



The New York Public Library
Photographs and Prints Division. Schomburg Center for
Research in Black Culture

Guide to the

George Westerman photographs

1921-1989

SCP 186080

Processed by Stacey Ference in 2022.

Summary

Creator: Westerman, George W.

Title: George Westerman photographs

Date: 1921-1989

Size: 6.92 linear feet (15 boxes, 2 tubes)

Source: A gift to the New York Public library by in Mrs. Ruth Russell and family in 1989; transferred to the Prints and Photographs division in 1996 and 2002.

Abstract: George Washington Westerman (1910-1988) was a West Indian Panamanian journalist, sociologist, and diplomat. This collection includes the photographic materials separated from the George Westerman papers collection, consisting of photographs, negatives, newspaper stereotype mats, printing plates, promotional materials, clippings, brief correspondence, ID cards, and business cards.

Preferred citation: George Westerman photographs, Photographs and Prints Division. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library

Language of the Material: Multiple languages English and Spanish.

Processing note: Processed by Stacey Ference in 2022.

Separated Materials:

Photographs transferred from George W. Westerman papers in Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books, Schomburg Center.

Creator History

This biographical note was written by Janice Quinter in 2002 for the George Westerman papers collection. It has been condensed to fit this collection.

Journalist, sociologist, and diplomat, George Washington Westerman was a Panamanian of West

Indian origin and has been identified with almost every major social, cultural, civic and labor struggle, particularly those affecting people of West Indian descent on the Isthmus, dating to the 1940s. Westerman served as a bridge between Panamanian West Indians, the American managers of the Canal Zone, and the Panamanians. He waged a relentless battle against social inequities and discriminatory racial practices in all fields.

Born in Colon, Panama February 22, 1910, of a Barbadian father and a St. Lucian mother, Westerman, like many other West Indian Panamanians of his generation, had a limited formal education. He attended the Canal Zone Elementary School at La Boca (the West Indian district) between 1916 and 1920 through third grade. From 1920 until 1923, he was tutored by Samuel A. Inniss, one of the leaders in the 1920 strike of West Indian workers against the Canal Zone government. Westerman described himself as being largely self-taught and a prolific reader, especially of history and black literature; he also took correspondence courses. Although he did not marry, he maintained close, active communication with his family, helping many of them pursue their education and career goals, particularly that of Rex Williams, Westerman's nephew and fellow journalist.

Westerman's secretarial and stenographic skills won him clerical jobs on the Panama Canal Zone, which was unusual for a man of West Indian descent. Between 1925 and 1928 he was a messenger and office helper for the Transportation Division of the Supply Department for the Panama Canal Company. From 1928 to 1943 he worked for the Compañía Panameña de Fuerza y Luz (the Panama Power and Light Company) as a typist/stenographer and secretary to the assistant treasurer. He later went on to become the chief of the Steno-Typist section for this same company. From 1943 until 1956 he served as secretary to the superintendent of the National Brewery. It was here Westerman met Ernesto de la Guardia, Jr., future president of Panama (1956-1960). The two men became close political allies.

Westerman's primary profession was journalism. He began his career at age sixteen as the sports contributor to *The Panama American*. He also worked for *The Star* and *Herald*, a daily, the black weekly *The Workman*, writing under the pen name "The Greek" and was a columnist for *The Panama American* from 1932 to 1941. From 1928 until 1932 he was the sports editor for *The Panama Tribune*, established in 1928 by a group of West Indian workers. This English language weekly, with a circulation of 8000, was the voice of the West Indian community and a vehicle for protesting the denial of social justice to thousands of non-U. S. citizens working for the American government on the Canal Zone. By 1938, Westerman had become associate editor of *The Panama Tribune*, and when the founder, Sidney Young, died in 1959, Westerman purchased the paper from his widow, thus becoming the owner and editor. He wrote an editorial "The Passing Review" at least as early as 1935 and continued to contribute columns to the paper. Due to economic considerations and differences with the military government then in power, the newspaper folded in 1973. Prior to and following *The Panama Tribune's* collapse, Westerman wrote for other Panamanian newspapers as well as for the American *Miami Herald* and *Dix New Media* of Ohio. He was a member of the Inter American Press Association, a Latin American and United States professional organization, and served as its regional vice president of the Freedom of the Press Committee from 1964-1970.

Westerman gained national prominence as a tennis player. In 1936 and 1938 he won both the singles and doubles titles in the Panamanian National Tennis Championship under the auspices of the National Olympic Committee, and in 1938 he was a member of the tennis team representing Panama in the IV Central American and Caribbean Olympiad.

Westerman frequently used cultural programs as a method of fostering pride and educating Panamanian youth about the accomplishments of their African heritage. In 1942 he was one of the leading figures in the founding of the Isthmian Negro Youth Congress (INYC), an organization comprised of

Panamanians of West Indian descent. He served as director of the Bulletin and wrote the introduction for a pamphlet entitled *An Exhibit on the Races of Mankind*, which the INYC published. In the mid 1940s he chaired the Intercultural Committee of the INYC, bringing top African-American entertainers to perform in Panama, including William Allen, Todd Duncan, Hazel Lawson, Philippa Schuyler, William Grant Still and Florizelle Wilson. The INYC also sponsored the first Negro History Week observance on the Isthmus.

Applying his talent as an impresario, in 1949 he founded and became the director of Westerman Concerts, an agency which sponsored performances in Panama of Marian Anderson, William Warfield, and *Porgy and Bess*, in addition to many other entertainers. He operated this agency until 1956, when other responsibilities became the focus of his attention.

Westerman became actively involved in politics in the 1940s. Using his influence in the community, he organized the membership of the National Civic League to lobby the Constitutional Assembly to amend the 1941 Constitution. This Constitution had effectively denationalized Panamanian born children of foreign parents by requiring that they pass a test on the history and other aspects of Panama after coming of age before Panamanian citizenship would be granted. Through his editorials and other columns in *The Panama Tribune*, Westerman urged his readers to seek the passage of this amendment. Although his objective had been an amendment which would restore full citizenship, the 1946 amendment only bestowed conditional citizenship to the affected groups. It was not until 1960, with the passage of the "Bazan Amendment" enacted under President Roberto Chiari, that the right of full citizenship from birth was restored. Another issue Westerman protested was the Panamanian Immigration Law of 1948 which forced African Americans and other "prohibited peoples" who wished to visit Panama to pay a deposit of \$500 to guarantee their return to their country of origin. This was in contrast to white visitors who only had to pay a deposit of \$150.

Westerman's full immersion into party politics occurred during the 1956 presidential election when he supported the candidacy of his friend, Ernesto de la Guardia, for president. Westerman joined the National Patriotic Coalition Party and organized the West Indian community to participate in the national election. He was in charge of the employment section of the party and recommended hundreds of West Indians for jobs. He also distributed food, gasoline and other favors to win votes for his candidate. As a reward for this crucial support for his successful election, de la Guardia appointed Westerman a delegate with the rank of ambassador (Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary) to the General Assembly of the United Nations, where he served from 1956 to 1960.

Westerman was the first Panamanian of West Indian parentage to enter Panama's diplomatic service. His advocacy of minority rights resulted in his serving on the Fourth Committee of the United Nations General Assembly which dealt with independence for non-self-governing territories and the self-determination of emerging African and Caribbean nations. In this capacity, he prepared statements for the independence of South West Africa (now called Namibia) and Togoland (presently Togo). He attended the independence celebrations of Ghana, Cameroon, Chad, Nigeria, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago as well as the presidential inaugurations of William V. S. Tubman of Liberia, and John F. Kennedy of the United States. Following the death of Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld, Westerman was considered, among others, as a candidate for the position. In 1967 the Panamanian government appointed Westerman Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary in order to achieve diplomatic relations with the new Caribbean nations and to support their admittance to the Organization of American States. He was also appointed honorary Consul to Barbados while in Panama, a position he held in 1968 and 1969.

Westerman's formal attempt to improve the West Indian Panamanian situation in regard to United States-Panamanian relations dates to at least the early 1950s when he appeared before a Panamanian

Negotiating Commission in Washington and described racially discriminatory practices on the Canal Zone and treaty violations. Westerman also researched a strongly worded petition presented to Vice President Henry A. Wallace condemning the dual system under which non-U. S. citizens worked for the federal government. Wallace promised to conduct a personal investigation into the charges made. Using his contacts in the United States, he sought support from politicians such as U. S. Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., who in 1952 read a speech Westerman had given regarding relations between the United States and Panama that focused on some of the tensions between the two countries, into the Congressional Record. Negotiations for the 1955 treaty included discussions concerning discrepancies in wages and retirement plans.

Labor issues as they affected workers on the Canal Zone was another area in which Westerman exercised his considerable personal and political influence. In the late 1940s *The Panama Tribune*, via Westerman and others, took the initiative in organizing the committee that fought for a new CIO union to represent non-U. S. workers on the Canal Zone to replace a local of the United Public Workers of America, which was reportedly under Communist control. Additionally, he supported a 1960 bill to increase cash relief payments for retired employees of the Panama Canal Company, and was chairman of the Scholarship Committee of the National Maritime Union, which provided scholarships to over sixty children of members to attend any accredited high school in Panama.

In 1950 Westerman achieved international recognition when he presented a paper about West Indians as a minority group in Panama before the First International Congress of Sociologists and Political Scientists in Zurich, Switzerland. Following that experience, he regularly attended conferences dealing with the Pan-American Highway, mass media in society, blacks in the Americas, immigration, and Catholic women in Panama, among other topics. Westerman traveled in the United States where he gave speeches about the history of West Indians in Panama, business possibilities in Panama, and other timely issues affecting his country. Westerman served as chairman or treasurer of numerous civic, cultural and educational organizations in Panama, and was a member of many learned societies such as the American Sociological Society and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. He received numerous decorations, awards and citations granted by both Panama and international bodies for a variety of services in the furtherance of human rights and the fostering of international goodwill. In 1953 he was awarded Panama's highest honor, the Vasco Núñez de Balboa de Panama decoration, and also received an honorary Doctorate of Humanities from Philathea College in Canada, and the Honor of Merit from Haiti. This man of distinction died on August 31, 1988 in the Colon Old Folks Home after a long illness.

Scope and Content Note

This collection consists of materials separated from the George Westerman papers. It contains photographs (some of which are autographed and dedicated to Westerman), negatives, newspaper stereotype mats, printing plates, promotional materials, clippings, brief correspondence, ID cards, and business cards. Topics include subjects Westerman covered as a journalist with accompanying text (with special notice on the Panama canal and United Nations), conferences and events attended by Westerman, his Westerman Concerts organization and the celebrities that took part in it, and personal photographs. Black and white photographs make up the majority of the collection. The date is uncertain on about half of the collection materials.

Arrangement: Materials are collected into three groups: General, Professional, and Personal. These are the groupings that the three materials were placed in when they were separated from the papers.

Key Terms

Subjects

Ambassadors -- Panama
Black people -- Panama -- Canal Zone
Journalists -- Panama
West Indians

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Black-and-white photographs
Color photographs
Negatives (photographs)
Newspapers

Occupations

Journalists.

Names

Anderson, Marian, 1897-1993
Westerman, George W.
Westerman Concerts (Firm)

Container List

General

- b. 1 f. 1 Marian Anderson 1952-1958
- b. 1 f. 2-3 Awards
- b. 1 f. 4 Errol Barrow, Prime Minister of Barbados 1966
- b. 1 f. 5 Black Business Professionals
- b. 1 f. 6 Canal Zone Laborers / West Indian Commemorative Stamp 1951
- b. 15 f. 1
- b. 1 f. 7-8 Conciertos Westerman -- Hazel Scott 1954
- b. 1 f. 9 Conciertos Westerman -- Emily Butcher 1949-1989
- b. 1 f. 10 Dedication of Parque Sidney A. Young circa 1966
- b. 1 f. 11 Entertainers
- b. 2 f. 1-6 Events 1955-1968
- b. 3 f. 1-2
- b. 3 f. 3 Events -- Annual Governor's Prayer Breakfast -- Curundi, Canal Zone 1966
February 8
- b. 3 f. 4 Events -- Unidentified Social Event
- b. 3 f. 5 Events without George Westerman 1960
- b. 3 f. 6 High School and Junior College Buildings
- b. 3 f. 7 Kennedy Administration 1961-1963
- b. 3 f. 8 Liga Civica National 1950
- b. 3 f. 9 Los Angeles, California Visit
- b. 3 f. 10 Luncheon/Dinners/Receptions 1967-1970
- b. 3 f. 11 Thurgood Marshall
- b. 3 f. 12 Meetings/Ceremonies 1956-1969
- b. 3 f. 13 Miscellaneous 1952-1960
- b. 3 f. 14-15 Negatives
- b. 4 f. 1
- b. 4 f. 2-3 Panama Canal Construction 1921-1962
- b. 4 f. 4 Panama Canal Construction -- West Indian Laborers 1936-1964
- b. 4 f. 5 Personalities
- b. 4 f. 6 Philathea College Presentation
- b. 4 f. 7 State Funeral 1955
- b. 15 f. 2-4 Untitled General
- b. 4 f. 8 Robert C. Weaver 1962
- b. 4 f. 9 Westerman Collection Acquisitions 1987 Howard Dodson and Roy S. Bryce-Laporte 1987

Professional

- b. 4 f. 10 Cabinete del ex-Presidente Robles
- b. 4 f. 11-12 Conciertos Westerman 1945-1951
- b. 5 f. 1-2
- b. 5 f. 3 Conferences: SIP HIAPA SIDI General Assemblies 1963-1967
- b. 5 f. 4 Introduction of Governor Robert J. Fleming as a member of American International Academy

Professional (cont.)

- b. 5 f. 5-6 Events circa 1955-1969
- b. 6 f. 1-2
 - b. 6 f. 3 Events -- Luncheon -- Honor of Westerman 1970
 - b. 6 f. 4 Events -- Panamanian Journalists
 - t. 1 Honorary Citizen of New Orleans Certificate 1960
 - b. 6 f. 5 Labor Unions -- Panama
 - b. 6 f. 6 Richard M. Nixon Visit to Panama
Panama Tribune
- b. 6 f. 7-13 1945-1976
- b. 7 f. 1-3
 - b. 7 f. 4 Ralph Abernathy
 - b. 7 f. 5 Martin Luther King, Jr
 - b. 7 f. 6 Carlos A. Mendoza
 - b. 7 f. 7 Photos Used For 1945-1965
 - b. 7 f. 8 Claude Lio. Walker
 - b. 7 f. 9 Westerman and Office Staff
- b. 7 f. 10 Panama Canal Commission
- b. 8 f. 1 Personalities 1949-1961
- b. 8 f. 2 Printing Plates
- b. 8 f. 3 *The Sunday Republic* 1984
- b. 8 f. 4-5 United Nations 1954-1960
- b. 8 f. 6 Visit of Panamanian President-Elect to Haiti
- b. 8 f. 7 Preston Wilcox 1973
- b. 8 f. 8 With New York City Mayor Robert F. Wagner
- b. 8 f. 9 With New York City Governor Averell Harriman 1956
- b. 9 f. 1-7 Untitled Professional Photographs circa 1930-1985
- b. 10 f. 1-8
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Personal

- b. 11 f. 7 Emily Butcher 1950
- b. 15 f. 9
- Family
- b. 11 f. 8 1976
- b. 12 f. 1 Ethel Springer
- b. 12 f. 2 Ethel Springer's Death / Westerman Family with Company Executives circa 1962
- b. 12 f. 3-5 Ethel Springer's Funeral 1962
- b. 12 f. 6 Social Gathering
- b. 12 f. 7 Rosina Westerman
- b. 12 f. 8-14 Friends/Family circa 1923-1979
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- b. 13 f. 8 Leisure Activities
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- b. 15 f. 11
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- b. 14 f. 7 **George Westerman with Friends** circa 1936-1973
- b. 14 f. 8 **Sidney A. Young** 1946
- b. 14 f. 9 **Untitled Personal Photographs** 1953-1960
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