

1

00:00:00,000 --> 00:00:06,509

Our next speaker is Damaris Serrano, who holds a PhD in Hispanic Cultural Studies

2

00:00:06,509 --> 00:00:11,190

and a Master of Comparative Literature from Michigan State. She has held various

3

00:00:11,190 --> 00:00:16,830

teaching and research positions at the University of Panama and has five times

4

00:00:16,830 --> 00:00:22,920

received Prestigious National Literary awards in the Republic of Panama. She is

5

00:00:22,920 --> 00:00:28,289

the author of numerous award-winning books and articles, serves as a

6

00:00:28,289 --> 00:00:32,369

researcher for the encyclopedia towards a history of Central American

7

00:00:32,369 --> 00:00:36,840

literature's, and author for the
Dictionary of Central American

8

00:00:36,840 --> 00:00:42,390

literature's. She has been a professor
for 35 years in Panama and in the United

9

00:00:42,390 --> 00:00:49,640

States. She will talk to us about comics,
swing, and vaudeville: The Transatlantic

10

00:00:49,640 --> 00:00:58,140

Connection. I can't wait to see how she
puts all of that together. So I think

11

00:00:58,140 --> 00:01:03,899

that the best idea was to create a movie
with that. I couldn't introduce all this

12

00:01:03,899 --> 00:01:09,090

swing and vaudeville and Ella Fitzgerald

and everything else but since all my

13

00:01:09,090 --> 00:01:16,320

research has always always been devoted
to bring new things to the classroom the

14

00:01:16,320 --> 00:01:23,850

movie was made in self by two of my
dearest students, former students, one

15

00:01:23,850 --> 00:01:29,130

from the school of medicine and a
current CoLA student, so it's a movie so

16

00:01:29,130 --> 00:01:34,259

I won't have to speak. It's about 12 minutes
so you can ask me questions afterwards,

17

00:01:34,259 --> 00:01:39,570

and yeah I brought from my research
about seven thousand pictures so I just

18

00:01:39,570 --> 00:01:43,189

brought a few of them here.

19

00:01:47,530 --> 00:01:54,490

Comics, Swing and Vaudeville: The
Transatlantic Connection. Monroe Doctrine,

20

00:01:54,490 --> 00:02:00,259

Hispanic American War, big stick on
one hand and on the other the slow

21

00:02:00,259 --> 00:02:04,399

disappearance of slavery and the
emergence of independent nations. The

22

00:02:04,399 --> 00:02:11,209

Isthmus of Panama gateway to the South
Seas in 1513. Commercial Port of the

23

00:02:11,209 --> 00:02:16,459

Atlantic since the spanish conquest.
Pathway for the gold rush. Sight of the

24

00:02:16,459 --> 00:02:21,860

first Transcontinental Railroad. Meeting
point and passageway. The French could

25

00:02:21,860 --> 00:02:25,910

not have built the canals of the North
American spot and built. They did it at

26

00:02:25,910 --> 00:02:30,230

the expense of intervening in foreign
country policies, ending revolutions, and

27

00:02:30,230 --> 00:02:34,970

buying consciences. The canal was built
because Roosevelt imposed the Marshall

28

00:02:34,970 --> 00:02:39,170

discipline over the high rank employees
and hired military engineers that could

29

00:02:39,170 --> 00:02:45,230

not desert. And among them, the people,
actors in the drama the canal whose

30

00:02:45,230 --> 00:02:51,200

historic recognition merely appears.

West Indians from Jamaica, Barbados,

31

00:02:51,200 --> 00:03:00,230

Trinidad, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Coração,

St. Kitts, St. Lucia, St. Vincent. Whose

32

00:03:00,230 --> 00:03:05,989

arms built the two grand projects of

modernity. We know of deaths, french

33

00:03:05,989 --> 00:03:12,880

bankruptcy, segregation imposed by the

USA with the silver employees at schools,

34

00:03:12,880 --> 00:03:20,450

commissaries, fountains, houses, and even

the air. The cultural profile of the

35

00:03:20,450 --> 00:03:24,920

West Indian has not been adequately

highlighted. Similar to the New Indian,

36

00:03:24,920 --> 00:03:29,690

the Spaniard who has enriched in America,
the ideal of a better life embodied in

37

00:03:29,690 --> 00:03:34,340

the Cologne man. The best campaign of
marketing and modernity was just an

38

00:03:34,340 --> 00:03:38,810

employee stressed and white tipped to
promote this opportunity. These were the

39

00:03:38,810 --> 00:03:42,380

workers who came by thousands and
thousands and died by thousands

40

00:03:42,380 --> 00:03:47,420

dynamited in the vicinity of the
excavation. But in the midst of all from

41

00:03:47,420 --> 00:03:51,769

bunk beds where they slept like those in
slave ships, they started to forage

42

00:03:51,769 --> 00:03:56,440

a syncretic culture of work songs, feasts

43

00:03:56,440 --> 00:04:01,600

and preservatives. White employees believed it was
black magic, screams of the night, but

44

00:04:01,600 --> 00:04:05,500

throughout the lost towns, flooded when
President Woodrow Wilson pushed the button

45

00:04:05,500 --> 00:04:11,020

in Washington to blow up the dam, and
interoceanic transcontinental culture

46

00:04:11,020 --> 00:04:15,670

emerged. This culture would forever
connect the West Indies, Panama, and the

47

00:04:15,670 --> 00:04:23,800

United States in an unending
journey. During the 1930's Panama became a

48

00:04:23,800 --> 00:04:28,210

hub for interchange in a mandatory route,
a place that witnessed the presence of

49

00:04:28,210 --> 00:04:32,470

personalities such as Albert Einstein,
who visited the khatoon lox on

50

00:04:32,470 --> 00:04:37,300

December 18th 1931. A venue where
the death of King George the Sixth and the

51

00:04:37,300 --> 00:04:41,740

visit of the newlywed Elizabeth the
Second were important events since West

52

00:04:41,740 --> 00:04:46,480

Indians and Panama were British subjects.
A place where years end, prominent

53

00:04:46,480 --> 00:04:49,330

members of the community received

greetings from the authorities of the

54

00:04:49,330 --> 00:04:53,800

Empire. Also a place where religious
authorities linked somehow to the US

55

00:04:53,800 --> 00:04:58,240

missionary enterprise became leaders of
several organizations. The tone of their

56

00:04:58,240 --> 00:05:01,690

discourse range from social justice in
the political context of lyrical

57

00:05:01,690 --> 00:05:12,010

Christmas views without a link to the
country's social reality. From the P.C.W.I.E.A. Panama Canal, West Indian employees association to the
Wesleyan Methodist

58

00:05:12,010 --> 00:05:17,800

church social life was led by the model
we will rise and the black workers of

59

00:05:17,800 --> 00:05:22,690

the Panama Canal founded associations
event of the community. The Mellow Moon

60

00:05:22,690 --> 00:05:29,650

Company. The Esmean Entertainers. Leanora
Este was born in Trinidad in 1907. Her

61

00:05:29,650 --> 00:05:34,570

parents took her to Panama along with
her seven brothers. George P. Hinds was

62

00:05:34,570 --> 00:05:39,940

born in the city of Panama in 1909. As
a child he had lived near the site of

63

00:05:39,940 --> 00:05:44,320

Emperador, where one had to head for
protection whenever there was a dynamite

64

00:05:44,320 --> 00:05:49,210

explosion. Her mother worked at Las Cascadas School. A girl's whites-only

65

00:05:49,210 --> 00:05:54,310

facility. At lunchtime I would take a little from each tray because I thought

66

00:05:54,310 --> 00:05:58,450

that was what was done until my mother told me that she had received a huge

67

00:05:58,450 --> 00:06:05,460

bill. I learnt to play the piano, art, music, as all young ladies of the time did. She

68

00:06:05,460 --> 00:06:09,430

learned piano, singing and all the social skills of a well

69

00:06:09,430 --> 00:06:13,660

educated high-class girl. That education at the beginning of the century and will

70

00:06:13,660 --> 00:06:18,190

prepare her for her role in life from choreographer to play writer from

71

00:06:18,190 --> 00:06:23,080

member of the Panama Canal Red Cross to
member of the gardening society. Nora

72

00:06:23,080 --> 00:06:25,900

moved back and forth between the
boundaries of the silver-black

73

00:06:25,900 --> 00:06:31,930

population to the white-gold inhabitants
of the Panama Canal. As a young man,

74

00:06:31,930 --> 00:06:37,060

George P. Hinds and George Sports he
later became a trainer in athletics but

75

00:06:37,060 --> 00:06:42,520

theatre was his passion. As a married
couple, George, Nora, and her siblings founded

76

00:06:42,520 --> 00:06:46,840

a company that traveled and excessively
throughout the 30's, among colored towns and

77

00:06:46,840 --> 00:06:51,520

white club houses and the best local
entertainment centers. The Tabouli Hotel,

78

00:06:51,520 --> 00:06:56,200

The Cotton Club in Colón and finally
societies and lodges for better

79

00:06:56,200 --> 00:07:01,270

Negroes in the US Harlem New York and
other parts of the world. Always looking

80

00:07:01,270 --> 00:07:05,560

towards Africa. [Equin] the Harlem
Renaissance The Cotton Club was founded

81

00:07:05,560 --> 00:07:09,910

in the Atlantic City of Colón also
called the Gold Coast, The Port of Entry

82

00:07:09,910 --> 00:07:14,740

for West Indians. The Vaudeville Theater

turned into the thematic and

83

00:07:14,740 --> 00:07:19,150

representations of the fashionable in
New York. The Heart of Dixie Land, The

84

00:07:19,150 --> 00:07:23,920

Bold Front and Reflected the same
structural complexity. Live band music,

85

00:07:23,920 --> 00:07:30,190

drama, music and dances, comics skits and
even a boxing program before or after

86

00:07:30,190 --> 00:07:35,590

since at the time the champion Panama Al
Brown traveled to Paris and developed in

87

00:07:35,590 --> 00:07:39,970

the cultural environment and witty
dialogues live in Kentucky plantations

88

00:07:39,970 --> 00:07:44,350

is equal to the hard work and hurting
discrimination of the workers who built

89

00:07:44,350 --> 00:07:50,380

the canal between 1904 and 1914.

Panamanian Vaudeville becomes a part of the

90

00:07:50,380 --> 00:07:57,520

global experience of black students

slavery. The spaces of no memory from

91

00:07:57,520 --> 00:08:01,870

cultural center to ghost town, red tank

is an example of the evolution of towns

92

00:08:01,870 --> 00:08:06,160

throughout the Canal Zone. The US Army

created it as barracks for single

93

00:08:06,160 --> 00:08:10,330

soldiers and later moved west Indian

workers to the site. It became a cultural

94

00:08:10,330 --> 00:08:14,920

center where the workers unions of the
Isthmian Canal Commission met and where

95

00:08:14,920 --> 00:08:18,700

churches held cultural events it became
one of the main venues for the

96

00:08:18,700 --> 00:08:24,280

performances.

By a paradoxical logic the spaces where

97

00:08:24,280 --> 00:08:28,240

suffering, pain, and segregation took
place will come in the Vaudeville

98

00:08:28,240 --> 00:08:33,219

experience in spaces of culture. The
tour's up and down the Panama Canal Zone

99

00:08:33,219 --> 00:08:38,800

club houses, towns, and cultural venues
became the new scenario where the Negroes

100

00:08:38,800 --> 00:08:43,599

could regain identity. The
smashing success and popularity allowed

101

00:08:43,599 --> 00:08:47,920

the troopers to break the separation at
least during the hours when swing and

102

00:08:47,920 --> 00:08:53,790

plays happened. The troopers broaden their
scope from the colored towns Silver City

103

00:08:53,790 --> 00:09:02,830

Cristóvão, Arcoiris, Gamboa, [Atereso],
Pedro Miguel, Red Tank, La Boca to the big

104

00:09:02,830 --> 00:09:10,360

band hotels Tivoli and Washington. When
the construction was over in 1914 the

105

00:09:10,360 --> 00:09:15,250

migration to the United States began and
it was organized by groups, families, and

106

00:09:15,250 --> 00:09:20,920

societies using the method called Susu
Brotherhood. The one that led the

107

00:09:20,920 --> 00:09:24,790

movement to Harlem to prepare the path
for the rest that will migrate in the

108

00:09:24,790 --> 00:09:31,810

future. According to Watkins and blood
relations upon completion of the Panama

109

00:09:31,810 --> 00:09:36,550

Canal construction the Silver Man meets
Jim Crow and immigrants to the United

110

00:09:36,550 --> 00:09:41,770

States especially to Harlem. [In the limbo]
that occurred because they were neither

111

00:09:41,770 --> 00:09:47,020

US citizens nor Panamanians, it was the

culture that gave them space when in

112

00:09:47,020 --> 00:09:52,240

decree number 83 of 1931 bans the
entrance of immigrants, the theatrical

113

00:09:52,240 --> 00:09:57,790

companies were not affected by the
decree. The big swing bands [Fred Ramdeen]

114

00:09:57,790 --> 00:10:03,220

had seasonal events but also live music
programs. He was an Indian descendant and

115

00:10:03,220 --> 00:10:07,510

had been born in Trinidad. He came with
his parents and siblings to Panama at

116

00:10:07,510 --> 00:10:11,620

the beginning of the 20th century.
Instead of embracing the Commerce as the

117

00:10:11,620 --> 00:10:17,950

rest of the Indian community, he decided
to be a musician. Carnival, ballroom shows,

118

00:10:17,950 --> 00:10:21,970

and orchestra competitions were followed
in the press. During the 30's

119

00:10:21,970 --> 00:10:26,050

Vaudeville and variety companies travel
throughout the canal sun with pieces

120

00:10:26,050 --> 00:10:29,830

echoing the contemporary one to the
United States. The Transatlantic

121

00:10:29,830 --> 00:10:34,740

connection was a corridor of cultural
influences. The West Indians live in the

122

00:10:34,740 --> 00:10:38,970

threshold of living to prove themselves,
achieving to better the community not

123

00:10:38,970 --> 00:10:42,630

only their community but also the
nations that have rejected them legally

124

00:10:42,630 --> 00:10:48,270

more than once. At the end, Vaudeville
was the act of reinsertion, the claim of

125

00:10:48,270 --> 00:10:55,410

identity the path to the hard-fought
battle of citizenship. Vaudeville companies

126

00:10:55,410 --> 00:10:59,820

totally embrace swing and orchestras
along with the troopers tour throughout

127

00:10:59,820 --> 00:11:04,590

Canal Zone towns. First among colored
ones and later among luxurious club

128

00:11:04,590 --> 00:11:09,930

houses and hotels. Ella Fitzgerald and
Duke Ellington's music inspired by Harlem

129

00:11:09,930 --> 00:11:14,370

dance companies totally occupied the
cultural scene. While the American

130

00:11:14,370 --> 00:11:19,080

population high-ranking members of the
armed forces and civilians transported

131

00:11:19,080 --> 00:11:23,850

everyday american life and encapsulated
self in it the west Indian community

132

00:11:23,850 --> 00:11:27,540

echoed the fights of Marcus Garvey's
universal Negro Improvement Association

133

00:11:27,540 --> 00:11:32,760

and created a connection that
transcended its borders. Frivolous tone

134

00:11:32,760 --> 00:11:36,600

contrasts with the solemnity of the
proposals for claiming human rights and

135

00:11:36,600 --> 00:11:41,970

a transplant of territory. Swing and
Vaudeville bettered and united immigrants

136

00:11:41,970 --> 00:11:47,430

from different islands. They sowed the
seeds of national music, local combos and

137

00:11:47,430 --> 00:11:52,890

the Isthmian adaptation of Calypso.
Almost a decade before [Terryhos Carter]

138

00:11:52,890 --> 00:11:56,640

agreement was signed, afro descendants
became part of a governmental

139

00:11:56,640 --> 00:12:02,850

organization and participated in many
aspects of culture, cinema, dance, theater,

140

00:12:02,850 --> 00:12:10,170

and music. The slogan was black and

indigenous people to the power. Towards

141

00:12:10,170 --> 00:12:14,760

the 70s in the now districts of the
canal area such as Paraiso and Pedro

142

00:12:14,760 --> 00:12:19,320

Miguel there appeared a second period of
Vaudeville theater but much more as a

143

00:12:19,320 --> 00:12:23,970

form of consciousness and pride and
ethnic roots. This arrow was similar to

144

00:12:23,970 --> 00:12:29,010

the Black Power movement in the US with
the intent of accomplishing model we

145

00:12:29,010 --> 00:12:36,000

will rise. Towards 1980 when the American
school system in Panama was closed, the

146

00:12:36,000 --> 00:12:39,690

new wave of migration of African
descendants to the USA continued

147

00:12:39,690 --> 00:12:43,770

the cultural transatlantic connection.

[...]

148

00:12:44,950 --> 00:12:51,550

In the novel "Banana Bottom" written in 1921
by Claude McKay, a Jamaican who was

149

00:12:51,550 --> 00:12:55,750

militant with the universal Negro
Improvement Association in Harlem. He

150

00:12:55,750 --> 00:13:00,520

mentions the wise men of Panama who
survived the hell of Lasaniya, the Panama

151

00:13:00,520 --> 00:13:06,910

Canal. Today the poets of Panamanian
afro-descendants spin the globe. Some are

152

00:13:06,910 --> 00:13:11,560

born in New York, some had been residents
in Africa, or live in Central America,

153

00:13:11,560 --> 00:13:16,090

some had completed the ellipses and have
returned the Caribbean islands. They

154

00:13:16,090 --> 00:13:20,860

claim to the Panamanians, they now have
more than one citizenship. This spirit of

155

00:13:20,860 --> 00:13:25,840

brotherhood is kept in culture and music.
The swing and the Vaudeville patch the

156

00:13:25,840 --> 00:13:29,760

path to break the segregation.