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Editor: Dr. Jean-Claude Dutès

Assistant Editor : Réjane Pierre

Layout Editor: Maggy Moise-Thomas

Zanmi Detroit is published by the Haitian Network Group of Detroit, whose mission is to promote Haitian culture and provide a forum for Haitians and friends to network.

Please e-mail questions or comments to the HNGD:
Info@hngd.org

Zanmi Detroit
Haitian Network
Group of Detroit
60 East Milwaukee
PO Box 2106
Detroit, MI 48202

WWW.HNGD.ORG

Zanmi Detroit

EDITOR'S NOTE



Hello again my friends,

It is hard to believe that almost half of the year has gone by. I find that time is always best appreciated by what I have done with it, as its passing is always so fleetingly seamless. So immersed in the daily challenges, we seldom realize the work that we do until after we look back and contemplate. And for many of us, that moment of contemplation only occurs after an interruption.

HNGD has been on the move for more than 20 years now, with its nose to the grindstone, always working on the next event. Others in the community, however, have been paying attention to its diligence. So, it is no surprise to most members of our community that on May 30th of this year, HNGD received "The Best of Both Worlds" Kola Award for "Best Organization." HNGD was summoned to put down its tools, take off its apron and come to the stage to be honored.

What a well-earned gift of recognition and appreciation!

Congratulations to the Board of Directors for their vision, dynamism, and hard work, and on behalf of HNGD, I wish to express my deep appreciation and gratitude to all those who have selflessly given of their time to help the organization concretize its mission. Now, back to the grindstone!

Looking to inspire, Zanmi Detroit offers you a glimpse at what it takes to become a leader through an interview with Mr. Ralph Gilles. I am not going to tell you who he is.

Read the article to see why Zanmi Detroit has chosen to talk to him and to let you on his secret for success. Fascinated by the many complex layers in which we are rooted, Professor Irene Green takes us on a visual and spiritual journey in a trip to Professor Montilus' home gallery.

In addition, you will read about our recent graduates and the different events that have happened or will occur in our community.

Happy reading!

Jean-Claude Dutès, Ph.D., Editor
Clinical Neuropsychologist ■

INSIGHTS INTO THE PATH TO LEADERSHIP

AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. RALPH GILLES

By Maggy Corkery



With May being Haitian Heritage Month, I wanted to focus my article on a male or female individual of Haitian descent. Someone whom our ancestors, Toussaint Louverture, Marie-Jeanne Lamartinière, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, Claire Heureuse Félicité Dessalines or Henry Christophe, would look at with pride and say "Ou mennen bak ou byen! You have done well!" In my mind that special person would also need to be a role model for all youth of color, and particularly Haitian American youth. I purposefully wanted to stay away from a star or a celebrity athlete because not everyone is cut out for either of these occupations and those who make it to the pinnacle are

Continued on next page

few and far between. Rather, I wanted an individual who was local, approachable, that boys and girls could not only relate to but would also want to emulate; and when hearing about that person's life story, they would immediately think "if he or she can do it, I can do it too!"

As far as I was concerned, it was a no brainer... It had to be Ralph Gilles! Once the light bulb came on, I immediately reached out to his wife Doris, whom he lovingly referred to as "my boss." Doris waved her magic wand, and a few days later I was conducting an interview with Ralph Gilles.

Although we used a virtual platform and were miles apart, as soon as he greeted me, his warmth and congeniality were palpable. From the get-go, we agreed that we would be informal and address each other by our first names. Many times, during our interaction I had to remind myself that it was not a dream! The Chief Design Officer for the Chrysler, Dodge, Jeep, Ram, Maserati and Fiat Latin America brands, and a member of Stellantis' Top Executive Team had actually set some time aside to share his story with me, in spite of his very busy and full schedule. And so, I spent 30 delightful minutes chatting with Ralph, who, in addition to English speaks fluent French and some Italian and Créole. We touched on everything from his work to the views on his parenting that he shares with his wife, who also speaks Mandarin.

It was such a nice and down-to-earth conversation that rather than providing a summary, I decided to share the interview in its entirety.

Maggy: For those who do not work in the automotive arena, what does it mean to be Chief Design Officer and a member of Stellantis Top Executive Team?

Ralph: It means that we have a view of what is going on in the company around the whole world. Stellantis is a company with 14 brands. We are now the fourth largest automaker in the world with our combined French, American and Italian roots. We basically sell cars in every country, on every continent. So, we have incredible coverage. In my job, I have to have a lot of global awareness. I travel quite a bit so that I can see firsthand the trends in different segments and markets; more so before COVID-19, but now I am starting to travel again. As a member of the executive team, I get to be exposed to the decisions guiding the company forward. We have a lot of meetings, but also work a lot and take actions.

Maggy: What a journey it has been for you! Can you recount what the experience was like from when you first started in the field?

Ralph: I started working at Chrysler in 1992 as a board designer. I remember that feeling and pinching myself because I actually got to work and sketch and draw. For the first time, I was not the weird kid sketching in the back of the class. I was among peers and learning from them. The same thing happened to me when I went to school in Detroit just before

that. This continuation of being surrounded by creative people is just intoxicating. I am surrounded by artists and creative people all the time. We are naturally positive because we always believe that the next best thing is coming: the coolest car that I have not designed yet! The downside is that every night I go to sleep wondering "did I have my last ideas?" It is a bit of a constant self-challenge to push and try to keep the company going. My big jump came in 2000 when I became the Director of Design in the performance car groups. It was a huge jump. At 30 years old it was a pretty exciting leap for me. And the next big one was in 2008, when I became Head of Design for the North American Market for Chrysler and in 2013, I became Head of Global Design for Fiat Chrysler Automobiles. The responsibilities have increased, but I try to maintain a very accessible nature in the way I lead. I surround myself with young people and creative people.

Maggy: What does your success mean to you as a person of Haitian descent?

Ralph: It is huge! My parents are first generations. They were in their late teens and early twenties when they moved to the US. Taking a big gamble, they wanted us to have a better life. Every day they reminded us that we were Haitians, and they were incredibly careful to educate us on our history. My grandmother lived with us, and she practically raised us. She barely spoke English, just a little bit of French and mostly Creole. She cooked for us and taught us many lessons. I never forgot that I was Haitian. I always feel it in my heart! I always feel the connection. I have been back to Haiti 3 or 4 times. A few years ago, I went with my family. It struck me then the significance of what my parents did. So, we give back. We support the schools there. We donate money whenever we can. I still have this connection with Haiti. I want to make sure that young Haitians who look up to me say "Wow! I can do it too!"

Maggy: How do you think you would have reacted if when you were in your 20s someone had told you that you would be occupying this important position?

Ralph: I would have never believed it! Honestly, I still do not believe it! I do not take it for granted at all. I am very grateful and thankful. I always encourage every person that I meet who has similar dreams. In some ways, I have exceeded my dreams. I just wanted to be a car designer and be in a major car company, and I achieved that. But doing what I do now, leading people, is a different kind of challenge. Somewhere along the way, I had to learn to be a leader. I had to really learn to listen carefully and find ways to make people's lives better. Internally and externally, whether it is car design for a customer or in the workplace. How do we treat people to encourage them to stay with the company when they can go anywhere? The people who work for me are so talented. The biggest thing I try to strive for is to make our office as pleasant a place as possible. It starts with me: my attitude, my way of handling my employees, my accessibility, my friendliness. It is something I have used my whole life. My parents taught me to be friendly. People can be intimidated very easily; I try to create

the opposite and create a welcoming environment.

Maggy: In your opinion, what are the elements that facilitated your success?

Ralph: Good role models! I am very lucky, on both sides of my family I had extremely good role models. Aunts and uncles who are successful; but beyond just being successful... They are very good and very kind and welcoming people. I love how they helped cousins out for years, letting them sleep in their house, helping them out when they were down. There is always this mentality of taking care of each other in my family. And still to this day we behave this way. So, it is role models; it is also the achievement thing. My parents were very strict, so no fooling around, no going out, no playing. They were the authority figure, and I was a very good kid in those days; my kids are the same. I have been blessed. I follow the following motto "Leave people better than you find them." That is how I live my life.

Maggy: What advice do you have for our youth who are interested in this field?

Ralph: Number one is: do your homework. When I was their age, there was no such thing as the internet. Now, they have this incredible tool to reverse engineer. That is for any career, it does not have to be just this one. Any career they find interesting. Google it and reverse engineer it. Try to understand where the people who work in this field went to school, what they studied. There is a lot of information to be gathered. My dad was very big on this. It is that time from 14 years old to 22 years old, it is the most critical time of your life. People mistake that time as the time to have fun and fool around. Even though I lamented about not partying or doing anything terribly fun in those days, I thank my parents because that is exactly when I buckled down. For a little while I went AWOL, but for the most part that is when I stuck to the books. And now, I can have fun for the next 50 years of my life. It is a small investment in the beginning to pay for a lifetime of opportunities.

Maggy: You have two daughters, correct? What are their names and age? Did you encourage them to follow your career path?



Ralph: Yes, but I do not have them, they have me. Tia is 22 and Sydney is about to be 21. I refused to encourage them to follow my footsteps. I told them do what you want to do. One is in the animation world in California and the other one is in the fashion industry in New York.

Maggy: What can parents do to nurture a talent that they see in their children?

Ralph: I had very supportive parents, aunts, and uncles. My mother gave me paper to draw, simple things like giving me the tools. My aunts and uncles gave me the encouragement to go to college and they helped me get the application. So, I had a very supportive network. I think what parents can do is listen to their kids. Haitian parents some time tend put pressure on you to be a doctor or this type of thing. Ironically, my brother is a doctor. For a split second, I thought maybe I should be a doctor. Since I could not handle the sight of blood, I had to think of something else. So, my parents got it and they did not give me any unnecessary pressure. But at the same time, I think that as parents you have to be a little bit tough. Not so lax that the kids do not have discipline.

Maggy: In the US, there is currently a lot of racial tension; your family is unique in the sense that you are of Haitian descent and your wife is of Asian descent. Do you have that conversation with your children?

Ralph: We talk about it all the time. In some ways, the Asian and Black cultures are going through similar things. There is a new kind of kindred spirit in a way. In our case we call it "Blasian" and, so far, it has not been too much of an issue. They have been able to find a network of friends who are very liberal and open minded. At the same time, they are genuinely concerned about some things that they see, as there are also a lot of bad apples out there. We never assume that everybody is in the same mindset. That is the way I am. I take every single person, one case at a time. I do not cast an opinion on any group. Because when I used to, I was always proven wrong. The person you might think is a certain way might be the completely opposite way. Once I met a man whom I thought was a certain way, then I found out that he had adopted 5 Black children. You just never know; you really have to take everybody case by case. Try not to let the appearance or things that you see out there taint your view of the world. You are just as responsible to change people's views. For years I have been having these conversations that today are called uncomfortable, because I always get misjudged. I do not use my position to carry myself any certain way. You would be surprised if you see me on the weekends; I look like a lumberjack. You would never realize that I am the head of anything. I love that and it always surprises people. I love the unexpected conversations.

Maggy: Considering that they are of mixed heritage, which culture do your children identify with?

Ralph: That is something that we talk a lot about. They proba-

bly identify with the Asian side. Since they do not outwardly look Black, people do not assume that they are. It has happened that on occasion they have overheard comments made about Blacks and they have had to address it. So, it has been tough for them sometimes. They have a lot of empathy for both cultures. My wife and I have been careful to go back and forth between both sides of our family. They are exposed to both cultures. They are children of the new world; they are the modern generation, and they do not want to identify. They feel this incredible opportunity to restrike what the new normal is. They identify in the term that they respect their heritage, but they do not let that be the first thing. They want to be able to understand the world. One of the benefits of my job is that I have seen the world. The minute we could, we took the kids with us everywhere. They have seen the whole world, and this has opened their eyes. They really understand that people come in all shape and sizes. How can you not be tolerant when you are mixed like this? They are citizens of the world, but also proud that they are “Blasians”.



The interview with Ralph Gilles ended on a positive note with a promise of having some of his prized works of art displayed at the 2022 Bèl Bagay Lakay Haitian Art & Craft Festival. What a treat this will be for car enthusiasts and for all lovers of beautiful things! Stay tuned! ■



With due regard to maintaining a safe and healthy environment in our community, the **Bèl Bagay Lakay Festival committee** has decided to postpone the much beloved festival until 2022.

The committee is currently working through the ramifications of this unprecedented situation to offer you this Fall *A Taste of Bèl Bagay Lakay* in the form of a virtual event.

Our thoughts are with those affected in the US, Haiti and around the world. ■

KOLA AWARDS

AND THE 2021 KOLA AWARD GOES TO...

On May 30, Kola Restaurant and Ultra Lounge hosted the 4th Annual “The Best of Both Worlds” Kola Awards. The event’s MCs, Sophia Chue and Shola Salako, were looking their best as they introduced different presenters to a packed room. Two members of the Haitian community, Régine Condé Beaubœuf and Sabrina Césaire, had the distinct honor of introducing the Best Community Advocate Award winner Seydi Sarr and the Best Educator Award winner, Gracie Xavier. These ladies were assisted in their duty by the ever charming 2018 Miss Carival Queen & Miss Haiti, Alexandra Brutus.

Our community was well represented in the competition. Enos Fabre was a nominee for the Best Artist category and Maggy Corkery for the Best Community Advocate category. Along with Ms. Xavier, Haitian Network Group of Detroit was inducted into the Best of Both Worlds club. I was so thrilled when the announcement was made that we had been selected as the Best Organization!



Maggy Corkery, Enos Fabre, Sabrina Césaire



I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate all the winners and nominees of the 2021 Kola Awards. To the creative force who worked behind the scenes to make this event happen year after year, Ime Ekpenyong, Sophia Chue and the marketing guru, Ebony Walls, I say “Bravo! Bravissimo! Well done indeed!”

On behalf of the HNGD Board, I thank all those who voted for the organization. Your seal of approval means a lot; it confirms that we are not operating in a vacuum and that the work that we do is relevant to the community. We truly appreciate your continued support and look forward to serving you for years to come.

Maggy Corkery ■



From left to right: Shola Salako, Ebony Walls, Sophia Chue and Ime Ekpenyong

FROM THE ANTHROPOLOGIST'S CORNER

TONGUES OF FIRE: THE SACRED ART COLLECTIONS OF PROFESSOR GUERIN MONTILUS

By Iris Green



Iris Green next to one of Professor Montilus' pieces

Students of magic at Wayne State University would eventually cross paths with Dr. Guerin Montilus, an esteemed anthropologist and world renowned expert on the topics of African

Studies, Religion and Vodun (Vodun being the African version, and Vodou the Haitian counterpart). To the delight of his *Magic Science and Religion* students, Montilus brought sacred paintings to the classroom and discussed the impacts of material and visual culture on society. Sprinkling conversation with poetic French and African proverbs, Montilus weaved a net capturing the most unwary of students. A griot in his own right, Montilus delivered a wealth of information to his thirsting students, suggesting (with a wry smile) that we read his book, *Dompim: The Spirituality of the African Peoples*. Fortunate students were able to accompany him on study trips to Africa.



After my graduation Montilus invited me to visit the Anthropology Material Culture Lab (which he himself founded) at Wayne State University. In their profile of Dr. Montilus WSU stated,

“This lab housed a personal extensive collection of West African and Caribbean art and artifacts related to traditional African religions.” Visiting the Material Culture Lab caused a paradigm shift in my worldview and changed my life.

At the Material Culture Lab, I was like a girl in a candy shop, wide eyed, and eager to engage Montilus in discussions about the artworks that beckoned me. Dr. Montilus brought an item to the table, covered in a black cloth. He unveiled the painting and to my surprise it was simply the painting of an older Black man. The painting's colorful island backdrop also included a house, a chicken, a dog, and gourds hanging from a tree. The man himself wore a red bandana, simple clothing, and carried a knapsack. In the background was a crossroad that bridged over water. The man depicted could have been my uncle, and though older, he was vibrant, and protecting. His eyes were intense and bore into me, searching my soul. This piece, by Haitian Artist Francois-Ricles Gracia, commanded my attention. “This is a spiritual one,” said Dr.

Montilus gauging my response. “His name is Legba.” He continued, “It's rare to find a Caribbean artist that will paint a spirit or a lwa (a title given to Vodou spirits, who each have their own domain).” Though infrequent, sometimes artists will include the supernatural in their paintings, after a dream or vision.

Interestingly, Montilus sequestered these rare paintings, and even had a hand in their design. Several were painted based on his input, making him the co-creator of many of the exceptional pieces in his collection.

Montilus teaches about the symbols, ancient codes and archetypes that speak to us through the silence of visual cues. Through him I learned different levels of understanding, in the realm of spiritual art. While Dr. Montilus lectured, I recorded notes. The man in the painting (discussed above) is named Legba; he is a lwa or “spirit”, who arrived from Africa (Benin) during the enslavement of African people in America. Legba controls the living world. He is also keeper of all doors and crossroads (representing the supernatural doorway between this world and the next). His permission is needed to enter the spiritual dimension of the lwa. His power is infinite. In the painting, Legba's red bandana represents blood (power). He goes everywhere and sees everything (thus the intensity in his eyes). Legba is almost always shown with his dog, chickens, or gourds. All of which have representative ties to the spirit world.

It was a charm to see a Black “deity” held in such high regard. The experience was empowering, causing a shift my perspective concerning community. Any older Black man could secretly be a powerful Legba! In my wanderings, I noted that many Haitian homes embrace the aspects of their home culture, expressed in visual images. Visual culture is strongly embedded in the community. Africans throughout the diaspora need to have opportunities to experience these conscious-uplifting images.

Next discussed, was a painting of Santa Barbara, a Cuban spirit who was murdered by her father for refusing marriage after joining the church. Sacred symbols in this and other paintings of Santa Barbara include: the chalice (representing her last communion and the life force of blood), a crown (representing her royalty after death), and a medicinal herb (as she is called on to assist the sick and dying). She also holds the sword that killed her (which is shaped like lightning). It was lightning which would cause her father's un-

timely death. Possibly an act of revenge by the sword, of the Cuban spirit Shango.

Santa Barbara demonstrates syncretism in Caribbean Art. Many depictions of her show women of European descent, yet her icons are also used for celebration of the spirit Shango who avenged her. During times of oppression, Africans living in America appealed to their enslavers by worshipping the saints that enslavers would allow them to serve. Yet, each saint also had representation in the spirit world of the lwa. And it was the lwa or spirits that Africans (who practiced traditions) would “actually” serve.

Artworks in the lab also included mermaids (La Sirene), snakes (Damballah), sparkling and sequenced Vodou flags (depicting the skeletal lwa Baron Samedi, and St. Michael or St. George on his horse), statues of Mary, Catholic saints, ancient African bronzes made in the Congo, additional artifacts, and gifts from students. Each piece had its own story.

Later, I was invited to a student meeting in the home of Dr. Montilus. As I walked through the door, space and time felt altered... at that point I knew that I was in a sacred space... a temple...so I took off my shoes before entering...

If one can describe walking through a door as a rite of passage this one was it for me, and perhaps it was Legba who opened the door!

Upon entering the home, one is greeted by the exquisite wood carving of an African Maroon kneeling with his conch shell horn. The Maroons were freedom seekers who escaped enslavement and started their own communities in the mountains. The conch shells were used as a source of communication between and within communities. Beyond the carving, I was stunned by the beauty of paintings that adorned every wall. Visual culture. Artwork depicted Black people in positions of reverence and power. Many paintings displayed African uses of spiritual power (Vodou practitioners say that it was the power of the lwa Ogoun who assisted Haitians in overthrowing enslavement on January 1st 1804). Forms of “softer” power include paintings that show Africans at the marketplace and collecting fish. These paintings represented the power of having your own business, your own means. One outstanding painting shows a community group at night, together, holding torches lit with tongues of fire. All selections reveal the quiet activist that resides in the heart of Dr. Montilus, who is himself a tongue of fire.

Paintings, statues, carvings, artifacts, hand-carved furniture, royal chairs, ceremonial knives and axes, bronzes, and an

assortment of items, each with a story, all have a place in the Montilus gallery.

Montilus continued with the family room enhanced by stained glass which gave the room a dancing rainbow effect. This room held artwork concerning the Air Spirits (connected to air), which included the Haitian lwa Ogun, Cuban spirit Shango and two Cuban Santa Barbara paintings. Shango (by Cuban artist Sandos) adorned the back, left wall. This painting depicted Shango as a Black male with feminine red lips (Many of Sandos paintings are androgynes, depicting qualities of both sexes). Shango is ready for battle; his right hand wields a double-headed axe (justice), and his left hand holds a cloud (air).



Finally, Montilus discussed the “staging” of the gallery’s artwork. Montilus discussed the unique *relationships* between pieces, and how he ingeniously moves artwork around, creating complementary artwork arrangements. This movement of art makes his gallery dynamic and unique. Rearrangements can be based on new acquisitions, research, dreams, or whims. He would sometimes awaken at night to rearrange artifacts. Santa Barbara paintings can be placed next to Shango because they are both Air spirits from Cuba. An actual double-headed axe may be placed close by. Each visit there is a new arrangement, and a rewarding lesson concerning the recent changes.

As he has made his home in Detroit, Montilus also includes Detroit Art in his repertoire of paintings. From Detroit artist Michael Horner, Montilus has a mixed media painting infused with real cotton plants, depicting powerful Black people working the cotton fields.

It is no wonder that people come to tears passing through the home gallery of Dr. Montilus. His collection really does touch the heart with tongues of fire!

*Iris Green was and still is a student of Dr. Montilus and an adjunct professor of Anthropology. With a Master of Art in Anthropology, Iris has taught courses in Anthropology Departments at Wayne State University, Wayne County Community College District, and Oakland Community College. She has conducted research on spirituality and exorcism in Senegal, West Africa and has worked with traditional healers from Africa, in Detroit. Iris has also conducted presentations and freelanced as a photojournalist nationally for small presses, including the Michigan Chronicle.

All photographs were taken by author, Iris Green. ■



MEET THE GRADUATES



Besides ensuring our physical and emotional survival, the second most important contribution parents make to the lives of their children is to provide them with best education their means allow. With an education we are always in a position to turn luck into an opportunity for durable achievement of any kind. In a tribute to both parents and their remarkable children, we are happy to recognize the graduates for their academic and/or professional achievements. **CONGRATULATIONS!**

WHOOBY DID IT HER WAY: BRAVO AND CONGRATULATIONS Dr. WHOOBY DERRIVAUX!

The Bible says in Exodus 20:12 "Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee."

The reason I start the article with this verse is because, as a father, I feel that my daughter has bestowed upon me and her mother, what I considered to be the greatest honor: watching her walking across the stage to receive her doctorate degree.



I will not offer any apology for behaving like a proud dad. I am delighted by her achievement because I know how hard her journey was. With her grit and determination, I knew that she would not be deterred by any of the many obstacles that could have derailed her from pursuing her dreams.

And what a journey it has been!

Right after high school, Whooby was admitted to Kettering College in Ohio, a school well known for its medical program. Whooby graduated in 2015 with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Human Biology, a well sought-after degree for anyone who envisions studying medicine. While completing her undergraduate studies, Whooby developed an interest in Occupation Therapy with a focus on early childhood development.

After securing her undergrad degree, Whooby came home to Detroit and found employment as a pre-school teacher. Wanting to continue her education, she applied for and was accepted into a master's degree program in Early Childhood Development at Oakland University, which she completed in 2018.



June Whooby Graduate and family

Always looking to the next step on the ladder, she applied for and was accepted into the Doctorate program at Kettering College, earning her doctorate degree in April of this year. She did all of this during the COVID-19 Pandemic shutdown, managing both her course workload and the capstone project remotely.

At home, we used to tease Whooby that it seems like she has been

in school forever, but it was all worth it. In the end, she got the reward of her hard labor and we got to be on top of the world as proud parents. Even if for just a moment, somehow, we feel that we played a small part in all of it.

Bravo and congratulations, Whooby! ■

BRAVO AND CONGRATULATIONS AFI!

Meet **Afi Aalkebulan**, daughter of Sabrina Césaire and Mutope Aalkebulan, sister of Ishmael Césaire and Semu Aalkebulan. Afi graduated Cum Laude and received a BS in Aviation Engineering from Bowling Green State University (BGSU).



She was raised in Detroit where she was crowned Little Miss Haiti. Afi is the founding President of the Women in Technology organization at BGSU. She is set to begin a 2-year fellowship with the City of Detroit Mayor's office. Prior to graduating, she had completed an internship as an aviation mechanic at Detroit City Airport. Afi had an opportunity to travel to Japan with the Sister Cities program along with Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan. In 2017, she was featured in BLAC Magazine's Young, Gifted and Black #2k17.



Our graduate is a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Incorp, and she served as a NAACP youth Hostess for 3 years. Over the course of time, this accomplished young woman has garnered many accolades: Graduate of Detroit's Cass Tech, Franklin Wright Settlement College Tour participant for 3 consecutive years, Sidney A. Ribeau President's Leadership Academy Scholar and Representative for the Dean's Advisory Council on Diversity and Inclusion. ■



LET'S CELEBRATE OUR HERITAGE! LET'S CELEBRATE US!

May: Haitian Heritage Month

Haitian Heritage Month is a nationally recognized month and an opportunity to celebrate the rich culture of Haiti and its people. The celebration is an expansion of the Haitian Flag Day on May 18.

Since 1998, several governors, members of state senates and houses of representatives, mayors and city officials have issued proclamations, recognizing the Haitian Heritage Month celebration in their states or cities. In May 2005 President George W. Bush and his wife Laura sent a letter to congratulate the Haitian-American community for the heritage month and organized a celebration at the White House the same year.



Alain Desvallons Mentor &
Cassandra Baptiste



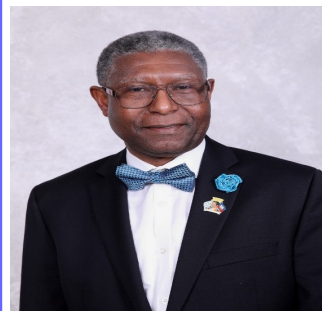
Children celebrating Haitian culture
with Jinette Dumont-Chapman

June: Caribbean Heritage Month

Caribbean-American Heritage Month was first officially observed in 2006 by proclamation of the President and Congress in the United States to honor the achievements and contributions of Caribbean immigrants and their descendants living in the United States. Events are held throughout the month celebrating and educating the public about Caribbean-American history and culture. ■



FROM DUSABLE HERITAGE ASSOCIATION (DHA) – CHICAGO, MAY 2021



Etzer Cantave,
President DuSable Heritage

Greetings to our friends at Haitian Network Group of Detroit! Thank you for providing this space for an update on Chicago and DuSable.

For DHA, 2021 has been an exciting year so far. As usual, we held our Annual March Gala. Due to the pandemic, we converted our traditional dinner event to a virtual one on March 6th, 2021. It was quite a learning experience for us. I am happy to say that, thanks to the hard work of our team and our Chicago-based event planner Impact365, the event was extremely well received by our viewers. In case you missed it, please click this link to watch the entire event:

<https://vimeo.com/553080139/4531e52c1c>

DuSable Updates — The movement toward full recognition for Jean-Baptiste Pointe DuSable, Chicago's founding father, has picked up much steam. It could not have been a better time to be connected with Chicago's first settler, businessman and entrepreneur — the Black man from Haiti who founded Chicago 240 years ago.

After a delay of more than two decades, the construction of

Continued on next page

DuSable Park has moved to the forefront: its original plan is being revamped and a new mayoral proposal is expected to significantly expand the scope of the project. We are excited that DuSable Park is on the verge of being a reality near the Chicago lakefront. On the other hand, the renaming of the iconic Lake Shore Drive to DuSable Drive moved one step closer to fruition last April. The ordinance awaits a full City Council vote, which has been rescheduled to June.

The DuSable Memorial — This event commemorating DuSable's death is scheduled this year for Saturday August 21st from 11:00AM to 1:00PM CST, at Pioneer Court located at 401 N Michigan Ave Chicago IL 60601, near the DuSable Bust. We will have our traditional wreath-laying ceremony, followed by a guided tour of the Founder's Trail, where we will recount the history of DuSable and early Chicago. New this year -- we moved the annual film festival to the same day as the Memorial. So, our guests will join us later to watch the Haitian film "Kafe Negro" and the post-screening discussion.

Announcement — It is a great pleasure to introduce the two new board members of DuSable Heritage Association: Catherine Auguste and Hervé Leonard, both with Michigan roots. We are grateful to HNGD for connecting DHA with these two talented team members.

Catherine has been a tremendous addition to DHA. She stepped in as a volunteer last fall and instantly became a key contributor to the success of the 2020 Film Festival in collaboration with the African Diaspora International Film Festival (ADIFF). She went on to play a key role in our 2021 virtual gala. Without Catherine's technical know-how and interactions with Impact365, we would not have pulled off this event. Welcome to DHA, Catherine!



Hervé Leonard was our first Virtual Gala Master of Ceremony. He managed to learn in short order our mission, history, and the legacy of Jean-Baptiste Pointe DuSable. Despite the multiple challenges from the technical sides, Hervé kept his composure and delivered a great performance to our audience at our 15th Annual Gala. We are proud to have him on board. Welcome to DHA, Hervé!

Lastly thanks to Maggy and team, for this opportunity. Keep up the great work you have been doing in the community!

Godspeed!

Etzer Cantave
President, DuSable Heritage Association ■

MICHIGAN CELEBRATES 2021 NATIONAL CARIBBEAN AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH (NCAHM)

"OUR SHARED HISTORY, OUR SHARED FUTURE"

by Sophia L Chue

May 12, 2021

Immigrants from the Caribbean in Michigan since the 1800s

First families found lodgings in the established black neighborhood of the Lower East Side, known as Black Bottom.

Our community members have been woven into the fabric of Detroit since our arrival. In 1925, thirteen leaders of the black community founded Detroit Memorial Park in a response to segregation at local cemeteries. The Board of Directors comprised of three founding members Joseph Gomez of Trinidad, James M. Gregory, Esq. of Jamaica, dentist turned practicing lawyer, and Vollington Bristol of Barbados, who owned a funeral parlor on Joseph Campau and Macomb¹.

Let's talk about the organization recognized as the first on the block to meet the cultural and family needs of the Caribbean Diaspora here in Metro Detroit, **The West Indian American Association**. West Indian immigrants came to Detroit in a comparatively small but continual stream during the interwar years (Between World War I and II). By 1930, immigrants from the Caribbean had settled in Michigan, and comprised roughly 1.9 % of the African-American population. Stricken with loneliness and homesickness, Caribbean nationals turned to listening and dancing to the serenading sounds of calypso and heart thumping reggae music while playing cricket and soccer. They also indulged in comforting, sumptuous arrays of spicy dishes of their homeland to preserve ethnic identity. This led to the formation of an organization in the Detroit Metropolitan area in the 1920s called variously the West Indian Social League, the Michigan Cricket Club and currently, the West Indian American Association ([WIAA](#)). The WIAA was reorganized in 1969 and formed its headquarters in the heart of the city of Detroit on 2015 East Seven Mile Road.

The heart of the Rust Belt is host to a variety of community organizations and programming that welcomes and provides a feeling of home in a foreign land. Such organizations are the Caribbean Community Service Center ([CCSC](#)), Caribbean Cultural & Carnival Organization ([CCCO](#)), The Belizean Association of Michigan ([BAM](#)), Haitian Network Group of Detroit ([HNGD](#)) and Jamaican Association of Michigan ([JAM](#)) along with many others across the state.

Along with vibrant heritage and culture, Metro Detroit has a plethora of Caribbean restaurants to tease and satisfy taste buds of Caribbean flavored foods such as the Norma Gs, Jamaican Pot, Caribbean Citchen, Island Spice and Irie Occasions/Flavors of Jamaica just to mention a few.

Many prominent and notable Caribbean nationals of Michigan operate in many professional roles serving our collective communities; some great examples are CEO of Detroit Medical Center (DMC), Dr. Audrey Gregory Ph.D, RN (Jamaica), State Senator Erika Geiss (Panama),

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Radiation Oncologist Henry Ford Health Systems Dr. Eleanor Walker MD (Grenada), Director Center for Latino/a and Latin American Studies Dr. Jorge Chinae, Ph.D (Puerto Rico) and Associate Professor of English, Afro-American and African Studies University of Michigan Dr. Aliyah Khan, Ph.D (Guyana) along with many others.

We strive to keep our Caribbean culture alive as we thrive in Michigan. We invite you to learn about the vast diversity in our region of the world and celebrate National Caribbean American Heritage Month every June. For current and future events and additional information please visit us at:

<https://caribbeancommunitysc.org>

<https://facebook.com/CaribbeanCommunityServiceCenter>

<https://instagram.com/caribbeancommunitysc/>

Dr. Beard, Kathryn Lorraine, "Higher than those of their race of less fortunate advantages: Race, ethnicity, and West Indian political leadership in Detroit's African American community, 1885-1940" (2011). Wayne State University Dissertations. Pg 269. ■



With due regard to maintaining a safe and healthy environment in our community, the **Bèl Bagay Lakay Festival committee** has decided to postpone the much beloved festival until 2022.

The committee is currently working through the ramifications of this unprecedented situation to offer you this Fall *A Taste of Bèl Bagay Lakay* in the form of a virtual event.

Our thoughts are with those affected in the US, Haiti and around the world. ■

REDISTRICTING WHAT IS IT. WHY IT MATTERS.

What it is. Every 10 years, every state redraws all of its district election maps. For MI, that's 110 MI House district maps, 38 MI Senate district maps, and 13 U.S. Congressional district maps. Once these are drawn, you elect your MI House, MI Senate and U.S. Congressional representatives based on which district you live in. If more of us who share a culture or history live in the same district, we will have more votes and we will be more able to elect a representative who speaks for us. For that to happen, though, districts have to be drawn so that we are kept together, drawn so that they don't split our communities up.

The Michigan Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission (MICRC) is drawing up the new district maps this year, which will not change for the next 10 years. And by law, Communities of Interest (African-Americans, Arab-Americans, Latinos, Asian-Americans, Native Americans, and others) have a right to demand that the MICRC not split us up when drawing the maps. But it is going to be up to us to go to the MICRC Public Hearings and tell the Commission about ourselves, and draw maps of our community, of where we live, and send them in.

What's at stake. At stake is our community's voice with the MI Legislature in Lansing, and with the Federal Government in Washington DC. It is about our ability to elect someone from our community or elect someone who listens to our issues and concerns. What's at stake is our community's access to State and Federal resources such as funding for local schools, ESL, kids at risk, small business development, environmental pollution, insurance, Medicaid, mental health funding, MI Child, Meals on Wheels, senior care and many other laws, resources and services that can help our communities. And for the next 10 years.

So go to any of the Public Hearings across MI, and tell the MICRC Commissioners about your community, about where you live, and demand to be kept together. This is the time for our voices to be heard, for our communities to be respected, and for our democracy to work for us.



Hayg Oshagan
Dir. Of New MI Media
Wayne State Univ. prof ■

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Our Community's Future is in Your Hands. Shape It.

For the first time in history, we
can impact how district maps
will be drawn in Michigan.

Come and Be Heard **PUBLIC COMMENT**

DETROIT
June 15, 6 pm
Village Dome at
Fellowship Chapel
7707 W. Outer Dr.,
Detroit, MI 48235

DETROIT
June 17, 6 pm
TCF Center
1 Washington Blvd.,
Detroit, MI 48226

Come and address the Michigan Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission about how it is drawing maps for Michigan's Congressional, Senate, and House districts at public hearings across the state.
Resources for our community and our voice in Lansing and in Washington DC depend on it for the next 10 years.

**MICHIGAN
INDEPENDENT
CITIZENS
REDISTRICTING
COMMISSION**



www.michigan.gov/MICRC
833.968.3729

THE LITERARY CORNER



In this section, the public is invited to showcase their literary talent by submitting short stories, plays, poems and essays on topics dealing with Haiti or Haitian experiences. ■

AFRICAN ROSE

By Iris Green c1993

African Rose

Slim innocent stem bursting forth from its seed

Pushing, Pushing its way through the blackness of Mother Earth

Guided by the secrets of nature, to an unknown destination

No reasons, No causes, No cares

Black Rose

Reborn, Reborn through the ancient crust of past civilizations

Met by the silent chorus of a gentle African breeze as she reaches for the moon

The same moon that lit the paths of her ancestors

Now she has Destination, Destination to touch the stars which spray the night sky, with their beauty

African Rose

Reaching, Reaching, realizing the strength of her beauty

A strength that must protect the black velvet flower, a wonder which unfolds itself from the stem

A strength that must protect the secret enclosed, its gift to the universe

A strength that MUST protect against those who will attempt to touch, steal and destroy

And now she...Must grow thorns...

Black Rose

Surrounded, Surrounded by the sounds of life, Earth's drum, a rhythmic heartbeat beneath the soil

Earth's heartbeat, prompting her to reach for the moon, the sun, the stars, and the galaxies beyond

African Rose

Now leaning down to kiss the ancient dust and merge with the love of Mother Earth

Mother Earth now Calls. Calls for her child to come home

Leaning prostrate to the ground like a form of prayer

the African Rose, no longer needs to lift her heavy head-dress, towards the dancing stars...

For, she is finally consumed in the peace and comfort of Mother Earth

Only to Rise Again!

-Iris Green
(aidadiopdet@aol.com)

■



Iris Green in Africa



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The HNGD Board Members

Maggy Corkery - President

Alain Desvallons Mentor - Vice President

Janny Magloire Milton - Secretary

Shirley Alcé Konaté - Treasurer ■