time the resentment decreased and an increasing number of Panamanians began to attend U.S. schools in the Canal Zone and post-secondary schooling in the United States.⁶⁰ Though there were some positive effects of United States influence, Panama continued to struggle for greater independence.

The influence of the United States was not only governmental. Community customs and social practices changed as Panamanians were influenced by ‘American’ culture. Furthermore Linda Smart Chubb, asserts that a new attitude surrounding women and social customs developed taking on a more ‘American’ approach. Traditionally women’s and men’s roles in Latin American society were based around the ideas of machismo and marianismo.

⁵⁶ Falcoff, *Panama's Canal*, 26.

⁵⁷ Biesanz and Biesanz, *The People of Panama*, 223.

⁵⁸ Falcoff, *Panama's Canal*, 28.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁶⁰ Chubb, “The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama” in *The Forgotten People*, 6.

Machismo has been described as “a celebration of the sexual and social expressions of masculine power and virility.”⁶¹ The ideal of machismo is represented by a strong, powerful, virile, assertive and aggressive man, who defends honour above all else. Marianismo is the feminine counterpoint of the male ideal which accents traditional female virtues. Authors Skidmore and Smith state the following about marianismo, “this myth exalts the virtues associated with womanhood, semi divinity, moral superiority and spiritual strength”.⁶² Women were the caretakers of virtue, a roll which was more subdued than that of the male members, but at the same time not powerless. Women were valued as mothers, caregivers and as the providers of virtue and religion. Marianismo was complemented and upheld through the protection provided by the ideal of machismo. The strong gender roles wedded to these ideals were important aspects of Latin American culture. As Latin Americans became increasingly influenced by the United States presence the traditional roles held by men and women began to change. The effect of the United States presence was the same in Panama as it was in other Latin America countries.

By the 1920s Panamanians were being influenced by U.S. customs, products and entertainment. Although they were highly accepting of some U.S. culture many people still felt a deep resentment towards the United States because of the Canal Zone. The racist attitudes of many U.S. citizens continued to place the Panamanians in an inferior position. 'Americans' continued to believe in their superiority over both the West Indian community and Panamanians. The popular stereotype Zonians associated with the Panamanians was that they were a lazy people who felt a misplaced sense of entitlement because of the Canals importance.⁶³ The

⁶¹ Skidmore and Smith, *Modern Latin America*, 62.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 63.

⁶³ Biesanz and Biesanz, *The People of Panama*, 179. The term Zonian refers to 'American' citizens who lived in the Canal Zone.

Panamanian people maintained their own stereotype of U.S. citizens; “they were blond, young, cocky, possessed an assumption of superiority, were “money mad”, lacked culture and finally were involved with loose women”.⁶⁴ Though many members of all three groups believed their own discriminatory version of the 'races', marriages between the groups grew as residents spent long periods of time on the Isthmus.

Over the decades as the 'American' presence became more apparent interracial, and international marriages became more common.⁶⁵ Linda Smart Chubb states that an increasing number of sailors, soldiers, and working American class men began to marry into the local population, which included, “mestizos, part-negro Panamanians and in some case women of West Indian descent”.⁶⁶ Herbert and Mary Knapp suggest that the decrease in racism and the slow acceptance of both West Indians and Panamanians began with the working men. Those white men who dealt on a day to day basis with the workers of African descent and saw them as people.⁶⁷ It is also the white labourers who married inter-nationally and inter-racially as discussed by Linda Smart Chubb. Although some people became less discriminatory due to familial ties, the racist policies of the Canal Zone and the growing resentment towards West Indians could not be stopped.

The resentment felt towards the West Indian population was furthered by the distinction of peoples within the Canal Zone. It is important to remember that the racial motivations over

⁶⁴ Biesanz and Biesanz, *The People of Panama*, 179. The last point is particularly interesting as 'Americans' often thought that the Hispanics and West Indian women were loose. The lack of legal marriages, especially between members of the West Indians community lead 'Americans' to believe that West Indians were the ones involved with loose women.

⁶⁵ Chubb, “The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama” in *The Forgotten People*, 6.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶⁷ Knapp and Knapp, *Red, White and Blue Paradise*, 155.

hiring and employment played a role in the perceptions groups formed about each other. In the Canal Zone the spectrum of employees placed white U.S. citizens at the top of the ladder and the 'black' West Indians at the bottom. Between the two a number of other groups were fighting to form their places in the social and economical hierarchy of the Zone. The three main divisions between the U.S. and West Indians were U.S. 'blacks', Europeans and white West Indians.⁶⁸ Each of the groups caused concern on the canal because they did not fit into the 'black and white' social hierarchy which was in place. The 'blacks' from the U.S. were originally placed on the Gold roll because of their nationality but this did not work as the Gold roll was to be white only. Eventually few 'American blacks' were hired and those under employment were given home and sick leave privileges even though they were demoted to the Silver roll.

Southern Europeans caused a similar issue as they were white but considered low class by U.S. Zonians because they were labourers. Though they were placed on the Silver roll, separate mess halls and facilities were provided so that they would not have to mix with employees of African descent. Similar to the U.S. citizens of African descent, European recruitment ended in 1908 and their numbers decreased rapidly. The last group which did not fit into the realm of Gold and Silver rolls were the white West Indians.⁶⁹ Though they were not actively recruited, a number of white British subjects came to work on the canal. Often the intermediary roles between administration and the British West Indians of African descent were filled by the white immigrants. British West Indians trusted their countrymen, although this trust was not always returned in the form of loyalty. While placed originally on the Gold roll, subsequent requirements regarding nationality forced the Canal Zone to list white British West Indians as Silver workers.

⁶⁸ Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal*, 35.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

The placement of white workers on the Silver roll caused problems as did the U.S. policy of placing Panamanians on the Silver roll. Panamanians did not believe that they should be placed at a level equal to West Indians. Trevor O'Reggio states best the result of U.S. racism and social structuring in the Canal Zone; "U.S. racial practices during and after the construction era had a profound effect on formal and informal relations between Panama and the United States, especially as they related to the Black West Indian".⁷⁰ The informal effects were discussed above but it is the formal effects of U.S. influence on Panama that caused the greatest upset in the West Indian community.

Encouraged by U.S. influence, the Panamanians began to further differentiate themselves from the West Indian population based on skin colour and hair type.⁷¹ Racial segregation became an important part of Panamanian society, as colour was a tool used by the 'American' foreigners to determine a persons societal position. While the 'American' influence was apparent both white and black Panamanians were concerned with the arrival of West Indians during the earliest construction projects.⁷² The fact that West Indians had a different language, culture and religion, worried the Panamanians while making assimilation very difficult. Panamanians were further threatened because West Indians generally did not want to assimilate and continued to participate in their own culture and community. This was particularly true of the 'old timers' who only came to Panama to make money and return home.⁷³ As a number of Panamanians could pass as more white than black they were commonly placed in a higher social position. Those of

⁷⁰ O'Reggio, *Alienation and Citizenship*, 66.

⁷¹ Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 6.

⁷² Lewis, *The West Indians in Panama*, 12.

⁷³ Biesanz and Biesanz, *The People of Panama*, 224.

West Indian descent were not as lucky and quickly became the focus of serious attacks.⁷⁴ As nationalism grew and periods of unemployment and depression occurred, antagonism towards West Indians greatly increased and decreased with the rise and fall of economic hardship.

During the canal construction and up until 1919 the Panamanians viewed Black West Indians as a necessary inconvenience. As the jobs available on the canal decreased, the number of unemployed West Indians rose and the economic benefit Panamanians gained from West Indian commerce disappeared. The situation became even worse as Panama suffered an economic recession in 1921 and 1922. Everyone in Panama was hit by the recession but the plight of the West Indians was particularly terrible because they were living in a country that cared little for their well being. The situation in Panama reached terrible heights in the later months of 1921 as the world began to report on the conditions West Indians were living in. On October 23, 1921, The New York Times ran a short note entitled "Thousands Are Destitute On Isthmus of Panama".⁷⁵ West Indians unable to gain employment were also unable to return to their native islands.⁷⁶ The development of soup kitchens and other types of aid were becoming necessary for the continued survival of the unemployed.⁷⁷

In November a similar article was published focusing on "Panama's Labor Problem".⁷⁸ As a result of the continued labour crisis across the country, the Panama Labor Federation appointed a committee to develop a solution for dealing with the increasing numbers of unemployed. The solution favoured by the committee which became widely popular with

⁷⁴ Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 6.

⁷⁵ "Thousands Are Destitute on Isthmus of Panama," The New York Times, October 23, 1921.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ "Panama's Labor Problem," The New York Times, November 19, 1921.

Panamanians was the repatriation “of alien labor”.⁷⁹ By January of 1922 the situation in Panama was still not resolved and continued to worsen.⁸⁰ The number of unemployed Jamaicans became so large that authorities tried to prevent further immigration to the country. Panama was also in the process of securing funding from the Jamaican government to repatriate the Jamaicans left of the Isthmus.

West Indians were seen as a drain on the economy and as an unwanted alien element living in Panama.⁸¹ Panama had been watching the 'American' treatment of the West Indians for a decade and felt no compulsion to treat the community any better themselves. The dislike and anger directed at the West Indians increased as the 1920s proceeded. Public comments regarding the 'West Indian problem' were not uncommon. Trevor O'Reggio includes the following quote from a Panamanian weeklies in 1924:

The West Indians who infest our terminal cities, lower our standard of living, and, with their strange customs, give to Panama, Colon, and Bocas del Toro the appearance of African outposts, constitute one of the most serious problems that this country must solve...

The problem is acute yet not beyond solution. Our economic situation is growing worse, work is slackening daily, and occupational opportunities, as time goes on, are vanishing. Are we going to stand aside and permit an inferior unassimilable foreign element that is objectionable from a sociological point of view to take advantage of the few jobs that our native element could fill?...

...If this state of affairs be allowed to persist, the West Indians will be the real owners and masters of the patrimony which rightfully belongs to us, Panamanians. We may continue to be friendly with the United States, England and France after ridding our country of the black element that they have unloaded on the Isthmus to the detriment and ruin of native labor.⁸²

While the quote only represents the view of the individual who wrote it, the sentiments were a

⁷⁹ “Panama's Labor Problem,” *The New York Times*, November 19, 1921.

⁸⁰ “Jamaicans Destitute in Panama,” *The New York Times*, January 26, 1922.

⁸¹ O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 66.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 67.

wide spread phenomenon that by 1926 became a reality in the form of laws. The reasoning given behind the new legislation was both economic and racial.⁸³ Fears of increasing unemployment were well founded and the prohibition of new immigrants helped to minimize the growing numbers of unemployed.

As of October 23, 1926 Panamanian racism reached a new high when the National Assembly passed Law 13. Law 13 prevented the immigration of non-Spanish speaking individuals, which included Chinese, Japanese, Syrians, Turks and Antillean Blacks.⁸⁴ The law also prohibited the return of prohibited immigrants if they left the country. The addition of this clause trapped West Indians on the Isthmus because they feared they would not be able to return to their families if they left. Accompanying Law 13 was Law 6 which required all businesses to have a minimum of seventy-five percent Panamanian employees.⁸⁵ Both the West Indian community and a number of enterprises fought the clearly discriminatory policies that the National Assembly was approving. The United Fruit Company was particularly concerned as many of their workers were West Indian. Once again 'American' capitalism gained some ground for the West Indians as Law 13 was amended by Law 16 of 1927. Law 16 allowed for 'authorized immigration of West Indians under certain restrictions'.⁸⁶ Although immigration had decreased significantly the Panamanians still felt threatened by the large number of West Indians residing within the Republic.

In 1928 West Indians were attacked yet again by Panamanian legislation, this time in terms of citizenship. Prior to 1928 all Panamanian born children, West Indian or not were

⁸³ Panama and Canal Zone, Annual Report of 1931. January 22 1932. FO 341/15849, J/N 36318, Pg.11.

⁸⁴ O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 67.

⁸⁵ Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal*, 65.

⁸⁶ O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 69.

granted automatic Panamanian citizenship. Panamanian born children of British West Indians could also apply through the consulate for British citizenship as long as they were the product of a legitimate union in which one parent was a British subject. In 1928 Panama changed everything by withholding Panamanian citizenship from children born to prohibited foreigners.⁸⁷ Citizenship could be attained but only after the child reached the age of twenty-one and proved a clear knowledge of Spanish, as well as Panamanian history and the country's customs. While the law was unsettling, the Assembly did not make it retroactive ensuring the citizenship of many West Indian born children prior to 1928. The enacting of the law made all children born after 1928 insecure in their nationality.

The 1930s affected Panama in two major ways, the annuity paid was decreased due to the fall of the U.S. dollar and large numbers of Silver employees were suddenly unemployed. Between 1929-1933 one third of the Silver work force was laid off, leaving 3,400 workers and their families without homes, provisions, or the money to live in Panama.⁸⁸ A quick call for repatriation was heard throughout Panama, and the government insisted that the United States repatriate all unemployed West Indians.⁸⁹ The debate surrounding the repatriation of West Indians to their islands of origin is well documented. Between 1932 and 1934 numerous conversations, letters and reports were recorded which discussed the issue of who was truly a British subject and who was not and how to proceed under the new Panamanian laws. Law 6 caused much concern in the West Indian community which was reflected in the legations correspondence.

⁸⁷ Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal*, 66.

⁸⁸ Meditz and Hanratty, *Panama: A Country Study*, 40.

⁸⁹ Conniff, *Panama and The United States*, 89.

Due to Law 6 many West Indians feared that they would be fired to enable companies to hire the required percentage of Panamanian employees. A meeting between Brigadier-General Burgess Governor of the Panama Canal, Lieutenant-Colonel J.L. Schley the future Governor and Sir J. Crosby Legation representative, the difficult issues facing the West Indian community were discussed.⁹⁰ The first matter discussed was the job security of those West Indians working on the Canal. General Burgess assured Sir Crosby that current employees and those with experience would be given fair consideration for positions.⁹¹ While it was reassuring for the community that West Indians would still be employed, those out of work or retiring had to determine whether they could remain on the Isthmus. The women and children connected to men who became unemployed or retired were also affected by the changing Panamanian policies. Many of the children had been born and raised on the Isthmus. The decision to leave also hinged on the ability to pay for return passage back to the islands which was only given to men with contracts. Both women and children often had to pay their own return fare, making repatriation an expensive option. The choice to leave Panama was not simple and legal issues often made moving more difficult.

The cost of repatriation was high and the conditions on the Islands were not better than those on the Isthmus. The United States agreed to pay the cost of repatriation and General Burgess had suggested that each family should be given a sum to help them after returning home.⁹² While the problem of cost was settled, Sir Crosby stated that no children born to British West Indian couples living in consensual unions would be considered British subjects and

⁹⁰ J. Crosby, British Legation, Panama. (September 8th, 1932. Jamaica Archives. IB/5/79), 1.

⁹¹ Ibid., 2.

⁹² Ibid., 3.

therefore they could not be repatriated. While the younger generation by Crosby's definition was considered Panamanian by the British authorities, they were culturally British; speaking English and remaining loyal to their British heritage. Since families with illegitimate children would be unable to repatriate without leaving their children behind the British Legation sought alternative options.

Sir Crosby continued to pursue the issues faced by West Indians. Two suggestions other than repatriation were presented in the correspondence. The first was the opening up of land for unemployed people to farm. The second suggestion was the development of public works projects to help minimize the number of unemployed. While both suggestions were plausible the anti-West Indian attitude of the Panamanian government prohibited the implementation of either idea. The only option in the eyes of the Panamanian government was repatriation. The West Indians were considered a 'negro menace' and the Panamanians worried that their growing numbers would provide West Indians with political power.

As the push for repatriation continued the British Legation presented a new option to the Panamanian government. While illegitimate children were not technically British, those under sixteen whose passage was paid by their families would be allowed to repatriate.⁹³ The President of Panama was happy with the new development but wished for the age limit to be raised. While the new regulations were an improvement, poor families and single mothers would likely be unable to pay for passage, cutting them off from the option of repatriation.⁹⁴ Also any families who did not wish to leave their teenage children alone in a hostile and discriminatory country would have to stay in Panama, unable to leave due to the prohibition of West Indians returning to

⁹³ J. Crosby, British Legation, Panama. (December 27th, 1932. Jamaica Archives. IB/5/79), 1.

⁹⁴ C.H.A Marriott, British Legation, Panama. (June 27th, 1933. Jamaica Archives. IB/5/79), .

their country. The struggle of the repatriation of West Indians continued, though the difficulties subsided as standardized repatriation agreements were made. The instability of the West Indian community in Panama continued to make life difficult for West Indians.

The hostility between Panamanians and West Indians continued to grow as depression swept across the capitalist world and work became scarce.⁹⁵ Prior to the depression of the 1930s many of the manual labour jobs completed by West Indians were seen as too demeaning for Panamanians, but as the depression continued those jobs presented lost opportunities.⁹⁶ The nationalistic fervor which began in the 1920s was strengthened by the Depression. The 1930s followed in the footsteps of the previous decade. In 1930 the National Assembly introduced new legislation that barred the naturalization of prohibited immigrants.⁹⁷ The depression era also represented a time when Panama repeatedly tried to institute laws which would require all aliens to register their presence. The special return permits that were issued after the restrictions of the 1920s were discontinued as of 1931, barring all prohibited immigrants from leaving the Isthmus if they hoped to return. Laws barring return were particularly difficult on the West Indian community as it was not unusual for them to return to the islands to visit family and to take vacations. Laws affecting businesses also focused on removing West Indians from positions of relative importance.

The 1934 merchandising law required all corporations to have Panamanians controlling fifty-one percent of the stock, while having prohibited immigrant control to no more than

⁹⁵ Marc, Edelman and Joanne, Kenen. *The Costa Rica Reader*. (New York: Grove and Weidenfeld, 1989), 163. Though the statement was written of Costa Rica it is directly applicable to Panama as similar reactions to the West Indian community developed during the depression.

⁹⁶ Biesanz and Biesanz, *The People of Panama*, 95.

⁹⁷ Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal*, 80.

twenty-five percent.⁹⁸ The new laws also supported Law 6 by requiring corporations to have seventy-five percent Panamanian employees who received seventy-five percent of the company's payroll. West Indians tried to challenge the discriminatory legislation through elections and media support.⁹⁹ Unfortunately, for the West Indian community the 1920s and 30s were only precursors to the election of a nationalist President and the culmination of the most racist legislation ever directed at the West Indian community in Panama.

The political climate during WWII focused on the nationalistic populist movement which swept Panama. Traditionally the upper class controlled the government, maintaining a largely oligarchic system.¹⁰⁰ But nationalistic movements accompanied by populist politics began to appeal to the masses in the late 1930s. Panama was not an exception, the upper class was largely in charge of the government but as nationalistic fervor grew the Panamanian populist movement expanded. Elected to be the leader of Panameñismo, a nationalistic populist group was Arnulfo Arias.¹⁰¹ The movement's purpose was to mold a Panama for and of Panamanians. The nationalistic aspect of the movement called for the removal of all aliens including; North Americans, West Indians, Chinese, Hindus and Jews. Conditions in Panama further deteriorated when Arnulfo Arias became president in 1940. Once in office Arias pursued a nationalistic policy which demanded increased payments for land from the United States and threaten the citizenship, and civil rights of the West Indian community.¹⁰²

Racial discrimination reached a high in 1941 with the passing of a number of racist

⁹⁸ Biesanz and Biesanz, *The People of Panama*, 102.

⁹⁹ Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal*, 81.

¹⁰⁰ Meditz and Hanratty, *Panama: A Country Study*, 192.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁰² Conniff, *Panama and The United States*, 93.

laws.¹⁰³ The West Indians were not the only group discriminated against but they were one of the largest on the Isthmus. In 1941 President Arias confiscated Chinese owned shops.¹⁰⁴ Law 24 of 1941 prohibited persons of the restricted immigration group from participation in commercial and industrial commerce except under special circumstances.¹⁰⁵ The retail grocery industry up until 1941 was dominated by the Chinese population in Panama. Law 24 drastically reduced the number of Chinese immigrants operating in the retail industry. The repossessed stores were given to Arnulfo Arias's friends or sold to Panamanians for low prices. Coupled with Law 24 were the merchandising laws of 1934 which were expanded to prohibit the operation of certain types of retail and trade. Law 38 further limited 'alien' immigrants by taking away their right to work in any position of significance.

In 1941 Arnulfo Arias, passed legislation which removed citizenship from "Isthmain-born descendants of West Indians".¹⁰⁶ The requirements for Panamanian citizenship were changed from birthplace to parental citizenship. Where birthplace had previously been the only requirement to attain citizenship, parental citizenship now became the determining factor.¹⁰⁷

Trevor O'Reggio lists those who were eligible to opt for citizenship after 1941:

The following are Panamanians by birth

¹⁰³ Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 6.

¹⁰⁴ Biesanz and Biesanz, *The People of Panama*, 102.

¹⁰⁵ O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 102.

¹⁰⁶ Knapp and Knapp, *Red, White and Blue Paradise*, 162. Similar laws limiting and restricting West Indians had been implemented in Costa Rica. In the early 1930s the government demanded that a high percentage of workers be Hispanic, and to help ensure this no entrance visas were issued to 'blacks' as of 1934. Increasing discrimination led to the institution of the 1936 law which prohibited West Indians from entering the highlands. They were limited to the eastern coastal lowlands. The limitation became an even greater issue when the banana plantations were moved to the Pacific coast in the 1940s due to Panama disease. West Indians were forbidden to work on the Pacific coast and many workers were left with nothing. The 1942 law prohibiting the entrance of all 'blacks' to the country coincides with similar legislation being passed in Panama. Both countries became increasingly racist and discriminatory towards their West Indian communities.

¹⁰⁷ O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 103.

- a) Those born within the jurisdiction of the Republic, regardless of the nationality of their parents, as long as neither of these are of a prohibited immigration status;
- b) Those born within the jurisdiction of the Republic, even though one of the parents was of a prohibited immigration status, as long as the other is a Panamanian by birth. This provision shall not apply if the father who was of a prohibited immigrations status is a member of the black race and whose language is not Spanish.
- c) Those born outside the jurisdiction of the Republic, of a father or mother who is a Panamanian by birth, as long as one of them were not of prohibited immigration status.¹⁰⁸

The new laws succeeded in placing many West Indians in a position where they were no longer Panamanian or British. Citizenship was not returned to Panamanians born of West Indian parents until 1946.¹⁰⁹ Linda Smart Chubb states that the laws were not only resented by the West Indian population but also by Panamanians of Negro descent.

Through the implementation of these laws, Panama was forced to admit that it was not a 'white' country.¹¹⁰ The myth of 'whiteness' is commonly documented in regard to both Panama and Costa Rica. The countries assert that they are the descendants of European farmers and a minimal aboriginal population. But both Panama and Costa Rican have small black populations that have been living there for hundreds of years. In spite of their recognition of a naturally mixed population, national pride continued to place the British West Indians in a precarious position.¹¹¹ The supposed racial superiority of 'true Panamanians' played an important role in the development and implementation of the discriminatory laws of 1941. A statement made by the minister of external affairs easily demonstrates the racial motivation behind the new laws while denying racial reasoning, "reform of the constitution is not inspired by racial reasons but it has been demonstrated that persons classified as restricted immigrants do no belong to the class of

¹⁰⁸ O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 103.

¹⁰⁹ Biesanz and Biesanz, *The People of Panama*, 215.

¹¹⁰ Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 6.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

people that should constitute the national entity”.¹¹² Linda Smart Chubb concludes it best; “The new social discrimination against the British West Indians was added to by this heavier legal one, discriminating against their employment and forbidding their immigration altogether.”¹¹³

After a little over a year as President, Arfulno Arias was disposed on October 8th 1941 by Ricardo Adolfo de la Guardia.¹¹⁴ The country, no longer fully supporting Arias took advantage of his un-authorized absence to oust him from power. The changes instituted in his short presidency caused upheaval for the West Indian community, the United States enterprises operating in Panama and many of the elite Panamanians who supported U.S. interests. When Arfulno Arias was disposed, the lives of West Indians did not change instantly.¹¹⁵ It took years for the issue of citizenship to be solved. Between 1941 and 1946 many West Indians were simply left in limbo. In 1942 West Indians protested against the 1941 constitutional change before the Panamanian Supreme Court.¹¹⁶ Much to their disappointment President Arias' law was upheld. Trevor O'Reggio argues that West Indian leaders at the time estimated that as many as 50,000 people were left without any citizenship. The loss of citizenship effected the entire West Indian community. As citizens of no country they could not leave the Isthmus nor was their position in Panama very secure. Britain continued to refuse citizenship to West Indians born in Panama who were over the age of sixteen. The lack of protection and recognition by Britain caused West Indians to reevaluate their lives as British subjects.

¹¹² O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 102.

¹¹³ Chubb, “The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama” in *The Forgotten People*, 6.

¹¹⁴ Political Trends in Panama, 1931 to November 1943. written January 24th 1944. Rg165 G-2 Regional Files for Latin America, 1933-1944. pg.16.

¹¹⁵ Meditz and Hanratty, *Panama: A Country Study*, 32.

¹¹⁶ O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 103.

The strong loyalty to British ideals and nationality faded fast as Panama became increasingly hostile and British protection became less apparent. Without the protection of Britain, increasing numbers of British West Indians began taking Panamanian nationality when it became available in 1946. Children once sent to English schools began to attend Spanish speaking Panamanian schools. Though citizenship was legally returned to Panamanian born West Indians, obtaining formal citizenship was not easy. The Panamanians made citizenship acquisition more difficult by turning children away due to language requirements. Children needed to speak Spanish in order to obtain citizenship but they could not attend Panamanian schools to learn Spanish unless they could already speak the language. This was difficult because West Indian children spoke English at home.¹¹⁷ As the only way to receive citizenship was by proving that the West Indian applicant was “spiritually and materially incorporated” into the national life of Panama – in effect, if Spanish became their primary language, West Indians began to learn Spanish and attend Spanish schools much more frequently.¹¹⁸ After five years in limbo and a the lack of help from the British government, many young Panamanian West Indians and those deprived of citizenship by the Arias laws applied for Panamanian citizenship

Though West Indians willingly accepted new citizenship, Linda Smart Chubb states that many did so “with great sorrow, as the exchanging of a higher for a lower culture.”¹¹⁹ While many were saddened, few other options were available to West Indians who wanted to remain in Panama. The acceptance of Panamanian citizenship, when it was offered, did not negate their lower position in society as formerly British West Indian citizens were listed as Antillano instead

¹¹⁷ Biesanz and Biesanz, *The People of Panama*, 225.

¹¹⁸ Knapp and Knapp, *Red, White and Blue Paradise*, 164.

¹¹⁹ Chubb, “The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama” in *The Forgotten People*, 7.

of Latino, as black Panamanians were.¹²⁰ Though the division between West Indians and Panamanians was apparent John and Mavis Biesanz suggest that “the children and grandchildren of West Indian Negroes may achieve middle class status by education and occupation and by becoming culturally indistinguishable from those of Panamanian ancestry”.¹²¹

The struggles faced during the late 1920s until 1946 served to alter the cultural identity of many British West Indians. The lack of proper representation and the choice of Britain to not acknowledge British West Indian child born out of wedlock in Panama who were sixteen and older as British subjects, deeply damaged the loyalty of West Indians. The problems between British representatives and the West Indian community helped to encourage many of the young British West Indians to become Panamanian citizens. To secure a future for themselves and their children, many West Indians decided that assimilation into Panamanian society offered them the best opportunity. As the 1941 Presidency of Arias faded into the past, both Panamanian and West Indians alike began to assist the West Indian community in its integration. The anti-West Indian sentiments of the 1930 and 40s slowly developed in to an anti-American movement allowing West Indians a greater chance to succeed and find a secure position in Panamanian society. Though the West Indian community was changing Linda Smart Chubb thought that not all was lost. The final two sections of her memorandum contain suggestions meant to improve British loyalty and to regain the trust of the British West Indian community. By examining the suggestions and the subsequent changes seen in the West Indian community it is possible to see both the failures and the successes of the British representatives and the reactions of the West Indian community to the attitudes and approaches of representatives.

¹²⁰ Biesanz and Biesanz, *The People of Panama*, 215.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 210.

The Responsibilities of British Representatives

The beginning of the fourth section of the memorandum is clearly written by another person. Due to the relocation of Linda Smart Chubb, Vice-Consul Thwaites completed the report which she had initially begun. Though the section is written by Mr. Thwaites he makes it clear that he has remained as true as possible to the opinions of Linda Smart Chubb. He used her notes, the partially completed report, as well as information from conversations they shared to complete the memorandum. He also reiterates that the opinion of Linda Smart Chubb is not only valid but extremely important as she had the opportunity to observe at least thirty different Consular officers.¹ Not only did Linda Smart Chubb observe Consular officers at work, but also in social settings. Her social position allowed her to invite a number of Consular officers to both large and small gatherings in her home.² Her experience makes her a more than reliable source in the eyes of Mr. Thwaites. Though Mr. Thwaites writes the last two sections of the memorandum he explains that the attitudes, opinions and fact he is recounting have come from Linda Smart Chubb.

The fourth section of the memorandum focuses on the representation provided by British representatives to people of African descent. The memorandum also documents the changing attitudes of the British West Indians as the decades passed. Early feelings placed representatives in a position of great respect and authority in the eyes of the community as they were thought to have direct access to the Queen. The awe-like respect attributed to the West Indian community faltered as poor representation and social slights were the standard treatment provided by the

¹ Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 7.

² *Ibid.*, 7.

Consulate. The decrease in respect and faith in British representation is attributed to a number of social and political approaches commonly applied by British authorities. Even though her own experiences were positive, Linda Smart Chubb believes that British representation was in part responsible for “allowing the unhappy situation to engulf the coloured British subjects in the Republic of Panama and in the Canal Zone”.³

The memorandum explains that early attitudes towards the British representatives were “childlike”.⁴ Childlike, in the sense that West Indians saw British authorities as representations of the monarch and trusted them to fix the many problems faced by people of African descent on the Isthmus. West Indians would often refer to the Consul in terms reserved for royalty, such as “Your Majesty”, “My Lord” and even in later years as “Your Excellency”.⁵ The Consular officer was a representation of a culture and country West Indians held dear. British West Indians were proud of their heritage and were outspoken about that fact. The following is a quote from the British West Indian Committee's greeting to a visiting Duke and Duchess;

Our hearts continue to pulsate with lofty pride as we strive to maintain here among the citizens of the foreign nations, all honor and prestige which have always adorned the conduct of Great Britain in her international relations. We feel proud that the many years of residence in these parts have not caused our national sentiments to diminish nor our patriotism to wane.⁶

The address clearly demonstrates the passionate loyalty felt by many West Indians towards British authorities. The document also states that each letter written to the Consul included

³ Chubb, “The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama” in *The Forgotten People*, 7.

⁴ Ibid., 7.

⁵ Ibid., 7.

⁶ O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 44.

prayers and inquires into the Consul's life and family.⁷ The devotion of the West Indians could also been seen on Christmas day as caroler's sang at the consulate.⁸ Their deep loyalty was also expressed by the deep mourning which occurred if one of the royal family died.⁹ The Annual report from the Foreign Office in regard to Cuba, Panama and the Canal Zone for 1925-1926 documents the sympathy and general regret at the death of Queen Alexandra.¹⁰ The report mentions the West Indian community separately from all other Britishers, demonstrating their unique position in Panama; "General regret and much sympathy were expressed by the British, including the West Indian, community in Panama and Costa Rica...".¹¹ The West Indian community was also responsible for the "beautiful custom, since copied by other nationalities, of inviting their national representative to send a New Year message to all British subjects living here."¹² West Indians involvement in the Boy Scouts and the British Legion were further demonstrations of their British ties.¹³ In the annual report from 1925 a section is devoted to the Boy Scouts which demonstrates the importance of their existence in Panama.¹⁴ The 1925 report focuses on the appointment of a Bishop as chief Commissioner of Scouts and the implementation of a Silver Cup to encourage the continued participation of the different troops. Due to the strained relationship between the West Indian community and the U.S. the positive influence of the Boy Scouts is encouraged in the report, especially because most of the Boy Scouts are West

⁷ Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 7.

⁸ Ibid., 7.

⁹ Ibid., 7.

¹⁰ Annual Reports (Foreign Office) on Cuba, Panama and Canal Zone, 1925. Jamaica Archives IB/5/79, pg. 11.

¹¹ Ibid., 11.

¹² Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 8.

¹³ Ibid., 8.

¹⁴ Annual Reports (Foreign Office) on Cuba, Panama and Canal Zone, 1925. Jamaica Archives IB/5/79, pg. 11.

Indian in heritage. West Indians ties to the British Empire were demonstrated by their involvement in British organizations and their loyalty to the monarchy. Their continued participation was seen as a positive past-time which led to considerable support being provided to British West Indians participating in traditional public groups.

British West Indians were proud of their attachment to the empire and further used it as a defense against the harsh treatment they received working on the canal. The devotion exhibited by West Indians was an example of their faith in British and Colonial governments to protect and care for their subjects. Lancelot Lewis provides an example of British West Indian pride, "Don't you dare expunge language of a blasphemous basis to me, I'm a British subject."¹⁵ A British West Indian after been spoken to in an uncalled for manner responded with the above quote demonstrating the pride West Indians took in their connection with the British Empire. Respect and loyalty toward the British crown was an active part of life and was held in a positive view. Coupled with the West Indian loyalty to the Empire was the belief that their consulate would protect and honour them abroad. The large numbers of complaints brought forth by the West Indian community was often commented on by the Consular representatives. West Indians brought complaints of the many racist and discriminatory practices to the attention of the Consular officers, believing that the British representatives would protect West Indian interests as they would any British subjects. The opinion of the Consular officers and the degree of their responsibility toward the West Indian community greatly differed from that held by the West Indian subjects.

Though Consular officers did meet the basic requirements of their appointment, West

¹⁵ Lewis, *The West Indians in Panama*, 70.

Indian lives could have been further improved if equal representation had been granted to them. Linda Smart Chubb states that proper representation required a certain type of representative; "It is evident that to represent a people, the majority of whom are of this simple and confiding type, the Consular or Diplomatic officer must be a humane man".¹⁶ The document further claims that most of the Consular officers were good natured and conscientious. While this may very well be true it is important to note that Linda Smart Chubb had a close working relationship with numerous Consuls. Her working relationship with the Consul influenced her opinions which probably accounts for her largely positive view of officers. Many in the West Indian community would probably not provide the same positive opinion of officers. Linda Smart Chubb suggests that only a few deliberately ignored or failed to fulfill their obligations to the people of African descent they were there to represent.¹⁷ Also any number of officers are remembered fondly for their kindness. But over all none of the officers seemed to feel that their relationship with the non-English community should be anything "beyond the relationship at the counter".¹⁸ Many Consuls felt that their obligations ceased and that their role as representatives did not extend beyond their offices. Linda Smart Chubb states that no social contact beyond that with her was pursued by the officers with Britishers of African descent. She also notes, that even she was not always considered acceptable to associate with outside of the office. Consular officers did not socialize with West Indians and only communicated with them out of necessity at the legation. Even West Indians at the top of the social pyramid did not warrant social considerations. For example, "the departing Minister who declined Linda Smart Chubb's invitation to a farewell tea

¹⁶ Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 8.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

clearly felt that it was not part of his duty to meet 'coloured' British subjects in such circumstances."¹⁹ The inability of Consular officers to recognize West Indians as equals in society caused representatives to provide a lower quality of services to West Indians.

Consular officers defended their minimalistic approach with a number of reasons. One commonly stated reason was the high numbers of complaints brought to the Consulate by members of the West Indian community. In the Annual Reports (Foreign Office) on Cuba, Panama and Canal Zone for 1925, item 36 reports a high number of incidents of complaint by the West Indian community which the Consular officer found were largely unjustified.²⁰ The officer explains that the complaints are caused by the West Indian's inability to understand that British law is not universal. The officer also attributes the high number of complaints to the West Indian's "fatal love of argument".²¹ Though the officer states that the complaints are largely invalid the blame for the high number of complaints is not placed solely on the West Indian community. The British representative acknowledges that the Panamanian police force was in part to blame as they did nothing to improve matters or to diffuse misunderstandings. Other complaints of discrimination are attributed to the harsh manner used by 'American' foremen and the lack of compensation available to workers. The Consular's response to complaints regarding compensation further support Linda Smart Chubb's assertion that representatives only provided the minimum of services. In the Annual report of the Foreign office a Consular officer records his approach to dealing with claimants who were trying to secure a greater indemnity, "his [the claimant] claim is examined and the regulations expounded to him, and he finally goes away, if

¹⁹ Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 8.

²⁰ Annual Reports (Foreign Office) on Cuba, Panama and Canal Zone, 1925. Jamaica Archives IB/5/79, 9.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

not content, at least convinced that he has received his lawful due".²² The lack of proper compensation for injured or retired West Indian employees was an important issue in the West Indian community. The response of the officer clearly demonstrates that the reading of regulations is an appropriate response when dealing with a West Indian's complaint. Instead of reading regulations and supporting the discriminatory policies of Panama and the Canal Zone, British representatives should have been fighting to improve the lives of their West Indian subjects. Linda Smart Chubb suggests in her report that more should have been done to acquire fair treatment and proper compensation. The memorandum calls for a more involved type of representative who fights to obtain equal rights for all the subjects of the crown.

In contrast to Linda Smart Chubb's report calling for better representation is a Consular report from Limón by Frank N. Cox documenting the history of the Vice Consulate from 1896 to 1915.²³ In the report Cox provides a possible solution to the "excessive" complaints being brought to the Consulate by West Indians. The Consular officer suggests re-instituting a process begun by Consular McAusland in 1896. The process required West Indians to pay a registration fee to obtain a certificate of nationality which was required for complainants to be considered. The program instituted by McAusland lined his pockets with extra money but Cox suggests that the money taken in be used to pay for a larger consular staff. The document though written in Limón mentions that the lack of time to process complaints is common in Central America and that the new regulation could be instituted in numerous countries including Panama. Here again Consular officer Frank N. Cox expresses the opinion that the West Indian community should not be provided with the same free representation that white British subjects receive abroad. The

²² Annual Reports (Foreign Office) on Cuba, Panama and Canal Zone, 1925. Jamaica Archives IB/5/79, 9.

²³ Frank N. Cox, "Notes on the History of Limon Vice Consulate from 1896 to 1915 and on the Limon Consulate from 1915 to 1925" in Emigration- Costa Rica- Labour conditions at Limon. Jamaica Archives IB/5/77/42.

discriminatory attitude demonstrated in 1896 by McAusland's policy still exists in 1943 and is one of Linda Smart Chubb's major concerns

A report written by Governor Sydney Oliver about his 1912 visits to Costa Rica and Panama further examines the problems apparent in the system of consular representation.²⁴ The two most demanding areas of concern are the complaints issued against Panama due to the differences in the justice system and complaints made against the United States Canal Commission. In regard to the judicial complaints, Sydney Oliver stated that representatives are doing the best job possible although results are not always positive. Linda Smart Chubb argued that the representatives did not properly represent West Indians who became entangled in the Panamanian justice system.²⁵ When dealing with complaints about working conditions and worker's rights, Governor Oliver believes that the Consulates are not capable of coping with the heavy burden of work placed on them.²⁶ After stating his opinion Oliver abandons the topic to focus on "developments now proceeding which appear to me deserving of the attention of his Majesty's government".²⁷ The report continues to discuss military installations and political concerns only returning to the problems of consular representation at the end of the report. He again asserts that the number of consular staff available cannot deal with the vast amount of work required to properly represent the West Indian labourers. At the closing of the report Governor Oliver suggests that Britain needs to "fortify representation and agency of British power...in order to ensure that British West Indians shall not suffer wrong and injustice".

²⁴ Sydney Oliver, Jamaica, January 20th, 1912. Jamaica Archives IB/5/75/#73.

²⁵ Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 8.

²⁶ Sydney Oliver, Jamaica, 20th January 1912. Jamaica Archives IB/5/75/#73.

²⁷ Ibid.

Sydney Oliver's report, written 30 years before Linda Smart Chubb's, demonstrates the lack of representation available to British West Indians living on the Isthmus. Linda Smart Chubb's memorandum also demonstrates that the recommendations of Governor Oliver were not instituted as the West Indian community continued suffering from inadequate representation as late as 1943. Similar to the 1912 report, Linda Smart Chubb includes her own recommendations about how better representation could improve the lives of the West Indian community and how Consular officers could better serve their constituents.

The decision by British representatives to treat British West Indians of African descent as socially unacceptable supported the poor treatment of West Indians by U.S. citizens and Panamanians. Linda Smart Chubb notes a number of opportunities which could have been used by the British representatives to demonstrate that subjects of African descent should be treated like people, not objects.²⁸

For example, when asked by the American authorities if there were any graves of British War veterans which might simultaneously be honoured with their own, the Consul declined. Linda Smart Chubb argues that the response was untrue as there were many graves of soldiers from the West Indian Regiment. Another example of Consular failure was the inability of many officers to handle concerns in a sympathetic and understanding way. The underlying racial attitudes held by a number of officers is well demonstrated by the following example. When a petition against discrimination was shown to have legal standing the Consular officer wrote a letter to protest against discrimination. Yet in his own private correspondence the main memories of his placement were the "smell of town and its negro population".²⁹ To compound the point,

²⁸ Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 8.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

the document notes that the officer's wife sneered with 'American' guests about 'niggers' in front of her 'coloured' West Indian servants. Linda Smart Chubb argues that there is no way the representatives could provide proper representation for their subjects of African descent abroad when it is clear that they felt workers of African descent were inferior.³⁰ Another incident is included by Mr. Thwaites from his own personal experience; "a Consul remarked to a complainant that he had not been appointed in the interests of the West Indians, but of British Shipping."³¹ The ranking of British subjects below shipping interests demonstrates the challenging attitudes British West Indians struggled against to receive proper representation. The racist attitudes held by any number of Consular officers successfully inhibited their ability to properly represent the large body of Britishers of African descent working abroad.

Linda Smart Chubb argues that as a consequence of the discriminatory attitudes held by Consular and Diplomatic officers, representatives never used their social connections to benefit their subjects of African descent. Linda Smart Chubb believes that if the representatives had used their connections in the white, Panamanian and 'American' communities, the "plague" of racism may not have taken "so deep a root".³² Instead of properly defending the interests of West Indians, representatives tended to leave concerns unresolved. The memorandum documents frequent cases of mistreatment and violence faced by the West Indian community. Many causes of abuse by the Canal Zone, Panamanian police, white 'American' foremen and others have been documented. Without proper representation these abuses often went unpunished.

³⁰ Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 8.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

³² *Ibid.*, 9.

Violence against West Indians occasionally occurred and Linda Smart Chubb used the following examples to demonstrate instances of extreme abuse. One West Indian worker was shot in a barrel where he was hiding and another for fighting with a fellow West Indian. The memorandum states that the people responsible for violent acts against West Indians were rarely penalized and often they hid behind regulations which prevented any recourse. Linda Smart Chubb argues that Consuls should have shown more interest in the prosecution of the abusers. Governor Sydney suggested that Consuls were too overburdened to fulfill their roles as advocates for the West Indian community. Linda Smart Chubb provides a valid argument which suggests that racial beliefs not just time constraints were the reasons behind poor representation. Linda Smart Chubb believes that Consular officers should not have simply accepted regulations as an answer to the violence faced by West Indians. A similar complacent acceptance was often the response to "high-handed cases of deportation".³³ Linda Smart Chubb states that "not many consuls were willing to argue a case from a human interest angle,- not because they were hard-hearted personally, but because they did not feel that their duties involved this kind of representation".³⁴ The lack of representation provided may well be connected to the lack of specific job requirements which Linda Smart Chubb documented. While the lack of a job description could have been a concern, it is important to consider that representation for similar occurrences was provided to 'white' subjects. The memorandum documents a number of similar incidents where 'white' Britishers were provided the representation denied to British West Indians of African descent.

Linda Smart Chubb relates an instance when an Irish seaman was killed by a Panamanian

³³ Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 9.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

constable. The British government requested indemnity, but the request failed in arbitration.

The West Indian community was annoyed because many such cases involving West Indians were not pursued by the British authorities in Panama. Linda Smart Chubb states that it was a good thing that the case was lost in arbitration, as the loss “avoided an explosion of indignation against its representative”.³⁵ West Indians were treated unfairly while 'white' subjects were granted the proper representation which all subjects deserved.

The example of the Irish seaman is the only one provided in the body of the memorandum but Linda Smart Chubb included three appendices which further demonstrate the discriminatory treatment of West Indians by British authorities in Panama. Linda Smart Chubb states that the examples were chosen because they were not of lurid character and they involved respected members of the community. The first Appendix relates the Case of C.W. Omphroy. Mr. Omphroy opened his own business and began to distribute Dunlop sporting goods, which quickly became popular.³⁶ Instead of supporting and assisting the British subject, the Consular officer requested that representation of Dunlop sporting goods be given to an ‘American’ company instead of Mr. Omphroy. Linda Smart Chubb states that the request failed but it is apparent that racial motives played a role in the request. Yet another incident of mistreatment is documented in the case of E.S. Humber. Mr. Humber was a well respected member of the consular office who held a number of titles including Vice-Consul over his many years of employment.³⁷ Socially his family was considered to be white, though their heritage was mixed. After years of loyal and respected service, Mr. Humber was removed from office and his well

³⁵ Chubb, “The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama” in *The Forgotten People*, 9.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, Appendix No.1.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, Appendix No.2.

respected position by a newly arrived Consular officer. The Consular officer argued that ‘Mr. Humber might have been white in this youth but was patently coloured in his old age’.³⁸ The Consular officer also stated that the British Foreign Office should never make the mistake of letting a ‘coloured’ man hold a position of authority in the future. The example clearly demonstrates the racist beliefs of some Consular officers and supports Linda Smart Chubb’s argument that men holding deep racial prejudices could not properly represent the British West Indian community.

The poor and derogatory treatment of the most influential members of the British West Indian community provides a sad comment on the treatment labourers received. The final example of mistreatment is the case of Mr. H. Stone, a bookseller.³⁹ When a request was received to list all bookshops operating of which British subjects were the proprietors, Mr. Stone’s shop was not included because he was West Indian. Yet again the double standard of representation is clearly demonstrated by the choice of consular staff to ignore, not only the negative but positive contributions of West Indians on the Isthmus. The memorandum argues that as a result of the numerous examples of mistreatment and representation by the Consular officers British West Indians had lost faith in the justice system.⁴⁰ The loss of faith in the British representatives does not seem misguided as West Indian were repeatedly reminded that they were second class citizens in the eyes of many Consular representatives. Though largely under-represented, Linda Smart Chubb provided a number of reasons why West Indians were continually dismissed by the Consular office. She did not agree with the reasons given but does

³⁸ Chubb, “The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama” in *The Forgotten People*, 10.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, Appendix No.3.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

provide the excuses Consular officers used.

The memorandum explains that discrimination has “been justified by the assertion that they are a burden on the community”.⁴¹ Linda Smart Chubb states that similar forms of discrimination against the Chinese and Indians were based on the fact that they hoarded goods and money, and were not contributing to local trade. While West Indians did not provide large economic contributions, they were active members of society. Linda Smart Chubb states that the low economic contribution of the West Indians was based on the low salary paid to them.⁴² Minimal spending is also attributed to the expense associated with living near 'white quarters' and the high cost of basic goods. The economic contribution of West Indians was limited by the comparatively low wages they were paid. Linda Smart Chubb also demonstrates that West Indians were active in society and continually tried to better their community in positive ways. One of the most common attempts to enhance the community was the formation of social committees and societies.

The memorandum states that the West Indians attempted to organize community groups, to ensure their place as contributing members of society.⁴³ The size of the organizations ranged from small groups to the formation of a West Indian Congress. The congress had representatives from lodges, churches, fraternities and many other groups. The history of the formation and maintenance of West Indian community groups, associations and lodges demonstrates the attempts made by British West Indians to provide support and a sense of community in a hostile country. The organizations provided the social security that workers and families could not

⁴¹ Chubb, “The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama” in *The Forgotten People*, 10.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 10.

obtain through their employers or the Consulate. Many workers who were injured or killed on the job were not given compensation to help provide for their family's survival. No injury or death benefits, limited healthcare and a distinct lack of equality were the only things available to West Indian workers from the Canal authorities. The British West Indian organizations provided the community and its members with a safety net in case of injury or sudden unemployment. The associations formed played a vital role in West Indian society which reaches far beyond that mentioned by Linda Smart Chubb.

One example is the Court Brook Lodge which was formed in 1880 and began taking in both West Indians and local inhabitants. It was the first of many fraternal orders which emerged on the Isthmus.⁴⁴ Alongside the fraternal orders other non-ritualistic groups developed. Two specific examples are the Colour Progressive Association in 1907 and the West Indian Protective League in 1910.⁴⁵ As of 1919 *The Workman*, a West Indian run weekly paper listed 32 "friendly societies" in Panama.⁴⁶ One of the most active and long standing organizations was the Panama Canal West Indians Employees Association (PCWIEA) founded in 1924. Samuel Whyte was the founder and President of the group which fought for 25 years to bring equality to West Indian workers.⁴⁷ The focus of the organization was to improve working and living conditions for Silver employees through negotiation with U.S. employers.⁴⁸ Much of the information known

⁴⁴ Examples of other fraternal orders founded by West Indians are: "ancient order of the Shepherds, Order of the Fisherman of Good Samaritans, Order of the Stars of Bethlehem, Order of Odd Fellows, and the Order of Mechanics." O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 72.

⁴⁵ Dixon, "The Contribution of West Indians to the Construction of the Panama Canal 1910-1914" in *West Indian Participation in the Construction of the Panama Canal*, 69.

⁴⁶ O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 72.

⁴⁷ Michael Conniff, "Origins of the Panama Canal Gold and Silver Payrolls: A Case Study" in *West Indian Participation in the Construction of the Panama Canal* (Mona, Jamaica: Latin American-Caribbean Centre, June 15-17, 2000), 45.

⁴⁸ O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 109.

about the PCWIEA comes from annual reports and other U.S. documentation from meetings between officials. The association used petitions, interviews and legal requests to pursue changes in the labour structure on the canal. The PCWIEA documented a long standing positive relationship with the Canal authorities. Although positive results were not always attained, the association felt that a cordial relationship was important if any headway was to be made.⁴⁹ The following statement from the 1939 annual report best describes the association's attitude:

Notwithstanding our complaint in these directions and our inability to get results, we are satisfied that the exercise of patience and tolerance is more profitable than any attempt to act rashly and that eventually our policy may be amply rewarded. On this theory it is our firm determination never to let up on our agitation for a higher standard of wages.⁵⁰

An example of the association's goals included their battle for Silver rates of pay to match increasing living costs.⁵¹ In 1929 Silver wages were raised but the increase was based on the cost of living in the surrounding countries and commissary prices from 1914. Though the wage was increased, the cost of living in Panama or in the Canal Zone negated any appreciable gain. The PCWIEA also fought for equal schooling opportunities, pensions, sick and rest leave. Though not representative of all Silver workers and at times ineffective, the PCWIEA played an integral roll in the struggle for equality.

Another form of organization which West Indians used to try and improve their situation were the weekly papers. The *Workman* existed between 1912-1930, while smaller formats of papers dated back to the French Canal era.⁵² Panama also produced daily papers including the *Star and Herald* and the *Panama American*. Both of these papers often discussed or

⁴⁹ O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 110.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 73.

editorialized the problems caused and faced by the West Indian population. While the Panamanian papers often wrote derogatory and negative pieces on the West Indians, the *Workmen*, until bought out by the *Panama Tribune* in the 1920s, was used as a venue to air the discontent of the West Indian community. Common topics were unemployment, repatriation, living standards, wages, and discrimination perpetrated by both the Panamanians and the U.S. citizens of the Canal Zone.

Another attempt to form collective resistance occurred in 1915 with the formation of union groups which operated until 1920. Minor strikes occurred during 1916 and 1918 but the most famous strike occurred in 1920. In 1920, 18,000 Silver workers walked off the job to fight for their rights.⁵³ After 19 days they returned to work but it is noted as one of the biggest strikes ever, on the Isthmus. Unfortunately the organizers cheated the West Indians and led them into an illegal strike while stealing their strike funds. After the strike both agitators and leaders were removed from service, black listed and sent back to their respective home countries. Michael Conniff argues that the betrayal and abandonment of workers by the union served to end any serious labour movements for the next 25 years.

Linda Smart Chubb states that “recently” a group called the West Indian Communal Council tried to form, but similar to other large community representative bodies it did not last. The failure of a number of community efforts is used as an excuse by the British Representatives to explain why West Indians did not deserve better representation from them.⁵⁴ Often organizations failed simply because West Indians were not a homogeneous group, they came

⁵³ Conniff, “Origins of the Panama Canal Gold and Silver Payrolls: A Case Study” in *West Indian Participation in the Construction of the Panama Canal*, 45.

⁵⁴ Chubb, “The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama” in *The Forgotten People*, 10.

from different islands and had their own cultures. Trying to bring together such a diverse and large group of people proved a difficult task. Linda Smart Chubb suggests that the reasons for the failures, even those that came from lack of interest, personal quarrels or dishonesty in handling funds, were basically due to the sense that, as a group, British subjects of African descent were not respected and that any effort was foredoomed. While a number of organizations did not succeed, others such as the PCWIEA fought for many years to secure better working and living conditions for members of the West Indian community. The memorandum lists a number of groups which were successfully operating in 1943.⁵⁵ The People's Bakery, the Community Bakery, the Jamaican Progressive Society as well as the Barbadian Progressive Society were operating, but the success of each group was overshadowed by the continued discriminatory policies of the surrounding Panamanian community, the Canal Zone and British authorities. Linda Smart Chubb wrote that "it is this shadow which the Consular representatives could, and in the writer's opinion should have done much to dissipate".⁵⁶

For decades the British West Indians provided their own representatives and social security programs due to the lack of concern showed by their assigned representative body. Groups like the PCWIEA while not always successful but they fought for decades against the discriminatory policies operating in the Canal Zone. Other organizations provided the support and help which was denied to the destitute and struggling West Indian community during the 1930s. By 1943, when Linda Smart Chubb wrote her document, the relationship between the British Consulate and the West Indian community had deteriorated significantly after decades of neglect.

⁵⁵ Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 10..

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

The respect and love of the British West Indians was not returned by many of the Consular officers operating on the Isthmus. Lack of time and resources were often the excuses given by Consular officers but discrimination was also a common factor. West Indians were seen as second class subjects, who deserved minimal protection. The lack of help especially during the 1930s depression and the 1941 presidential term of Arnulfo Arias demonstrated to the West Indian community that they needed to protect themselves and that they could not rely on the British Consulate for help. Linda Smart Chubb proceeds in her final section to suggest possible changes which could heal feelings of mistrust held by the West Indian community. But after decades of neglect and loss of faith in the British Empire, a change in West Indian attitudes post World War II was apparent.

Conclusion: The Future of British Representation

After the difficulties faced by British West Indians in the 1940s a new attitude which focused on the positive integration of West Indians into Panamanian society emerged among the younger generation of the West Indian community and a large portion of Panamanian society. The fact that British West Indians were provided inadequate representation by the British Consulate spurred the younger generation especially to seek a more secure position in Panamanian society. The lack of support and protection provided by the British authorities is supported by both Linda Smart Chubb's memorandum and the vast amount of secondary literature available. The British West Indian community was repeatedly marginalized and under represented by the British Consulate. As a result of the repeated disappointments and the tense political situation of the 1940s, West Indians needed to secure protection for themselves.

Linda Smart Chubb argues in the fifth section of her memorandum that there was still a possibility of restoring the West Indian faith in the British system in 1943. Although the community was wary, positive changes could have been made which would have encouraged a more positive relationship between the British representatives and the British West Indian community. Linda Smart Chubb suggested that the continued use of community organizations as a way to enhance and improve communication between the government representatives and the British West Indian community was a good idea. Another way to improve the strained relationship was through the equal treatment of all British subjects in terms of social engagements. The division of social engagements into white and 'coloured' events in the past had only served to increase British West Indian distrust. To make the equal treatment of citizens a reality Linda Smart Chubb suggested that Consular officers should receive special training.

Linda Smart Chubb thought that prior to their arrival on the Isthmus, Consular officers should be provided with training to increase their understanding of British West Indians. At the time when the memorandum was written, a similar type of training was being given to officers working in Africa. An increased understanding of those being represented helped to decrease the number of misunderstandings between the local British subjects and the British authorities. To enhance the success of the training, Linda Smart Chubb suggested that a written job description outlining the specific responsibilities of British representatives should be provided. Linda Smart Chubb also stated that the new job description must make it clear that representatives were there to represent and protect the British subjects working on the Isthmus, not to please the U.S. and Panamanian officials. The formation and writing of the memorandum demonstrates a changing attitude in the consular office but as the author stated the changes would only continue if all officers operated under the same regulations. Linda Smart Chubb's report providing a first hand opinion of the deteriorating situation is an important demonstration of the changes happening in the British West Indian community. The fact that Mr. Thwaites was interested in the plight of the British West Indians also demonstrates a changing attitude in the Consular officers. The loss of faith shown by the British West Indians spurred him to request and support a honest and realistic report of the situation on the Isthmus. While both the writing of the report and the interest of the Consul in the difficult situations faced by West Indians is important, did much change after 1943?

To demonstrate the extent of disillusionment and unhappiness within the West Indian community Linda Smart Chubb begins the final section by examining the feelings of the West

Indian veterans.¹ After World War I, British West Indians felt let down, as they were the “first to be discharged and the last to be re-employed”.² To add insult to injury, their service was not recognized and all in all, the post-war world treated them no better. Though their numbers were limited, the lack of service recognition belittles the patriotism and devotion to the British Monarchy demonstrated by the participation of British West Indians in World War I. British West Indians were active members of the war effort both as soldiers and in civilian pursuits. The lack of recognition by Britain soured West Indians opinions of the nation.³

Author Glenford Howe argues “that colonial governments and imperial officials, who, having exploited the manpower and material resources of colonial territories, subsequently denied or obscured their contributions”.⁴ Howe suggests that the lack of recognition is based in racial and political reasons. The attitude of British authorities after the First World War left the British West Indian community in a position of disenchantment and detracted from their interest in being active participants in the Second World War. Linda Smart Chubb explains that the lack of interest in WWII is not due to a lack of loyalty but due to the poor treatment received during and after WWI. The memorandum directly quotes a number of West Indians “who say; “this is a white man's war” let the white folks kill one another out, there are too many of them anyway”.⁵ The clear disenchantment expressed by the above quote is directly linked to the repeated disregard and mistreatment of the British West Indians both abroad and in their own countries.

¹ Chubb, “The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama” in *The Forgotten People*, 10.

² *Ibid.*, 10.

³ Glenford Deroy Howe, *Race, War and Nationalism: A Social History of West Indians in the First World War* (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 2002) xiii.

⁴ Howe, *Race, War and Nationalism*, xiv.

⁵ Chubb, “The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama” in *The Forgotten People*, 11.

In the case of British West Indians residing in Panama the attitude expressed is linked to the decades of misrepresentation and mistrust by British representatives working in Panama.

Veterans were not the only members of the West Indian community disillusioned with the British system. The average West Indian by 1943 had lost faith in British justice.⁶ The repeated attacks instituted by the Panamanian government constantly placed British subjects of African descent in a precarious and unprotected position. The under representation and mistreatment of British West Indians was by no means limited to Panama. Linda Smart Chubb asserts that conditions in Panama were poor but mistreatment and discrimination could be seen in South Africa and in the Navy as well. Linda Smart Chubb shares the general opinion that no effort to understand the West Indian community was being made and the disregard of a portion of the British population represented the failure of real democracy.⁷ After 1946 British West Indians were placed in a difficult position. Their British imperial status ad provided little to no protection during the two decades of racial discrimination instituted by the Panamanians. The British Legation had also done little to help the West Indian community gain improved working and living conditions from their U.S. employers. The memorandum states that after all of the disappointments suffered by the British West Indians they were still hopeful that Britain would change. With the signing of each Charter and Covenant the West Indian community eagerly awaited recognition and security in policy which did not materialize.⁸ Linda Smart Chubb believes that the faith which had been lost could be restored if England recognized and supported the West Indian community.

⁶ Chubb "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 10.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

While Britain failed to meet the expectations of the British West Indian community, a number of groups on the Isthmus were struggling to secure proper representation and equality of rights for British subjects of African descent. Linda Smart Chubb describes one such group operating within the West Indian community. The British West Indian Committee was started to serve as the link between the British Legation and the British West Indian community.⁹ The 1925 Annual Report on Cuba, Panama and Canal Zone describes the role of the committee as follows, “the objects of the committee are to study the conditions affecting the British West Indians and to seek means of ameliorating them, to attempt to secure West Indian solidarity on the isthmus, and to serve as an advisory committee to the British Consulate.”¹⁰ Unfortunately, the Committee's success was minimal due to the community's distrust of those West Indians chosen as representatives. Linda Smart Chubb explains that representative positions were not elected by the community but appointed by the Legation.¹¹ Appointment to a positions reflected a persons financial, social and educational status not their ability to act on behalf of the community. The West Indians appointed did not always bring forth the concerns of the community nor did they truly understand them due to their elite status. They were commonly accused of snobbishness and arrogance, and were truly only in place to rid the Legation of its responsibility. Though the British West Indian Committee was meant to improve communication between the Legation and the community it did little beyond maintaining the status quo.

The people given positions on the committee “provided a 'set' whom the Ministers would

⁹ Chubb “The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama” in *The Forgotten People*, 11.

¹⁰ Annual Reports (Foreign Office) on Cuba, Panama and Canal Zone, 1925. Jamaica Archives IB/5/79, pg. 8.

¹¹ Chubb, “The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama” in *The Forgotten People*, 11.

invite on official occasions, such as the King's Birthday".¹² The document explains that while the West Indian representatives were invited to some gatherings, they were not included in the more important gatherings which Panamanian and Canal Zone officials attended.¹³ British West Indians, even those in elite positions were still ranked as second class citizens when 'white' gatherings occurred. Though the West Indian Committee was not overly successful it did do some good by influencing the Legation in a positive way. While representatives were still placed in a secondary position the increased interaction between the British West Indian Committee and the Legation was beneficial. Linda Smart Chubb herself sat on a similar Committee in Colon but it did not last for very long due to lack of community interest. While the committee was not an outstanding success, it did represent the increasing strength of the West Indian community as members banded together to improve the conditions faced on the Isthmus.

Linda Smart Chubb provides a number of positive examples which are representative of the changing attitudes of the British authorities. An invitation for all British subjects regardless of colour to attend a garden party was the first such invitation ever issued. While the event was unprecedented and a conscious step towards more equal treatment, it was unfortunately also an isolated incident.¹⁴ Another Consul personally attended a trial of a British West Indian in Cristobal. Similarly though a clear step in the right direction, to the writer's knowledge, the action was never repeated.¹⁵ Any positive changes in the treatment of West Indians were based solely on the individuals Consul's inclination. No changes in regulations or specific instructions

¹² Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 11.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

to treat British West Indians as equal citizens were given to British authorities. Because the positive changes were a result of personal choice, and not changes in Consulate regulations no permanent change occurred.

Linda Smart Chubb realized that the occurrences were personal choices and suggested that the examples she provided were representative of how the consular and diplomatic officers should behave. It was also apparent to Linda Smart Chubb that consular officers needed training in how to properly conduct themselves while representing both 'white' and 'coloured' British subjects. The memorandum argued that representatives sent to countries which contained people of African descent should be given "special training of the heart".¹⁶ The training should be specific in focus to foster an understanding of the British West Indian community which they are meant to represent. Linda Smart Chubb compares the suggested training to that given to the British Forces operating in North Africa, which explains "native mentality and the necessity of respecting local customs there".¹⁷ A similar training, specifically in regard to the British West Indian community, would greatly improve the difficult relationship which was a result of poor representation.

To accompany the special training, Linda Smart Chubb recommended that the equal treatment of all subjects should be a regulation and requirement. To ensure more consistent treatment each Consular officer should be given a complete list of regulations and requirements of their position, subsequently leaving less to their own initiative.¹⁸ For example it should not be a matter of initiative that West Indians are invited to British events. All subjects of the British

¹⁶ Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 13.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

Empire should receive equal social treatment and invitations to Consulate. The memorandum asserts that equal treatment in public settings would improve the disposition of West Indians towards the British Legation. Linda Smart Chubb believed that officers should arrive in Panama with the intention of treating all subjects of the crown equally, not because they felt so inclined, but because it was their job. The document also addresses the potential problems that could arise with other authorities, and states that the Legation should provide full support to the officer in such situations.¹⁹ Furthermore, Linda Smart Chubb stated that it should be “made clear to the Consuls designated that they are not expected to seek social agreeability vis-à-vis the Panamanians and more particularly the Americans, at the expense of the ‘coloured’ majority of their own colony”.²⁰ The document further reasserted with regards to the argument presented above, that British representative should use their social contacts to improve the lives of British West Indians.

A previously examined example from the memorandum of a white British woman laughing with her ‘American’ friends about ‘niggers’ in front of her British servant of African descent demonstrates the kinds of inappropriate behaviour British representatives participated in. British representatives and their families did not always support British subjects of African descent, which in turn reassured others that the unequal treatment of West Indians was acceptable. Another example of a Consul's disregard of British West Indians is demonstrated by the insistence that he was only in Panama to represent British shipping interests. Linda Smart Chubb stated at the end of the memorandum that the rights and treatment of ‘coloured’ Britishers

¹⁹ Chubb, “The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama” in *The Forgotten People*, 13.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

should be at least as important as Canal shipping and British trade.²¹ The examples clearly show the lack of representation provided for the British West Indian community. But did this memorandum and its' contents cause those positive changes to occur? An examination of post 1943 Panama demonstrates that few changes occurred during the decade and a half after the memorandum was written. Though positive change was limited, an examination of the West Indian community provides insight into that which did occur.

Panama in the post-1945 period did become slightly more accepting of West Indians as the anti-West Indian sentiments of Panamanian nationalism decreased. The anti-West Indian sentiments of Panamanian nationalism began to cool at the end of World War II as resentment was transferred to the 'Americans'.²² After WWII, Panama grew both economically and nationally into a more independent anti-American nation. Denison Kitchel argues that Panama's newly "heightened nationalism stemmed from... resentment of the ever increasing presence of a foreign power, particularly one in a military guise".²³ During WWII Panama was an area of intense 'American' military activity and the anti-West Indian sentiment made way for an increasing resentment of the 'American' presence. While Panamanians nationalistic ideals were changing British West Indians found themselves in a difficult position.

The West Indian community had to decide whether they wished to return to their islands of origin or remain in Panama. The choice between remaining British or adopting Panamanian culture and citizenship was a difficult one for loyal British subjects. In contrast for the younger generation born and raised in Panama the decision was simpler although not without difficulty.

²¹ Chubb, "The British West Indians and British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama" in *The Forgotten People*, 13.

²² O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 124.

²³ Kitchel, *The Truth About the Panama Canal*, 83.

Authors Henry and Mary Knapp use an Episcopalian priest's words to express the struggle older West Indians faced when deciding where they belonged, "Sometimes we're inclined toward the United States, sometimes toward Panama, sometimes towards the West Indies. But I think the young people are different. They're more Panamanian, but many want to emigrate to the United States. It's rather strange".²⁴ Micheal Conniff argues that young West Indian Panamanians were uncertain of their place in society because they were "torn between West Indian, Panamanian, and U.S. loyalties".²⁵ After the years of poor representation by British representatives and the racist treatment instituted by both the Canal authorities and the Panamanian government, the West Indian community was divided and confused. The three options available to West Indians after 1946 were, repatriation, citizenship and assimilation or immigration.

After 1946 a large portion of the West Indian community began to integrate and assimilate into Panamanian society at an accelerated rate. The insecurity experienced during the citizenship crisis from 1941 to 1946 served to encourage West Indians to choose a nationality and embrace it. The removal of Panamanian citizenship from all people of 'prohibited' status by President Arias followed by Britain's denial of all subjects born out of wedlock left many in the community country-less. After the redefinition of citizenship in the 1946 Panamanian constitution, many West Indians regained the Panamanian citizenship that they had been stripped of in 1941. While the process of integration did accelerate, hard feelings and distrust slowed the West Indian acceptance of their new citizenship opportunity. Many politicians and well known Panamanians spoke out about the process of integration and the most positive way for it to occur. Dr. J. Manuel Mendez Guardia, who was the under-secretary of foreign relations, stated the

²⁴ Knapp and Knapp, *Red, White, and Blue Paradise*, 167.

²⁵ Conniff, *Black Labour on a White Canal*, 106.

following:

The problem of incorporation of West Indians to Panamanian life is one that cannot be solved by the promotion of hatred and racial discrimination. We must make up our minds once and for all that we are all here together and we will remain here together for many more years, so why not pull together and work for the common good.²⁶

For the sake of future generations the West Indian community started to become part of Panamanian society by sending their children to public schools, learning the national language and adopting the national religion.²⁷ Schooling quickly became the focus of the integration process as language was one of the major barriers between the two communities. As children began to attend school taught in Spanish it became apparent that many of the difficulties between the two cultures could be bridged by educating young West Indians in Panamanian schools.²⁸ Providing a Panamanian education to West Indians was the most successful tool in the process of assimilation.

While many West Indians assimilated into Panamanian life, not all were happy to remain on the Isthmus. A number of West Indians chose to pursue their futures in the United States. Post 1945 West Indian immigration into the United States increased as many of the youngest and brightest looked for security and opportunity in a new country.²⁹ Like their parents and grandparents before them the young West Indians were looking for a better life for themselves and most importantly their children. By 1965, an estimated 16,000 Panamanians of West Indian descent had permanently emigrated to the United States.³⁰ Though many moved to the U.S. looking for better opportunities the struggle for equality and fair treatment was not so different

²⁶ O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 144.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 123.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 146.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 137.

³⁰ Conniff, *Black Labour on a White Canal*, 137.

from that faced in Panama by the generations before them.

The position of West Indians on the Isthmus was more secure after 1946, though little had changed in the Canal Zone. Discrimination and unequal treatment continued to be part of the policies operating in the Canal Zone. Herbert Knapp and Mary Knapp documented the racial segregation still present in the Canal Zone on their arrival in 1963.³¹ The civil rights movement was sweeping the United States, but in the Zone racial divisions were still apparent in many areas including housing, schooling and rates of pay. In contrast to the vocal denunciation of discrimination happening in the U.S., Canal Zone residents of African descent were considerably less vocal.³² Knapp and Knapp make it very clear that the Canal Zone was still instituting and maintaining regulations based on racial differentiation. The authors also note the lack of protest on the part of 'coloured residents' could be attributed to the years of neglect and misrepresentation suffered by workers of African descent. In *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, Trevor O'Reggio echoes this by describing the Canal Zone as one of the "last bastions of U.S. racism".³³ Authors Knapp and Knapp suggest that the lack of security and support from the local government kept resistance to a minimum. Workers of African descent, who were predominately of West Indian heritage, were discriminated against by both the Canal Zone and the Panamanian government which in turn limited their ability to press for change. While some desegregation occurred in public venues, Knapp and Knapp state that "in important and fundamental ways, segregation persisted on the Zone almost to the end of its existence".³⁴ The policy of segregation was deeply entrenched in the operations of the Canal Zone making

³¹ Knapp and Knapp, *Red, White, and Blue Paradise*, 152.

³² *Ibid.*, 153.

³³ *Ibid.*, 153.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 153.

integration an extremely difficult process.

Though discrimination was actively pursued by the Canal Zone, it did not continue to operate without coming to the attention of international bodies. The grouping of memorandums entitled "*The Forgotten People*" collected by Consul Thwaites came to the attention of the Anglo-American Caribbean Commission in Washington.³⁵ Charles Taussig chair of the commission had the concerns in the report investigated by Paul Blanshard. Not unexpectedly the extensive accusation of discrimination and mistreatment were supported by the findings of the investigation. Another group which became concerned with the Canal Zone Silver-rate policies was the international labour community which became interested in the disparity and discrimination present in the Canal Zone during the mid 1940s. In 1946 at the International Labour conference held in Mexico City the discrimination present in the Canal Zone was discussed as a major concern.³⁶ As a result of growing international interest, President Harry S. Truman requested that Frank J. McSherry complete an investigation to assess the Canal Zone's labour practices and to recommend positive changes which could be instituted.³⁷ Trevor O'Reggio lists the following concerns which came to light after Frank McSherry's report noting the ways Silver roll or 'local-rate' employees were discriminated against:

- a) The international treaty of 1936 between the United States and the Republic of Panama discriminates against workers who are not citizens of these countries.
- b) The following U.S. laws discriminate against some workers
 1. Third Locks Act
 2. McCarran Amendment
 3. Canal Zone Retirement Act
- c) Regulations of the Panama Canal-Panama Railroad discriminated against the same Silver employees in the following respects:

³⁵ Conniff, *Black Labour on a White Canal*, 107.

³⁶ O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 124.

³⁷ Conniff, *Black Labour on a White Canal*, 107.

1. Monetary compensation of certain semi-skilled or skilled Silver Roll workers
 2. Sick and Rest Leave
 3. Retirement
 4. Efficiency Reports
 5. Clubhouses
 6. Laundry and Cleaning Services
- d) Unofficial discrimination:
1. Central Labor Union attitudes towards Silver Roll employees
 2. A.F.G.E. attitude toward Silver Roll workers
 3. Gold Roll individuals' unfairness in appraising capabilities and worth of Silver Roll workers.
 4. Union rules limiting the type of work that a Silver employee may do
- e) There is segregation of Gold Roll Employees from Silver Roll employees in the following:
1. Commissaries
 2. Hospitals and Dispensaries
 3. Motion Picture Theaters
 4. Housing
 5. Schools
 6. Employment Offices³⁸

While McSherry's report clearly indicated extensive forms of discrimination being practiced, the Canal Zone treated the findings as it did those of the Englehardt survey. For all intents and purposes, the Canal Zone authorities simply disregarded the findings and proceeded as before. Some cursory changes, such as the removal of formal signs indicating Silver and Gold locations did occur but the vast differences between Silver and Gold employees did not change appreciably.³⁹ Although the report was filed, the U.S. government never enforced the changes required to make the Canal Zone a place of equal opportunity. O'Reggio suggests that the interest of the U.S. government was based on Cold War fears of communism.⁴⁰ Unhappy workers were feared to be prime candidates for conversion to the communist cause. The Canal Zone, which was of both strategic and economic importance, was of particular concern. Fear of

³⁸ O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 125-126.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 127.

a well timed strike crippling U.S. military movements inspired interest in the much neglected West Indian community.⁴¹ Cold War fears did help to encourage some basic changes to the Canal Zone policies but only surface changes really occurred.

In 1948 the Canal Zone did change the names of the Silver and Gold rolls to local-rate and U.S. rate but it was no more than a superficial attempt to quell the growing displeasure of the West Indian community.⁴² Although it was becoming more apparent every year that positive changes needed to be made in the Canal Zone, the Metal Trades Council (MTC.) and the American Federation of Labor (AFL) continued their mandate of removing all West Indian workers from the Canal Zone. The MTC and the AFL repeatedly requested that all alien labourers should be replaced by 'American' workers. The AFL also fought to maintain the wage differential between local and U.S. rate workers. Cold war fears did nothing to alleviate the direct attacks pursued by the MTC and the AFL. To support their cause the AFL had a study completed which concluded that the wage differential was necessary and "an increase was even recommended".⁴³ The study completed by the AFL further demonstrated that though the inequality between Silver and Gold workers was of international concern little would be done to change the status quo.

Negotiations between Panamanian President Remón and the Eisenhower administration to establish a new treaty began in 1953 and the local-rate employees hoped for positive changes. The two items which held the greatest importance were canal labour relations and sovereignty.⁴⁴ The hopes of the West Indian community were placed in the Panamanian presidents hands.

⁴¹ Conniff, *Black Labour on a White Canal*, 107.

⁴² O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 129.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁴⁴ Conniff, *Black Labour on a White Canal*, 117.

Unfortunately instead of improving conditions the 1955 treaty between Panama and the United States had a negative impact on the West Indian community. The new treaty instituted two new policies; the “elimination of commissary privileges for Panamanian canal employees not living on the Canal Zone and a depopulation program designed to increase the number of consumers in Panama”.⁴⁵ The expulsion of residents began as early as 1946 and made it even more difficult for West Indians to make ends meet in Panama. The cost of living was higher and the availability of housing was extremely limited in Panama City. West Indians moved into terrible tenement housing which was unsatisfactory and costly. The influx of West Indians caused problems with the Panamanians as any low cost housing was already allocated to the Panamanian poor. Coupled with expulsions, the removal of commissary privileges served to further increase the cost of living for West Indians.⁴⁶ Trevor O'Reggio states that between 1946 and 1955 the West Indian population in the Canal Zone fell from 14,501 to 2,243.⁴⁷ The large scale expulsion of West Indian workers from the Canal Zone caused an increase in living costs accompanied by a decrease in living standards compared to those previously offered in the Canal Zone. Coupled with the new housing policy in the Canal Zone was the continued implementation of discriminatory policies. The rules of segregation remained largely the same as demonstrated by the following examinations of schooling, housing, medical care, compensation, rest times, workers wages and worker rights.

Schooling though much improved by the 1950s still contained fundamentally discriminatory policies. West Indian students were limited by their inability to attend the Canal

⁴⁵ O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 134.

⁴⁶ Conniff, *Black Labour on a White Canal*, 118.

⁴⁷ O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 134.

Zone College due to their dark skin colour. It was not until 1954 that West Indian students were finally granted permission to attend the Canal Zone College.⁴⁸ Hispanic students had been in attendance since 1933 which clearly demonstrates that West Indians students were discriminated against because of their skin colour. While West Indian students were finally gaining some basic privileges in the Canal Zone, the court case of *Brown v. Board of Education* was taking place in the United States. The decision made by the United States Supreme Court broke down the lines of segregation in the public sector of education.⁴⁹ However while the U.S. was rocked by the civil rights movement the Canal Zone remained static, once again defending its' policy of segregation.⁵⁰ West Indian students had been admitted to the Canal Zone College but a high incidence of segregation was still present in the Canal Zone. The white and 'coloured' schools had become known as the 'American' and the 'Latin American' schools, which allowed the U.S. to maintain racial segregation under the guise of nationality.⁵¹ To make the new division more accurate Spanish language classes were introduced in 'coloured' schools in August of 1954.⁵² The separation of 'American' and 'Latin American' schools continued to be common practice until 1975, when all 'Latin American' schools were closed in the Canal Zone.⁵³ Although a semblance of equality began to grow during the 1950s, basic divisions were maintained placing West Indian students in a secondary position to their 'white American' counterparts.

Teachers of African descent were also granted new privileges as the opportunity to pursue higher education was supported. Lawrence Johnson and Osborne's group from La Boca Normal

⁴⁸ Knapp and Knapp, *Red, White, and Blue Paradise*, 159.

⁴⁹ Conniff, *Black Labour on a White Canal*, 121.

⁵⁰ O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 137.

⁵¹ Conniff, *Black Labour on a White Canal*, 122.

⁵² O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 137.

⁵³ Knapp and Knapp, *Red, White and Blue Paradise*, 159.

encouraged the changes and played an important role in the improvement of the 'coloured' school system in the Canal Zone.⁵⁴ As a result of their work teachers were offered equal pay if they met the education requirements of 'white' teachers. Although incentives were offered, many of the teachers which obtained a post secondary education did not return to the Canal Zone.⁵⁵ Johnson was also responsible for the institution of 'coloured high schools' with better courses. Many important changes occurred but by 1953 the economic cost of running the schools had increased greatly. Due to economic concerns many of the positive changes which were made, regressed to the poor standards previously accepted.⁵⁶ Similar to schooling other facets of Canal Zone living remained unchanged as the decades passed.

As of 1943 the terrible housing conditions which West Indians labourers were subject to in Panamanian cities did not improve. Large numbers of employees were housed in cities which simply could not accommodate them. The large influx of labour is attributed to both the Army and Navy contractors and subcontractors which did not provide housing to their employees. In a report written by the Chief Health Officer M.C. Stayer of the Canal Zone in 1942, concerns regarding the obvious over crowding and the possibility of disease were raised.⁵⁷ Mr. Byrd another health officer suggested more housing be made available in the Canal Zone to help relieve the pressure placed on the city of Colon. Between 1944 and 1952 studies and plans to expand local-rate housing were developed for the Canal Zone.⁵⁸ All of the plans supported an increase in the space provided as well as the building of new dwellings for many of the local-rate

⁵⁴ Conniff, *Black Labour on a White Canal*, 119.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁵⁷ Memorandum for the Governor of the Canal Zone, assembled by M.C. Stayer, Chief Health Officer, September 29, 1942.

⁵⁸ Conniff, *Black Labour on a White Canal*, 125.

families.⁵⁹ Although numerous plans were made economic, factors stalled and eventually halted all improvements to local-rate quarters.

A prime example of the Canal Zone administration's continued disregard for its Silver employees comfort and well being is seen in a 1948 petition written by eight Silver employees.⁶⁰ The men were concerned that new quarters had not been provided after eight years in temporary barracks. A fire in April of 1940 burned down the employees homes in Colon. After eight years the inferior temporary housing was being renovated not replaced. The men requested that the quartermaster consider the disadvantages they had suffered when determining where to move their families. The three main concerns stated were the smallness of the rooms, the lack of ventilation and the subsequent poor health suffered by their children. Whether the requests made in the petition were addressed is unknown but the fact that the petition was made demonstrates a distinct disregard on behalf of Canal Zone authorities for the welfare of Silver employees and their continued struggle for fair treatment.

In the 1950s improvements were made to 'local-rate' housing but the policy of segregation was vigilantly maintained.⁶¹ By the mid 1950s the overcrowding problems in Panama had not diminished forcing West Indian labourers to pay high rents for tenement housing in the cities. The policy of 'depopulation' passed the cost of social institutions on to Panama which did not have the required housing and schools needed to meet the needs of the influx of residents.⁶² Workers living in Panama paid as much as double to meet basic living needs compared to those who occupied the limited housing in the Zone. Housing conditions did not

⁵⁹ Ibid., 124.

⁶⁰ Petition for Silver Housing, To the Quarter Master. April 1940 Cristobal Canal Zone.

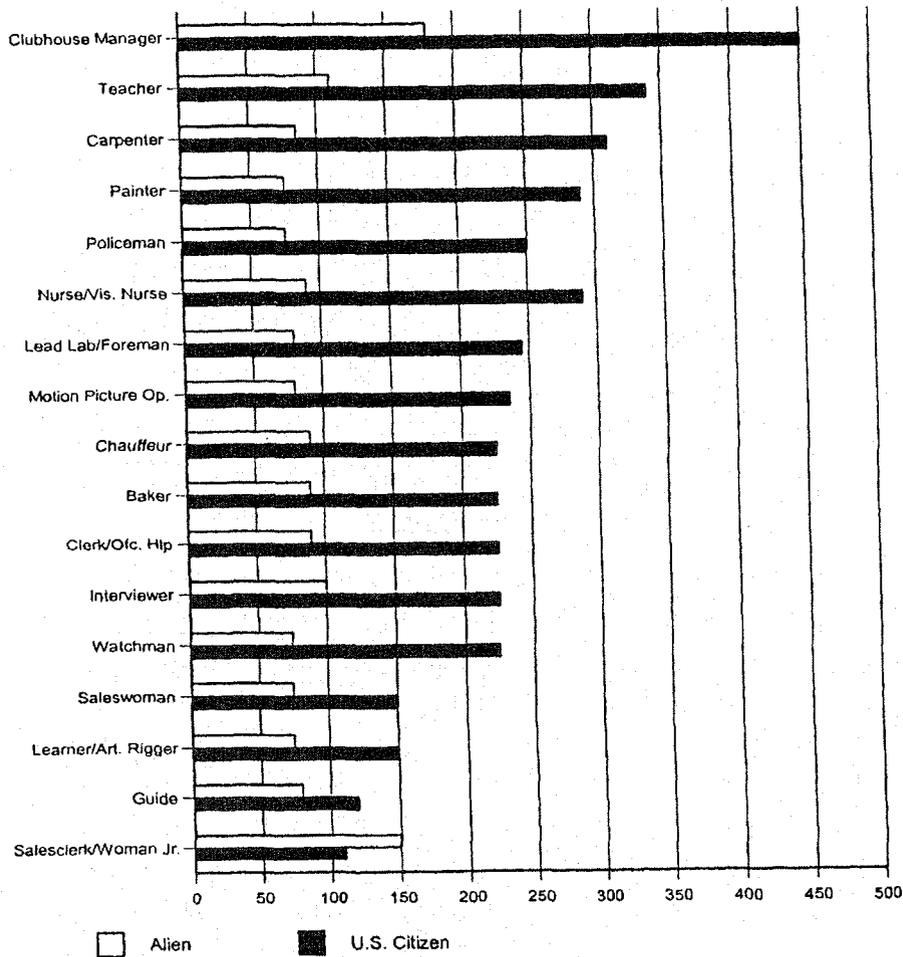
⁶¹ Knapp and Knapp, *Red, White and Blue Paradise*, 159.

⁶² Conniff, *Black Labour on a White Canal*, 126.

change for the better and the increased living cost were coupled with low wages and limited workers rights.

Between 1940 and 1945 little changed in regard to Silver workers housing. The lack of increase in wages also reflected the same neglect. Though the wages were raised from fifty to sixty-five dollars a month, the increase in living expenses was higher.⁶³ Silver wages which were based on local rates caused the discrepancy between Silver and Gold roll wages to increase during the 1940s. Table 2.0 taken from *Between Alienation and Citizenship* demonstrates the

Table 2.0: Local Versus U.S. Wage Scales⁶⁴



⁶³ O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 111.

⁶⁴ O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 130.

continued disparity between local and U.S. rate wages.

Furthermore in the eyes of the American Federation of Labour only the total removal of the West Indian workers was seen as acceptable. Though the AFL was successful in limiting the wages and opportunities of the Silver workers, the 1947 request to have all non-U.S. citizens replaced was denied.⁶⁵ The Canal authorities were never able to completely remove the West Indians because they provided cheap labour and cost less to house and support than workers with U.S. citizenship. Had West Indians been paid higher wages and received better benefits, the Canal authorities would not have insisted on maintaining a foreign labour force. The inequality in wages continued to plague the Silver-rate workers until 1957 when the U.S. wage scale was applied to all labourers, whether U.S. citizens or not.⁶⁶ Though removal of the Silver-rate systems was a positive event it is important to note that the wage discrepancies presented in Linda Smart Chubb's memorandum continued for a decade and a half after she wrote. In addition to the struggle for equal pay was the fight for equal medical treatment in terms of rest and sick leave. West Indians were not given the same benefits or sick leaves as U.S. employees making their lives extremely difficult if illness or injury occurred.

Panama Canal West Indian Employee Association had been fighting for sick and rest leave from its inception. Prior to the PCWIEA the Silver Employee Association applied for these same rights as far back as 1918.⁶⁷ In 1942 a rest leave was granted to workers, but it was not until 1944 that cumulative policies were introduced. In 1944 Silver workers were granted 2 days a month cumulative to 60 days total. The inclusion of a culminating leave was a much sought

⁶⁵ Petras, *Jamaican Labor Migration*, 213.

⁶⁶ Knapp and Knapp, *Red, White, and Blue Paradise*, 159.

⁶⁷ O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 113.

after benefit which was consistently denied. In contrast to the wage inequalities which continued for more than a decade after Linda Smart Chubb's memorandum, the changes in rest and sick leave policies occurred soon after its completion. While the changes occurred in the mid-1940s it is important to note that the struggle for these simple rights had been raging since 1918. The struggle lasted for over two and a half decades, clearly demonstrating the Canal authorities' resistance to change. The Canal authorities put down unions and organizations to maintain the discriminatory policies of the Canal Zone for as long as possible.

Operating during the same period as the PCWIEA's fight for rest and sick days were union agitation and strikes. In both 1920 and 1924 workers of African descent went on strike to fight for their rights. The failure of representatives to properly advise strikers and the failure of both strikes caused all unions for workers of African descent to be banned. After 1924, a union for workers of African descent did not officially exist until 1946.⁶⁸ As early as 1939, renewed interest in unionization began to arise within the West Indian community. After years of limited representation by labour organizations and the persecution of the Metal Trade Council and the American Federation of Labor, Harvey A. Stoudt, a West Indian worker formed the Canal Zone Workers Organizing Committee (CZWCO).⁶⁹ The CZWCO became an affiliate of the Congress of Industrial Workers eventually becoming the Canal Workers' Union in 1946. In 1946 the Canal Workers' Union became the Local 713 of the United Public Workers of America and it lasted until 1949.⁷⁰ The bringing together of both Panamanian and West Indian workers was one of the main goals of the newly formed union. The combining of Panamanians and West Indians

⁶⁸ Dixon, "The Contribution of West Indians to the Construction of the Panama Canal 1910-1914" in *West Indian Participation in the Construction of the Panama Canal*, 69.

⁶⁹ O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 138.

⁷⁰ Dixon, "The Contribution of West Indians to the Construction of the Panama Canal 1910-1914" in *West Indian Participation in the Construction of the Panama Canal*, 69.

was more likely after 1946 as anti-West Indian sentiments were quickly becoming anti-American in nature. As more West Indians began to assimilate into Panamanian culture the potential strength of unions rose.

Not unexpectedly the Canal Zone soon distributed a set of union regulations that inhibited the ability and strength of Local 713. Following are the four main regulations that the Governor of the Canal Zone wanted the unions to follow:

1. All Officers and members of the organization must be employees of the United States Government, its agencies, or organizations authorized to do business on the Canal Zone.
2. All members must be Canal Zone residents or citizens of the United States.
3. Only such members would be allowed to attend union meetings.
4. The union must renounce the right to strike, to advocate a strike, or to retain anyone who did so.⁷¹

Obviously the union resisted the regulations as they drastically limited the effectiveness and ability of the union to function. Regulation 2 was particularly effective in limiting the union as the number of West Indians living in the Canal Zone greatly decreased between 1946 and 1955. Though Local 713 opposed the regulations they accepted them and pursued the goal of equality in terms of housing, wages, compensation, representation, and retirement.⁷² In 1949, with the onset of the Cold War, Local 713 failed to maintain its position after accusation of leftist connections were made against the union leaders. The fear of communism was rampant during the Cold War and the U.S. was worried that the discontent of West Indians would make them easy targets for radicalization by communist agitators.⁷³

To replace Local 713, Local 900 of the Government and Civic Employees Organizing

⁷¹ O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 139.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 139.

⁷³ Conniff, "Origins of the Panama Canal Gold and Silver Payrolls: A Case Study" in *West Indian Participation in the Construction of the Panama Canal*, 46.

Committee was formed in 1950.⁷⁴ With the growing civil rights movement occurring in the U.S., union leaders held high hopes that change could finally take place. However, the Governor of the Canal Zone soon destroyed the union's hopes for success when he denied all of their requests on the basis of financial constraints. He also stated that "segregation on the isthmus was more or less natural and preferred by a majority of those directly concerned".⁷⁵ Although union movements were growing in Panama, West Indians were not able to attain the changes that they had fought for over the decades. In 1954, a group of workers from the Department of Defense formed the Local 907 of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees.⁷⁶ By 1955 real unions who were fighting for the rights of 'local-rate' workers began to operate somewhat successfully on the Isthmus. After 1955 the plight of the West Indians improved though the relationship between the West Indians and the U.S. and British administration was never completely healed.

As a result of the strained relationship between West Indians and British representatives many choose Panamanian citizenship after 1946. After 100 years of labour on the Isthmus the vibrant West Indian community changed through its assimilation into Panamanian society. Though West Indians assimilated the segregation and discriminatory policies of the Canal Zone continued to effect their lives for decades. The determination of Canal Zone authorities to maintain unequal rates of pay and workers rights demonstrated the extensive presence of racism in the Canal Zone.

Although the Canal authorities was openly racist they were not the only people who

⁷⁴ Dixon, "The Contribution of West Indians to the Construction of the Panama Canal 1910-1914" in *West Indian Participation in the Construction of the Panama Canal*, 69.

⁷⁵ O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 140.

⁷⁶ Conniff, "Origins of the Panama Canal Gold and Silver Payrolls: A Case Study" in *West Indian Participation in the Construction of the Panama Canal*, 46.

persecuted the West Indian community. The British representatives sent to protect and defend West Indians were also guilty of discrimination and mistreatment. The attitude of superiority and lack of caring demonstrated by Consuls as the decades passed slowly destroyed the strong faith and loyalty of the West Indian community. As women, men and children were left to fend for themselves during the 1930s depression and the 1941 Presidential term of Arnulfo Arias, loyalty to the British crown decreased. When the 1946 constitution of Panama provided the opportunity to assimilate many West Indian did so.

The history of West Indian on the Isthmus is an important piece of Panamanian history. Linda Smart Chubb's documentation of the struggle faced by West Indians provides a rarely seen woman's voice in the history of a strong and proud community. Her memorandum and those accompanying it caused the United States to investigate the mistreatment of West Indian workers.⁷⁷ That investigation coupled with the increasing chagrin of the international community led to changes in the Canal Zone. Although changes were slow to happen and discrimination continued for decades, the importance of Linda Smart Chubb's memorandum is supported by secondary literature. She provides a unique voice in the history of the West Indian Diaspora which helps historians to document the struggles of the West Indian community. Though equality was a long and hard struggle the West Indians who laboured on the Canal were crucial in the completion of the Panama Canal. More recent literature celebrates the contributions made by West Indians and this thesis continues the much needed examination of West Indian labourers in Panama. The West Indians of Panama no longer need to continue to be "The Forgotten People".

⁷⁷ Conniff, *Black Labour on a White Canal*, 107.

Appendix A

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The Forgotten People

A Report on the Condition of the British West Indians on the Isthmus of Panama.

Introduction.

There are no statistics of the number of British West Indians living and working on the Isthmus of Panama. Even if there were, it would omit some hundreds of thousands who are British in education and feeling, including about fifty thousand who, under a recent Panamanian law, have no nationality at all. Altogether, there is a population larger than that of the smaller West Indian Colonies, the great majority of British nationality and almost all British in sentiment.

These are the men and women whose fathers dug the Panama Canal. More of them are arriving from Jamaica to dig its extensions now. Until the entry of the United States into the war, the latter formed a continuous stream both ways, with a pool of about fifty thousand men. In the last year the stream has almost stopped, in both directions, but the pool remains.

This compact group of coloured British subjects has played a great part in the life of Panama and of the Canal Zone. They have been an important reality to Americans and Panamanians. Only by the British have they been ignored. With a certain number of exceptions, both Ministers

and consular officers have had very little concern with them. Neither the Colonial nor Imperial governments have recognized their existence at all. They are a forgotten people.

In consequence, with the spread of American influences on the Isthmus of Panama, the West Indians have been steadily pushed down. They have declined to the position of the Negro in the Southern States, with an added discrimination for being foreigners. The situation has come to a head in the last four years with the arrival of the "contract men" from Jamaica in the Zone; and almost simultaneously with the racial laws of Arnulfo Arias in Panama. The resistance of the liberty-loving Jamaican labourers; and the awakening of West Indians in Panama to the degeneration of their position there brought on a long period crisis.

This is the situation dealt with in the Memoranda of which this Report is composed. That from the West Indian Employee Association is by Mr. WHYTE, for more than twenty years the West Indian industrial workers representative and the president of the Association since its birth. He is the expert on West Indian labour relations in the Canal Zone. The Communication from the Dunbar Cultural League represents the views of the West Indian intellectuals in Panama. The Memorandum on the West Indian position and British representation is by a former Secretary to the Legation, Consulate and Vice Consulate of twenty-two years standing, who is also a leader in West Indian cultural life in Colon. A fourth Memorandum with annexes, on the Contract Labourers, has been compiled from the reports made during 1942 to H.M. Minister in Panama. These have been revised after an investigation, in January 1943, by a Labour Officer sent from the Government of Jamaica.

Each Memorandum bears recommendations of its own; but all come, in effect, to the same conclusion. It is essential that this forgotten group of British subjects should be remembered

while there is still time. They represent a British interest at least as real as oil wells or rubber groves. They are situated at an internationally important point, in what may one day become an international area. They have a right to the protection which their loyalty deserves. A beginning has been made by the Jamaican Government. When their attention was drawn to the plight of their labourers, - men whose contracts had been made under the Governor's authority, - they appointed a Labour Officer to advise the Consulate. Mr. C. Greaves Hill's success in a few weeks has been remarkable. It proved that representation was required; and that it could be effective without any international friction being generated. Further action along the same lines but with a wider scope is an urgent need.

Memorandum

The British West Indians and the British Representation on the Isthmus of Panama.

Linda Smart Chubb.

Introduction: Personal.

The following Memorandum is written from personal experience. The writer, a British Subject by birth of coloured West Indian parentage, was born and spent her childhood in the Panama Canal Zone. For twenty-two years she has worked with the British Representatives in Panama: for fifteen years consecutively at His Majesty's Consulate, Colon, followed by one year at the newly constituted Consulate in Panama City: and for intermittent periods at His Majesty's Vice-Consulate in Colon and Consulate and Legation in Panama City. This has given her the

opportunity of observing the position of the British West Indian communities in Panama and in the Canal Zone, their relations with the United States and Panamanian authorities. She has also been able to note at first hand the attitudes of His Majesty's representatives, consular and diplomatic, their actions and the consequences for the coloured British subjects in this district. At the instance of Mr. Vice-Consul Thwaites the following observations are set down, for official use and information only. At Mr. Thwaites' request, the writer's personal opinions have been expressed in the frankest possible way.

(1.) Original Position of British West Indians in Canal Zone.

The writer's parents came from Jamaica to the Canal Zone in the time of the French Canal Company. Her father was a marine engineer in its service. During the construction period many thousands of coloured British West Indians came and settled on the Isthmus of Panama, taking employment with the Company. The French accorded them equality of treatment and the majority of positions of trust were filled by them. French and British alike looked down on the native Colombians (as they then were), as untrustworthy both as labourers and citizens.

When the Americans took over the Canal works, they gave guarantees of fair remuneration and equality of treatment to the coloured British West Indians, who continued to arrive. The latter continued in positions of trust, large and small. A friend of the writer's was Chief Telegraph Operator. Another coloured Britisher was Receiving and Forwarding Agent of the Railroad. Almost all the station-masters were British, as were most of the dock foremen. So as far as labour was concerned, the Americans tried Italians, Spaniards, Chinese, American negroes, British Indians and native Panamanians, but finally preferred British West Indians to them all.

The guarantees were not implemented for long. As health conditions improved, white

Americans become willing to stay. There began a slow weeding-out of the old and trusted British employees, without regard to length of service. They were demoted to lower positions or dismissed without compensation. The Receiving and Forwarding Agent, for example, was expelled without cause shown. He died a few years after as an ordinary clerk in the Port Captain's office. A few saved their positions by taking American nationality. The majority refused to do so; and with the completion of the Canal were forced from their positions by a regulation precluding the payment of higher salaries to any but American citizens. Those in lower clerical positions were reclassified as 'helper' and so on, to enable lower wages to be paid for work identical with that of Americans.

(2.) Segregation and its Purpose in the Canal Zone.

The racial segregation in the Canal Zone was made on a basis of separate employment rolls, quarters, commissary and so on, under the titles of 'Silver' and 'Gold'. This seems to have been done to evade a provision in the Canal Zone legal Code making racial discrimination illegal. And for a time the line was not strictly drawn. A few West Indians of recognized ability or usefulness were retained, given 'gold' privileges and 'gold' quarters, though in general considered 'silver' employees. The present writer was born and spent her childhood in 'gold' quarters. A few American negroes, such as the Manager of the Cristobal 'Silver' Clubhouse and his wife, still retain status and privileges as 'gold' employees. But segregation nourishes itself and recently the last-named lady was refused service at a Post Office 'gold' window and even through her Congressmen was unable to secure effective recognition of her status.

For the British the situation is far worse. Were the separation merely social, there would perhaps be no cause for marked discontent among West Indians; though the 'silver' and 'gold'

signs would always be resented, especially among recent arrivals. But the object behind discrimination as practiced in the Canal Zone is to establish a kind of slave system. The British and the minority of other coloured peoples are simply hewers of wood and drawers of water, living on a far lower standard than the white Americans; and there is every intention of keeping them in this position. Certain Governors have been personally sympathetic but there has been unrelenting pressure by the organized American groups, through their Congressional representatives and otherwise, to force down the social position and living capacity of the coloured people. This has taken a number of forms.

First as has already been said, coloured British employees cannot be engaged above a low salary or for other than serving subordinate positions. There is a sharp differential in pay between them and the white Americans for jobs done by both alike. Actually, important work is often done by the coloured assistant, while his white supervisor draws a salary of as much as five times that of the man who really did the work. All West Indian clerks are termed "office helpers" and until recently the common titles Mr, Mrs. and Miss were not employed in official correspondence addressed to them.

Second, the living quarters for 'Silver' employees are markedly inferior. The conditions and situations of the buildings are poor in comparison and the space of accommodation is much less per head of family. This refers to the permanent 'Silver Roll', whose homes are on the Isthmus, and excludes the contracted labourers from Jamaica and the other colonies. The latter are housed in barracks under much worse conditions. No attempt is made to separate 'silver' employees according to their training and social habits. School teachers, for example, are mixed in confined quarters with the families of unskilled labourers.

Third, the foods available in the 'silver' commissaries are very inferior to those in the 'gold'. Inferior items and even deteriorated foods are systematically transferred from the latter to the former.

Permission to buy an article in the 'gold' commissary is extended to 'silver' employees only after considerable formalities. When a desirable line of goods appears in the 'silver' commissary, however, 'gold' employees and their families crowd the place and buy up the available supply. This abuse finally reached the newspapers and it is understood that it is now being moderated.

Fourth, even hospital visiting privileges are made an object of discrimination. White Americans may visit without restrictions during ample hours everyday. Coloured Britishers and others may visit only two days a week. Moreover they must obtain tickets; and each visitor to a given patient must await the return of his predecessor before being allowed entry. The reason given for this practice is the number of West Indians and their jolly and talkative nature. But if it were really desired, a less humiliating way of dealing with the problem could be found.

Fifth, it was only very recently, after representations by the Panama Canal West Indian Employees Association, that the normal forms of Mr, Mrs. and Miss began to be employed in official communications to coloured employees. It had even been the policy to omit the polite forms of address to all coloured persons, even those residents in the Republic of Panama and not in the service of the Canal. The wish to make a division into first and second class citizens could hardly be more clearly marked.

Sixth, the Canal Zone Courts have been openly and notoriously biased in their judgments. Many cases have arisen, up to the present time, where a West Indian has been sentenced for

months or years for stealing articles valued at a few dollars. Meanwhile considerable cases of embezzlement by Americans drew suspended sentences on condition of a quiet disappearance from the Isthmus. Moreover there has always been a tendency to exploit cases of West Indian convictions, especially where tried by the same judge and on the same day, to make hostile publicity against the British West Indians as a whole. In this the press cooperated with enthusiasm.

Seventh, bodies actually represented in the Administration, such as the Metal Trade Workers Union, a local of the American Federation of Labour, have been allowed to pursue a violently negrophobe policy. The Union is, of course, interested in preserving the wage-differential. To do so, it has not hesitated to stir up race hatreds consistently. This group and others have seen to it that reports of West Indian misconduct contained offensive terms. A coloured criminal was always "a big burly negro". Meanwhile they cooperated to suppress the facts of defalcations among their own citizens.

Eighth, again largely through the influence of the Metal Trades Union, the educational policy of the Canal Zone has been turned in the same direction. Even though the standard of education in the Silver schools has been raised in certain directions, the whole idea pervading the system of training is to provide a source of artisans and commissary clerks for the Canal, as well as a supply of domestic workers for the homes of the Americans. High School (Secondary) education is not available for West Indians. All this has especial importance when it is considered that one of the chief excuses for racial discrimination locally is that the West Indians are under-educated, untrained and so unfitted for equality of treatment. Yet in spite of this, the great body of coloured clerical workers in the Canal Zone is composed of West Indians or persons trained in

the West Indies. The attempt is thus actually to force the level of the British population down, by denying to the children the opportunity to develop the same skills and competence as their parents.

For this work the Canal Zone Director of Schools is well fitted. His rabid racialism can best be shown by examples. He refers to his coloured school principals and teachers as "girls" and "boys", the old Southern mode of address. When one of these teachers, a man of long service and high standing dared to criticize the limited curriculum at a teachers meeting, he threatened him with punishment for "sabotage". Another he gave a dishonourable discharge, - again a man of long service- for failing to direct his pupils to the 'voluntary' work of filling sandbags. Again, he reprimanded a sports director for being "too well dressed", holding that in view of his position he should wear overalls or the like. When the negro Captain of the U.S.S "Booker T. Washington" was introduced to the Schools Director, the latter remarked "my father owned slaves." "That" the Captain replied "is no credit to you."

In short, the intention of the American administration of the Zone toward the British West Indian community here was correctly seized by the artist who decorated the rotunda of the Administration building. He pictured the negro labourers in chains.

(3.) Repercussions on the Situation in Panama.

The colour and national prejudice introduced by the Americans in the Canal Zone was bound to have repercussions in the Republic of Panama.

The Panamanians are a Latin people, of white, carib and negro origin. Spontaneously, they are devoid of racial prejudice. Over a period of decades, a growing number of American soldiers, sailors and others of the working class, who were despised by Canal Zone society and

denied entry into the better American homes, began to intermarry with the local population. This included both mestizos and part-negro Panamanians as well in some cases as coloured West Indians. At the same time American influence, which had been resented on patriotic grounds, began to be accepted. More and more Panamanians attended Canal Zone and United States schools. Today nearly all Panamanian professional men hold American degrees, even those who received the bulk of their education in Europe and South America. The Panamanians have now copied American customs, especially with regard to their women, which they previously despised.

The result of this double process has been, first that the Americans began to concede social equality to straight-haired and light-coloured Panamanians. And second that the Panamanians began to differentiate, both between themselves and far more vis-à-vis the British and other foreigners, on a colour-basis. The coloured Panamanian quietly fell into various groups according to complexion, mixing to some extent yet mostly keeping apart. The West Indians, however, were open to far more serious attack.

The racist laws passed by the régime of Arnulfo Arias— and not repealed by his successor— were really prepared for in this way. They were resented by many Panamanians of negro origin, who came of families able to trace Panamanian descent for generations. It was admitted in the press, as a result, that Panama was a mixed and not a ‘white’ country. Nevertheless the principle of racial discrimination had been absorbed. In spite of the mixed population, it had become involved in the question of national pride, especially vis-à-vis the United States. The new social discrimination against the British West Indians was added to by this heavier legal one, discriminating against their employment and forbidding their immigration

altogether.

Unaccustomed to racial discrimination in their Islands, the West Indians are now beginning to accept it as inevitable here. Finding that their British nationality has done nothing to save them from the stigma of inferiority, their attitude towards it is changing. Formerly, they despised Panamanian customs and culture. They prided themselves on their nationality and reared their children in the idea that they must be educated in the West Indies. They continued to own property there and expected to die there. All this is changing now. Whenever possible West Indians are taking Panamanian nationality, which offers at least a partial protection. They are sending their children to Panamanian schools. The younger ones, as they come of age, are opting for Panamanian citizenship. Those who were deprived of it by the Arias laws are striving to get it back again. This development is regarded by most West Indians with great sorrow, as the exchanging of a higher for a lower culture. But it has been forced upon them by a situation beyond their control.

(4.) British Representation and its Responsibility.

The present writer has had very pleasant treatment from the consular officers under whom she has worked, or for whom she has had the opportunity of observation, -at least thirty-in number. She has had the honour of entertaining a large proportion of them at big and small parties at her home. Nevertheless, from her own observation she believes that the British representatives are in part responsible for allowing this unhappy situation to engulf the coloured British subjects in the Republic of Panama and in the Canal Zone.

The original attitude of the coloured West Indians toward their representatives was childlike. Their "council" was to them not only a consul or a counsel, but royalty. The Consul

was frequently addressed as “Your Majesty”, “My Lord”, etc. He is still frequently addressed as “Your Excellency”. There was seldom a letter, however urgent or important to the writer, which concluded without solicitous enquiry and prayers for the person and family on the Consul. In emotional outburst or childlike confidence they would bring their most petty and personal worries to the Consulate. Christmas morning would always find a group singing carols in front of the building. All this reflected a deep and passionate loyalty. Many West Indians went into deep mourning at every death in the Royal Family. And it was the local West Indian press which started the beautiful custom, since copied by other nationalities, of inviting their national Representative to send a New Year message to all British subjects living here. Both Boy Scouts and British Legion were introduced here by the West Indians.

It is evident that to represent a people, the majority of whom are of this simple and confiding type, the consular or diplomatic officer must be a humane man. The officers who have served here in the past have been on the whole good men, conscientious in a general way in the performance of their duties. Few have deliberately neglected their obligations to the “non-aryan” British subjects (East Indians, Hong Kong Chinese and Jews, as well as the West Indian colony.) Many are remembered lovingly by the coloured community for their affability, some for their charitableness. But hardly any seemed to feel that there should be anything beyond the business relationship at the counter. With perhaps one exception none of the officers whom the writer entertained sought any other contact with coloured persons socially. And even in her case: the departing Minister who declined her invitation to a farewell tea clearly felt that it was no part of his duty to meet coloured British subjects in such circumstances.

Golden opportunities have been wasted by consular officers to create the opportunity for

coloured British subjects to be regarded as persons and not merely things. When the American authorities enquired if there were any graves of British war veterans, which might be honoured simultaneously with their own, the Consul of the day replied in the negative. Yet there are many graves of ex-soldiers of the West India Regiment, veterans of the last war. Again and again applicants have been bewildered and disillusioned by officers who failed to handle their cases in an understanding and sympathetic way. Even when his conduct was technically correct there was usually no interest shown. The underlying attitude is shown by one Consul. After satisfying himself by a technical examination that a legal point did exist, he would write a formal protest against discrimination. Yet in his private correspondence afterwards he wrote that his chief memory of the post is of the smell town and its negro population. However fair he might be in his actual duties, could the Consul be thought a proper representative, whose British wife, in the presence of a coloured servant, could join in the sneers of their American guests regarding "niggers"? Another incident, not within the writer's personal observation like those above was when a Consul remarked to a complainant that he had not been appointed in the interests of the West Indians, but of British shipping.

The consequence has been that the consular and diplomatic officers have never used their social contacts, as they might have done, for the benefit of the coloured British subjects. Having the opportunity of meeting the white colony, the Panamanian official class and the Americans, the writer believes that there was a times when their influence might have prevented the plague from taking so deep a root. But their lack of interest had consequences more serious still. The Isthmus has always been the scene of violence and often death by violence. Very often, the victim has been a West Indian. There are frequent cases of maltreatment, by the Canal Zone and

by the Panamanian police, in some cases by white American foremen and others. They reach occasional climaxes, such as the shooting of a workman in a barrel, where he had taken refuge. Or the shooting of one West Indian for scuffling with another. Hardly ever has the culprit been penalised, or adequately penalised. In many cases he could hide behind unfair regulations, difficult to change. But most Consular officers never questioned whether any change was possible. Usually they were satisfied to present the grievance to the authorities concerned and receive an answer quoting a regulation. The same has been true with the many high-handed cases of deportation. Not many consuls were willing to argue a case from a human interest angle, - not because they were hard-hearted personally, but because they did not feel that their duties involved this kind of representation.

The consequence of this neglect was shown some years ago over the case of an Irish seaman killed by a Panamanian constable. When the British government asked indemnity the whole West Indian community murmured that many and many such cases of West Indians had gone unrepresented, or only weakly so. Only the loss of its case on arbitration by the British government avoided an explosion of indignation against its representative.

It would overburden this Memorandum to quote specific cases. A couple will be attached, therefore, as appendices. They have been chosen from those not of lurid character, but reflects the treatment of respected members of the community. In consequence of these and many other such, the belief in British justice has slowly dwindled. It may be asked what the West Indian community has done to deserve better representation. The West Indians accused of improvidence. Discrimination against them has been justified by assertion that they are a burden on the community. Yet discrimination against the other despised sections, Chinese and Indians,

was justified because they were horders, and would not spend to the benefit of local trade. And the low economic position of the West Indian labourer is in fact the consequence of his low rate of pay. In an expensive locality, the coloured labourer must face the same living expenses as the whites on a salary that is a fraction of theirs. The West Indians have in fact made many efforts to organise, ranging from small groups up to the West Indian Congress of a number of years ago, on which lodges, churches, fraternities and groups of all kinds were to have had representation. More recently in Colon there was formed a West Indian Communal Council; but like the other groups which aspired to represent a large part of the community, it did not last long. This has been accepted by some consuls as evidence that the West Indian community is incapable of organizing itself and undeserving of support. In the opinions of the writer, most of those failures, even where they came from lack of interest, personal quarrels or dishonesty in handling funds, were basically due to the sense that, as a group, the coloured Britishers were not respected and that any effort was foredoomed.

In latter years many firms and communal undertakings have been formed and are solvent at this time; such as the 'People's Bakery', the 'Community Bakery', the 'Jamaica Progressive Society', 'Barbadian Progressive Society'. And many others. But all over there is the shadow of discriminatory treatment, both by the community at large and of the authorities. It is this shadow which the Consular representatives could, and in the writer's opinion should have done much to dissipate.

(5.) Possibilities for Representation of British West Indians on the Isthmus

At the end of the last war, most British West Indians on the Isthmus felt let down. They were the first to be discharged and the last to be re-employed. Their war service went

unrecognized. The post-war world was not better for the coloured man than the pre-war one had been. For this reason, despite their natural loyalty, a proportion of West Indians here have felt little interest in the present war. The number has grown of those who say : "this is a white man's war" let the white folks kill one another out, there are too many of them anyway". As a whole, the coloured British subjects locally have lost faith in British justice. Apart from their own conditions, they look abroad and consider the position in South Africa, the discrimination against coloured British seamen. They feel that no effort has been made for a just understanding and the practice of real democracy even within the British Empire. And yet it is still to England that they look for the hope of a better world. They peer eagerly in to all the Charters and Covenants which her leaders sign, anxious to see a specific reference to negroes or coloured peoples in the guarantees for the post-war world. The faith can still be recaptured for those coloured Britishers who have begun to lose their belief in British fair play.

In the past, the chief measure of a representational kind was the organization, many years ago, of the British West Indian Committee, to act as a liaison between the Legation and the community as a whole. It has never been a great success, because it has never earned the confidence of the group it was intended to help. Many felt that the individuals selected were not honoured as representatives, but in their persons, because of their financial, social or educational advantages. They were accused of snobbishness and of arrogating leadership, even though it was recognised that such leadership imposed obligations and sacrifice. It was felt that this was a lazy means by which the Legation ridded itself of part of its functions. The Committee provided a 'set' whom the Ministers would invite on official occasions, such as the King's Birthday. Later in the day all the white British subjects would attend the more socially important gathering to

which the Panamanian and Zone officials would come, together with other leading personages and their wives. Nevertheless in the past the British West Indian Committee has been frequently consulted by the Legation and has succeeded in doing a little good. A similar Committee formed by a Consul in Colon, however, of which the writer was for a time one of the officers, did not long survive.

Other acts which have assumed representational importance may be listed briefly. One Minister invited all British subjects regardless of colour to a garden party. This was considered an important precedent. But the experiment was not repeated. One Consul attended the trial of a West Indian at the Cristobal Court. The judge received him well and had him sit at his side. This paternal interest was very well received by the West Indians. To the writer's knowledge, the incident has never been repeated. Again, an excellent impression was made by the simultaneous award of the O.B.E. to Captain Payne of Messrs. Payne and Wardlaw and to the late Messenger Brown of the Legation.

These instances give indication of the kind of thing that is needed. It is the writer's conviction that officers sent to coloured countries required a special training of the heart. Not a general training, but a specific one, aimed at fostering a proper understanding of those whom they are sent to protect and represent. They should be bent on winning the love and confidence of their people. Something, perhaps, like the special preparation and advices now being given to the British forces in North Africa, explaining the native mentality and the necessity of respecting local customs there.

On the other hand, the writer does not feel, from her experience, that quite so much should be left to the officer's personal initiative. It should not be a matter of individual

liberalism that West Indians be invited to participate in British festivals. This should be a matter of instruction. Nor should such invitations be of a segregating nature. Consular officers should arrive here prepared to offer their coloured British charges the same degree of protection as that which they expect to give other British subjects; and which they give not on personal grounds but because that is the chief ground for their appointment. And if such protection brings any friction with the local authorities, the officers themselves should be entitled to the full support of the Legation.

In the same way it might well be made clear to the Consuls-designated that they are not expected to seek social agreeability vis-à-vis the Panamanians and more particularly the Americans, at the expense of the coloured majority of their own colony. As has been suggested above social contacts of the consuls constituted perhaps the best means for bringing the needs and rights of coloured Britishers to the [attention] of the local authorities. These rights and needs should be regar[ded as] British Interest at least as important as Canal shipping and [commerce].

The foregoing was written-up from a partially completed Memorandum and fragments left by Mrs. Chubb on her departure abroad, filled in from notes of conversations with her. The greater part of it is in her own words, but there are possible a few points which she would have wished to phrase differently.

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Appendices Overleaf

- Appendix No.1 The Case of C.W. Omphroy.
- Appendix No.2 The Case of E.S. Humber
- Appendix No.3 The Case of H. Stone, Bookseller.

Appendix No.1

The Case of C.W. Omphroy.

This coloured West Indian is a native of Jamaica. He is now doing business in Panama City, but was formerly of Colon. He was a clerk in an American steamship company, which he subsequently left because he considered that the prospects for the coloured man in employment were limited. He opened a small bicycle shop in this own apartment. He introduced the Dunlop rubber goods – tires, tennis balls, etc. The business prospered, and soon Mr. Omphroy had to be thinking about large quarters. A consular officer about this time, felt that the growing popularity of Dunlop goods was of such importance that it would do British prestige little good to have this representation continue in coloured hands. He supported the request for an American firm for the representation to be transferred to them. Happily the Department of Overseas Trade failed to support this endeavour. Mr. Omphroy is today one of the leading if not the principal of the business men trading in auto parts, and Dunlop goods are only ones of the many lines, British and American, which he represents.

Appendix No.2

The Case of E.S. Humber

This gentleman was a West Indian born in Jamaica, who reared a large family in Panama. In his youth he entered the then Vice-Consulate at Panama in a semi-clerical capacity. He rose from one duty of importance to another; was for some time pro-consul, on various occasions acting vice-consul, and finally given the permanent local rank of vice-consul. Some of his relatives also entered the consular service as clerks, and became pro-consuls and vice-consuls, and worked either at the vice-consulate or at the legation. It is unfortunate that some of his children did not maintain the high standards of the father. But as far as the head of the family was concerned, he enjoyed during his lifetime the respect of the business world. He was Lloyd's Agent, and was an expert in the matter of registering patents under the Panamanian law, so that he became the stand-by of all United Kingdom firms. The writer has seen many beautiful tributes by the Department of Overseas Trade regarding the valuable work done by Mr. Humber in behalf of British trade.

Unfortunately, in Mr. Humber's old age there arrived at Panama a consular officer who was regarded as a negrophobe, even though he did maintain pleasant relations with some of the leading West Indians. He decided in his own words, that Mr. Humber might have been white in his youth but was patently coloured in his old age. In actual fact the Humber family is considered white for social purposes, although it is known that they have a fair admixture of negro blood. This consular officer set about the change of conditions under which not only was the Humber clan in positions of importance in the consular service, but were also landlords to the British Government. His methods appear to have been of a rough-shod nature, and caused much

humiliation to Mr. Humber, who was perhaps twice the age of his superior. Mr. Humber lost the Lloyd's Agency. He was divested of his consular rank. The consular officer recommended that never again should the Foreign Office make the mistake of appointing a coloured man to consular rank in this country. Mr. Humber did not long survive these acts of humiliation and ingratitude.

Appendix No.3

The Case of Mr. H. Stone, Bookseller

Mr. H. Stone is a British subject by birth in Jamaica. He is the proprietor of a prosperous bookselling business, with branches in Panama City and Colon. In peacetime he also did a small export business.

A few years ago a request was received from the Department of Overseas Trade for a list of local bookshops. A number of firms of no more importance than Mr. Stone's were listed, of which the proprietors were not British subjects but were of white race. His name was, however, deliberately omitted, on the ground that he was a West Indian.

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