

"Sidney Young, the *Panama Tribune*, and the Geography of Black Belonging"

Lara Putnam, Dept. of History, University of Pittsburgh LEP12@pitt.edu

Presented on panel: "Space, Empire, and the Panama Canal," American Historical Association Annual Meeting, Washington DC, January 3, 2014

Often marginal in the historiography of international black radicalism, Panama in the interwar era was more nearly at its core. As British Caribbean migrants moved outward from their home islands at the start of the twentieth century, they created a vibrant transnational culture. Central to it was a flourishing circum-Caribbean press, comprised of papers owned, edited, and read by men and women of color in Grenada, Barbados, Trinidad, Jamaica, Costa Rica—and Panama. Quotations and subscriptions linked readers at all these sites to the U.S. "Negro Press" of Chicago, Pittsburgh, and New York. The peripheral black press offered colonials of color a panoramic view of the evolving geopolitics of white supremacy: and a place to debate what could be done in response.

One tireless campaigner in the circum-Caribbean press was Sidney Adolphus Young (b. Jamaica, 1898, d. Panama, 1959). Young nurtured an unprecedented flowering of black journalism in Panama as the editor of the *Panama Times's* "West Indian Page" from 1926 to 1927 and subsequently as founder and editor of the *Panama Tribune*, which he founded in 1928. For the next three decades, the *Tribune* under Young's editorship would function both as a staging ground for local activism and as a window onto the wider "Coloured World." Young defined himself as both a "loyal Britisher" and a West Indian nationalist, as an anti-Communist and an anti-racist, as a man dedicated to his own "Negro Race" and as a champion of all "coloured peoples" from Japan to India to Cape Town. The *Panama Tribune's* global vision meant that even when readers found themselves at the margins of Panamanian national belonging, they could understand themselves to be at the center of a community of struggle that was far, far bigger.

Sidney Adolphus Young was born in Kingston, Jamaica, on 22 December 1898.¹ His father, Thaddeus Augustus Young, was a cabinetmaker and furniture dealer and his mother, Sarah Elizabeth (née Webb) the daughter of a farmer. The family relocated to Panama in 1906, part of the wave that brought eighty thousand Jamaicans, forty thousand Barbadians, and tens of thousands of other British Caribbean islanders to seek opportunity on the isthmus as canal construction under U.S. government control began in 1904. Like many middle-class emigrants, the Youngs sent their son back to Kingston for

¹ An abbreviated version of this paper has been submitted to the *Dictionary of Caribbean and Afro-Latin Biography*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Franklin W. Knight (New York: Oxford University Press).

primary school, which he completed at West Branch Elementary School from 1908 to 1911, followed by private studies in Classics and Social Sciences.²

Young returned to the isthmus in his late teens, finding work as a messenger in the U.S.-controlled Canal Zone. By 1920 the British West Indian population of the Zone totaled some ten thousand, while those residing in the adjacent Republic of Panama numbered another thirty to forty thousand, clustered in Colón (the canal's Atlantic terminus) and Panama City (the Pacific terminus). Within the Canal Zone, white U.S. citizens were assigned to the "gold roll," with high wages and highly subsidized lifestyles; non-white workers were relegated to the "silver roll," paid a fraction of "gold" workers' wages and limited to subordinate positions. Housing, schools, and recreational spaces were strictly segregated and social deference expected from any person of color interacting with any white American.³

Young soon left his position in the Zone, and would never work there again. By 1916 he was employed as a "printer's devil" at the Central American Printing Co., and over the next few years would work as well for a local mercantile company and as a baker. He also dived into Panama City's British West Indian-led civic life, playing baseball and joining the Baden-Powell Boy Scouts movement, which surged at the initiative of Afro-Caribbean men who had served in the British West Indies Regiment and returned to the isthmus after the Great War. Young founded the Isthmian Baseball League in 1918 and remained active as an organizer even after an injury to one eye ended his playing days.⁴ In 1924 he was among the small group of Scouters who traveled to Wembley Park, outside London, for the Scouts' Imperial Jamboree. He remained a leading supporter of isthmian scouting for the next three decades.⁵ In 1926 he married Mita Spencer, locally born daughter of a businessman prominent in Panama's British West Indian community. The couple would raise one son, David Antonio Young, and an adoptive daughter, Claudina Wilson.⁶

² "Young, Sidney Adolphus," in *Who's Who 1941-1946, Jamaica, British West Indies*, ed. L. A. Thoywell-Henry (Kingston, Jamaica: n.p., 1946), 657; "Jamaican Founder of Panama Tribune Dies," *Kingston Daily Gleaner*, May 29, 1959, p. 2; "Sudden Passing of Sidney Young Stuns Nation," *Panama Tribune*, May 24, 1959, p. 1, 19.

³ Michael Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal: West Indians in Panama, 1904-1980* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1985); George W. Westerman, *Los inmigrantes antillanos en Panamá* (Panama: n.p., 1980).

⁴ "Sid Young as Baseball Pioneer," *Panama Tribune*, May 24, 1959, p. 9; "Nation Grieved over Sudden Passing of Sidney Young," *Panama Tribune*, May 24, 1959, p. 19.

⁵ *Ibid.*; "Panama Scouts for Jamboree in England," *Kingston Daily Gleaner*, June 2, 1924, p. 2; Lara Putnam, "To Study the Fragments/Whole: Microhistory and the Atlantic World," *Journal of Social History* 39, no. 3 (Spring 2006): 615-30; Lara Putnam, "Citizenship from the Margins: Vernacular Theories of Rights and the State from the Interwar Caribbean." Forthcoming, *Journal of British Studies* 53, no. 1 (2014).

⁶ Floyd G. Snelson, "Harlem: Negro Capital of the Nation," *New York Age* Sept. 16, 1939, p 7; "Panama Editor To Visit In U.S.," *Chicago Defender*, Apr. 20, 1946, p. 18; A.

Sidney Young's career in journalism took off in the same years. He served as proofreader and then assistant manager of the *Central American News* from 1924 to 1925, reporter for the *Panama Star & Herald* from 1925 to 1926, and cable editor of the *Panama American* from 1926 to 1928. At the latter paper he persuaded the (white, American) editor to add a daily "West Indian Page" with Young as editor. It quickly became a vital forum for community news and debate, so much so that when the publisher threatened to eliminate the section in April 1927, donations flowed in unbidden to sustain it.⁷

Here as later, Young created a space that blended communal, national, and geopolitical commentary that reflected the multiple layers of identification that shaped his readers' lives: migrants far from island homes, long-time residents an increasingly hostile host nation; U.S. government employees immersed in Jim Crow; subjects of the British Empire; members of the "Great Negro Race." The daily West Indian Page printed news of personal events and civic doings from the "Zone Towns" as well as Panama City and Colón; articles excerpted from U.S. Negro press; contributions by eager men (and a handful of women) of the local West Indian community; wry commentaries by Young under the title "Sid Says"; formal editorials; and readers' letters commenting on all of the above and more.⁸

These were difficult years. In a series of anti-immigrant bills beginning in 1926, the Panamanian congress classed non-Spanish-speaking blacks as an "undesirable race" barred from citizenship, banned further immigration, and restricted employment. Meanwhile Canal Zone wages, nominally set at subsistence level, covered less and less as prices rose. A 1920 strike on the Zone had collapsed in the face of brutal repression and the abdication of support by the union's U.S. affiliate.⁹ For the next two decades the Panama Canal West Indian Employee Association was the sole representative of workers' interests on the Zone, and had no weapon beyond moral suasion; still, Young

M. Wendell Malliet, "Bias, Few Jobs Harass Panama: Plan Political Fight," *New York Amsterdam News*, Dec. 9, 1950, p. 7.

⁷ "Started On 'Armistice Day' 1928, the Tribune Enters its Own Plant on 'Emancipation Day' 1936," *Panama Tribune*, Aug. 2, 1936, p. 15; Rachel Gately, "Black Internationalism in Panama: Sidney Young as a 'Forgotten Editor,' 1928-1950" (undergraduate honors thesis, University of Pittsburgh Department of History, Spring 2013).

⁸ Lara Putnam, "Provincializing Harlem: The 'Negro Metropolis' as Northern Frontier of a Connected Caribbean," *Modernism/modernity* 20, no. 3 (September 2013): 469-84; Lara Putnam, "The Rising Tide of Color: Print Circuits and Peripheral Internationalisms in the Interwar Era," in *Print Culture Histories Beyond the Metropolis*, ed. James Connolly (under review).

⁹ See discussion in Conniff, *Black Labor*; Michael L. Conniff, "George Westerman: A Barbadian Descendant in Panama," in *The Human Tradition in Latin America*, ed. William Beezley and Judith Ewell, 141-150 (Wilmington DE: Scholarly Resources, 1987).

exhorted workers to join and seek strength in unity. Likewise Young's editorials urged urged readers to transcend island rivalries and respond with one voice to Panama's anti-immigrant legislation. Whether the community's vast array of fraternal lodges and friendly societies was evidence of organization or "insularity" stirred constant debate on the pages.¹⁰

The civic organization that drew most support among isthmian West Indians, though inspiring dissent as well, was the Universal Negro Improvement Association. Founded in in New York 1917 by Jamaican Marcus Garvey, *circa* 1925 the UNIA had three dozen branches in Panamanian territory and two in the Canal Zone.¹¹ Sidney Young was among the delegation allowed to meet with Garvey (who was forbidden to disembark) as Garvey's boat stopped in Panama during his deportation from the United States to Jamaica in 1927.¹² Young wrote at length of the encounter, describing Garvey as a "magnificent failure," whose shortcomings mattered less than his ideological impact.¹³

In 1928 Young published *Isthmian Echoes: A Selection of the Literary Endeavors of the West Indian Colony in the Republic of Panama, from Articles Contributed to the West Indian Section of the Panama American from February 1926 to December 1927*.

Intended as celebration, the volume arrived as valediction, for in May 1928, Young left the *Panama American* when its new editor told him he would never pay Young the same as a white man. Undaunted, Young borrowed and mobilized and on 11 November 1928 published the first issue of his own weekly newspaper, the *Panama Tribune*.¹⁴

Young had dedicated *Isthmian Echoes* "To the unity, welfare and progress of the West Indian community in the Republic of Panama, and to the advancement of colored people throughout the world," and the same dual commitment to the community and the race animated the *Tribune* from the start.

Young's politics cannot be pigeonholed. He denounced the injustice wrought by capitalism but was firmly anti-communist. He championed "race consciousness" but eschewed "racial chauvinism." Despite Young's own skepticism, he published countless

¹⁰ E.g. Sidney A. Young, "Federation and Unity," *Panama Tribune*, Jan. 13, 1928, p. 16.

¹¹ Robert A. Hill, "Introduction," in *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, Caribbean Series, vol. 11: *The Caribbean Diaspora, 1910-1920* ed. Robert A. Hill et al. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Lara Putnam, *Radical Moves: Caribbean Migrants and the Politics of Race in the Jazz Age* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

¹² "Mr. Marcus Garvey Thrills Vast Throng in the Ward Theatre Last Night," *Kingston Daily Gleaner*, Dec. 12, 1927, p. 6.

¹³ Sidney A. Young, "Magnificent Failures," rpt. in Young, ed., *Isthmian Echoes: A Selection of the Literary Endeavors of the West Indian Colony in the Republic of Panama, from Articles Contributed to the West Indian Section of the Panama American from February 1926 to December 1927* (Panama: n.p., 1928), 254.

¹⁴ "Started on Armistice Day," *Panama Tribune*, Aug. 2, 1936, p. 15, 20; Jack Jamieson, "Turnovers," *Panama Tribune*, May 31, 1959, p. 12.

contributions from Garvey supporters, long past the movement's international decline and Garvey's death in 1940. Garveyism was just one strand of the black internationalism that suffused Young's pages, where columnists and letter-writers debated lessons to be drawn from anti-native policies in Britain's African colonies, followed NAACP lawsuits over segregation and voting rights, mourned distant lynchings and hailed distant achievements.¹⁵

Racism and anti-racism, Young insisted, were international issues. White Americans' "addiction" to the "theory of Nordic superiority" was building "walls of hatred" worldwide, he wrote in 1932. "The economic depression, the dispute between China and Japan, the race of armaments between the larger nations, and even the threatened collapse of capitalism and the menace of communism are not so potentially dangerous as this smouldering race hatred which is spreading to the farthest corner of the globe."¹⁶

The *Tribune* offered readers a place in the international debates of the era, while glossing those events as part of an ongoing and multi-sited struggle against injustice. In this struggle, the solidarity of the "Negro Race" would be crucial, but even more fundamental was the inherent solidarity of all peoples of color confronting the hypocrisy and violence of white dominion (in this echoing the political positioning scholar Nico Slate has labeled "coloured cosmopolitanism.")¹⁷

For instance, Young editorialized in 1932 that in the Massie trial in Honolulu, "the entire system of American jurisprudence, and the traditional racial prejudice of the American people, were on trial before the world."¹⁸ Such was the presumed international awareness of his readership that he could presume "the plain facts of the case" to be 'well known, and need no review here.' The U.S. white press had depicted Lieut. Massie and his fellow Anglos' murder of the native Hawaiian man suspected of assaulting Massie's wife as a crime "of honor." Young would not let the hypocrisy stand.

It must be admitted that the assaulting of a white woman in Honolulu by a native Hawaiian, is in no way more heinous than the assaulting of a black woman in the southern United States by white men, a practice which is notorious and which does not even arouse indignation much less invoke punishment. For the white newspapers to attach the qualification of "honor" to the Hawaiian slaying is too contemptible for words.¹⁹

¹⁵ Putnam, "Rising Tide of Color." On Young's consolidated public stature in this era, see, e.g., "Conference with West Indians on Isthmus," *Kingston Daily Gleaner*, Aug. 25, 1934, p. 19.

¹⁶ Sidney A. Young, "Walls of Hatred," *Panama Tribune*, Feb. 7, 1932, p. 8.

¹⁷ Nico Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

¹⁸ Sidney A. Young, "The Trial of Honolulu," *Panama Tribune*, May 1, 1932, p. 8.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Writing from Panama, for a local and regional readership whose own political and civic rights were shaky at best, Young did not hesitate in adopting an editorial voice that *owned* the global struggle against racism.

So long as a flagrant disregard for the law is allowed to continue, so long as personal vengeance and mob lynchings are upheld, regardless of the race or color of the victims, so long as unbridled passions are praised and justified, so long will disorder and the domination of gangsters and murderers continue. The Lindbergh kidnapping, the Massie case in Honolulu, while dissimilar, can find their genesis in the same cause: lack of respect for the law of the land.²⁰

The international optic the *Tribune* forged for its readers relied on excerpted and reprinted articles from the U.S. Negro press, as well as the major international metropolitan daily papers. As the *Tribune*'s stature rose, Young reached out and built two-way connections. Particularly important was the *Pittsburgh Courier*, the U.S. black paper with the largest circulation among British Caribbean communities in Central America and Jamaica.²¹

Young's focus on communal co-operation and economic self-help echoed resonated both with Garveyism and with the campaigns of Afro-American leaders in the United States, promulgated not only nationally but—largely unintentionally—internationally through the pages of the black press. When *Courier* columnist George Schuyler, working alongside pioneering Afro-American journalist and activist Ella Baker, founded the Young Negro Cooperative League in 1930, Sidney Young championed a parallel movement on the isthmus. "The problem of our people wherever domiciled is the same and the same solution should apply," wrote Young in a 1931 letter Schuyler published in the *Courier*.²² Consumer co-operatives like those the YNCL promoted, and a broader ethos of communal self-support, Young insisted, would be key to the community's progress.

Even as these particular organizations and enterprises proved ephemeral, Young's efforts to unite the potential of international alliances and local communal solidarity in the fight against racism and impoverishment endured. Over the 1930s and 1940s Young and the *Tribune*'s assistant editor, one-time sports reporter and future diplomat George W. Westerman, sustained personal contact with Schuyler, *Pittsburgh Courier* editor Robert L. Vann, Jamaica-born journalist and *Courier* New York editor J.A. Rogers, and other Afro-American pressmen. In turn, these writers made efforts to publicize within the United States the inequities of the "silver" and "gold" wage system and government-run

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ See Putnam, *Radical Moves*, Ch. 4; Putnam, "Provincializing Harlem."

²² George S. Schuyler, "Views and Reviews," *Pittsburgh Courier*, Oct 10, 1931, p. 10. Young would continue harping on these themes. See, among many, Sidney A. Young, Editorial, "Line Up Your Buying Power," *Panama Tribune*, Jan. 31, 1932, p. 8.

segregation in the Canal Zone.²³ An Afro-American journalist hosted by Young and Westerman while visiting Panama in 1939 described the *Tribune* for the readers of the *New York Age* as “the official mouthpiece of more than 50,000 Negroes living on the Isthmus of Panama” and Young himself as “one of the most forceful writers to wield a pen on the Isthmus... Fearless, daring and relentless fighter for the uplift and progress of his race” who “packs a wallop” with his “bristling news of things affecting the Negro all over the world.”²⁴

Young leaned into Panamanian politics as well, although not as directly as Westerman. Given the long history of migration, among Panama’s sixty thousand West Indians there were by the 1930s thousands of locally born “criollos” already eligible to vote. In 1932 the *Tribune* urged them to support Harmodio Arias, who Young and others hoped would halt the assault on the community’s rights.²⁵ The election of Arias’s brother Arnulfo to the presidency in 1940, however, brought the nadir of anti-immigrant legislation. Demanding “Panama for the Panamanians,” Arias sponsored a constitutional amendment that in 1941 stripped citizenship from locally born children of black immigrants. This provision was altered in 1946, but citizenship was still withheld until adulthood, and even then was contingent on proof of cultural assimilation.²⁶

²³ E.g. Victor T. Smith, “The R. L. Vanns Are Warmly Received On Coast Tour,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, Sept. 14, 1935, p. 6; “A White Panama Canal,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, Jan. 2, 1937, p. 10; Floyd G. Snelson, “Harlem: Negro Capital of the Nation,” *New York Age* Sept. 16, 1939, p. 7; George S. Schuyler, “America’s Canal Zone Policy Is a ‘Disgrace,’” *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 31, 1948, p. 1, 16; Photo caption, “Here’s Panama Billiken,” *Chicago Defender*, Oct 28, 1950, p. 24; A. M. Wendell Malliet, “Bias, Few Jobs Harass Panama: Plan Political Fight,” *New York Amsterdam News*, Dec. 9, 1950, p. 7; “Newsman From Central America” (with photo of Young as “guest of honor” at gathering including Judge James S. Watson; Staley Ross, managing editor, *Amsterdam News*; Reginald Pierrepointe, and others), *New York Amsterdam News*, Dec. 9, 1950, p. 28. See also C. G. Whittingham, “Panamanians Tell Wallace Of Their Zeal For Democracy,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, Apr. 17, 1943, p. 5. Whittingham was a regular *Tribune* contributor, based in Colón, who (as in this case) published articles in the *Pittsburgh Courier* as Panama correspondent as well. Similarly, see “Panama Negro Weekly Celebrates 20 Years,” *New York Amsterdam News*, Nov. 27, 1948, p. 3, crediting an unnamed Associated Negro Press stringer based in Colón, who almost certainly would have been a *Tribune* writer.

²⁴ Floyd G. Snelson, “Harlem: Negro Capital of the Nation,” *New York Age*, Sept. 16, 1939, p. 7.

²⁵ Sidney A. Young, Editorial, “Political Issue,” *Panama Tribune*, Jan. 17, 1932, p. 8.

²⁶ Kaysha Corinealdi, “Redefining Home: West Indian Panamanians and Transnational Politics of Race, Citizenship, and Diaspora, 1928-1970” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 2011); Trevor O’Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship: The Evolution of Black West Indian Society in Panama, 1914-1964* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2006); George Priestley, “Race and Nationalism in Panama: George Westerman and the Antillean Question, 1941-1960,” *Wadabagei: A Journal of the Caribbean & Its Diasporas* 7, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2004): 1-58.

By the 1940s the *Tribune*'s weekly circulation surpassed 8,000 copies. Ninety percent sold in Panama's cities and the Canal Zone. (The English-speaking black population of the isthmus totaled around 65,000 by this time.) The remainder circulated as far afield as Liberia, Nigeria, the Gold Coast, Egypt, England, Australia, and Japan. The bulk of overseas subscribers, however, resided in the British West Indian communities of Costa Rica and Harlem and in the British Caribbean colonies themselves. Every issue reported "News from the West Indies."²⁷

Cooperation among British West Indian colonies was crucial, argued Young, just like cooperation among British West Indians on the isthmus. As demands for political reform mounted on the islands, British officials and democratic reformers agreed that self-government would require regional federation. In September 1947, progressive supporters of federation gathered at the Caribbean Labour Conference in Kingston, Jamaica in advance of the British-sponsored Caribbean Federation Conference in Montego Bay. Young attended, spending time with Barbadian future prime minister Grantley Adams, Trinidadian legislator Albert Gomes, Harlem tycoon and chair of the American Committee for West Indian Federation Augustine A. Austin, and others.²⁸

In the same years, Young and other black leaders sought to turn U.S. concern over potential Soviet manipulation of "anti-American sentiment" into action against Canal Zone discrimination. Yet Cold War politics brought limits as well as leverage. A new union formed in 1946 as Local 713 of the United Public Workers of America, affiliated with the CIO, received the kind of mass support from the Zone's 14,000 non-white workers that Young had long been calling for. Yet, convinced that the UPWA organizers sent from the United States were Communist sympathizers, Young and Westerman threw the *Tribune* into undermining them, and worked with Canal Zone and Panamanian authorities to achieve their ouster in 1949.²⁹

Both the strategies Young and allies pursued and the constraints they faced in attempting to turn geopolitical standoff into pressure against the U.S. government racism abroad echo those found by Penny Von Eschen in her study of Afro-American activists in the

²⁷ Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, George Westerman Collection, 32/3: "Panama Tribune: Its Origins, Purposes, Accomplishments and Impact" (undated ms. by George Westerman); George S. Schuyler, "Schuyler: America's Canal Zone Policy Is a 'Disgrace'," *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 31, 1948, 1.

²⁸ Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, George Westerman Collection, Photo Collection, Box 1 of 5, Folder "Personal"; "Caribbean Labor Congress Meet," *New York Amsterdam News*, Aug. 2, 1947, p. 13. See Eric Duke, "Out of One ... Many Nations: Imagining the West Indies Federation" (Ph.D. diss., Michigan State University, 2007).

²⁹ George W. Westerman, *Blocking Them at the Canal; Failure of the Red Attempt to Control Local Workers in the Vital Panama Canal Area* (Panama: n.p., 1952); Conniff, "George Westerman"; Corinealdi, "Redefining Home."

same era.³⁰ Observing Sidney Young, though, we see that figures from the broader diaspora attempted to reach helping hands towards U.S. activists as well as vice versa. As a member of Inter-American Press Association and at its assembly in NYC 1950, Young introduced a resolution condemning the failure to include the “American Negro Press” among its membership.³¹

Cold War tensions, struggles over decolonization, and the keen attention to emergent Civil Rights activism in the United States marked the *Tribune*’s coverage in the 1950s—as always, such international and internationalist coverage mixed with the reports of local civic life and notes of birthdays, visits, and convalescence typical of a small-town paper, which it also was. The denunciations of Soviet Communism in Young’s pages in the early 1950s might seem a far cry from the frankly Marxian rhetoric he himself had been willing to use in an earlier era, as when he wrote in 1932 of the pernicious belief among the “working, or poorer classes” that their poverty was divinely ordained: a “belief, it is proven, [that] has been injected into the struggling masses throughout the centuries by their priest class and by the fortunate class who had acquired the world’s wealth either through graces of chance or by their own unabashed villainy.”³² By the 1950s, forthright denunciations of “the weight of suffering which has been inflicted upon the world by the selfish lust for power of the ruling classes” had been muted.³³

Yet ultimately, more than change, it is the continuity of the editorial optic over the paper’s three decades with Young at the helm that stands out. The 1950s *Tribune* continued to showcase an eclectic and race-conscious mix of international, national, and local news, a typical 1959 front page ranging from tensions over the Berlin air corridor and Liz Taylor’s conversion to Judaism to struggles for formalization of West Indian youth’s Panamanian citizenship, disputes among fraternal lodges on the isthmus, and the fight against race-based wage discrimination on the Canal Zone, alongside both international black advance (“Central African Federation Names First Natives to Cabinet Rank”) and ongoing black struggle (“Family Weary of Harassment Leaves White Neighborhood,” in Wilmington, Del.).³⁴

Sidney Young’s last editorial, published the day before his death in Panama City on May 18, 1959, captured a bitter global panorama. “There is nowhere where men are not engaged in virulent political rivalry, in the bitter struggle of class against class, in the unceasing conflict of labor and capital, in the clash of ideologies, the collision of belief and unbelief; in racial antipathy, religious contentions and the hatred bred by greed and corruption, selfishness and trickery, ill-will and misunderstanding.”³⁵ Carrying news of

³⁰ Penny Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

³¹ Photo caption, “Panama Publisher,” *Chicago Defender*, Oct. 28, 1950, p. 2.

³² Sidney A. Young, “World Misery,” *Panama Tribune*, Apr. 10, 1932, p. 4.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Panama Tribune*, Apr. 5, 1959, p. 1.

³⁵ Sidney A. Young, “An Unfulfilled Longing,” *Panama Tribune*, May 17, 1959, p. 10. The *Tribune*’s issues of May 24, May 31, and June 7, 1959 carry innumerable

violence against black immigrants in Notting Hill, London; police threats against NAACP activists in Mississippi; lynchings unpunished; the dismemberment of the newborn British West Indies Federation; colonial wars in Algeria and beyond; and nuclear weapons testing on the Canal Zone, the *Tribune*'s pages showed just how many of the Afro-diasporic struggles that had spurred Young's journalism in the 1920s remained unresolved three decades later.³⁶

On the other hand, the *Tribune*'s recent campaign against hiring discrimination in Panama had scored some successes, and distribution had finally begun of the national ID cards confirming Panamanian citizenship for young adults born in the 1930s to "undesirable alien" parents—sealing the re-enfranchisement of the generation whose step-by-step denationalization from 1928 to 1941 Sidney Young had worked so hard to combat.³⁷ Young had been, in one columnist's words, "actively and intimately identified with the social, sporting, civic, educational, literary and other activities of the West Indian community" for forty years.³⁸ "No West Indian in recent years has made a deeper imprint on the affairs of this nation and the West Indian community," concluded another memorial.³⁹

Summing up his mentor's career, George Westerman wrote that Young had dedicated his life "to lessen racial conflicts, ease social tension and foster human understanding in its broadest aspects."⁴⁰ This is both true and misleading, for it understates Young's sharp insights and international optic, which together left him no doubt that when "conflicts"

testimonials and letters of condolence: from Panamanian political leaders; U.S. and British authorities; and members of the West Indian communities of Panama City, Colón, and Bocas de Toro; Jamaica and elsewhere in the Caribbean; and New York.

³⁶ E.g., see Jack Jamieson's fierce and pessimistic column in the wake of Young's death, sketching out the grim global panorama that substantiated, Jamieson declared, Young's final editorial: "While the white world maneuvers for the security of Europe and the release of West Berlin from Communist threats, and, incidentally the reunification of Germany, the so-called Big-3 powers continue to ignore the fate of Negro Africa and Africans abroad. In the United States Negroes are still the untouchables and outcasts, brutalized and lynched at will with almost wanton permission from some local or state governments. In Britain, Notting Hill, a London suburban area is fast becoming the Mississippi or Alabama of England, while colonial servants in Negro Africa are suppressing by every means—fair or foul, mostly foul—the rising tide of African nationalism." Jack Jamieson, "Turnovers," *Panama Tribune*, May 24, 1959, p. 10.

³⁷ E.g., "Nationality Barrier Removed for Children of Aliens in RP," *Panama Tribune*, Feb. 1, 1959, p. 1, 13; "To Start Processing on C.Z. for R.P. Cedula's next Sat'y," *Panama Tribune*, Apr. 5, 1959, p. 1. See Conniff, *Black Labor*; Corinealdi, "Redefining Home."

³⁸ N. Alex Reid, "Sidney Adolphus Young is Dead," *Panama Tribune*, May 24, 1959, p. 11.

³⁹ Untitled note beginning "The Boss has written 30," *Panama Tribune*, May 24, 1959, p. 10.

⁴⁰ George W. Westerman, "The Passing Review," *Panama Tribune*, May 31, 1959, p. 12.

and “tensions” were imposed by powerful external forces, the search for “understanding” could never succeed without strategy, struggle, and organization. He sought not to avoid conflicts and tension, but to join wisely and well the battles they necessitated. More in keeping with Young’s crusading stance (and less filtered through Westerman’s own choices) is the summation in the editorial carried by the issue that announced Young’s death: “He regarded discrimination as a pernicious enemy, and would smash the gods of intolerance.”⁴¹

Young was posthumously awarded Panama’s Vasco Nuñez de Balboa medal by President Ernesto de la Guardia. In 1966 a municipal park in the Rio Abajo neighborhood of Panama City was named in his honor.⁴²

Young is little remembered within Panama today, and even less so within the broader black world of which his voice was, for many decades, an inspirational part. His words, captured in one thousand and five hundred-some issues of the *Panama Tribune*, preserved on microfilm in the Library of Congress and the New York Public Library, have much to teach the present, if we take the opportunity to read them.

⁴¹ Unsigned editorial, “An Imperishable Heritage,” *Panama Tribune*, May 24, 1959, p. 10.

⁴² “Park to be names after Jamaican Journalist,” *Kingston Daily Gleaner*, April 16, 1966, n.p.