

Guantanamo's Cuban British West Indian Welfare Center Hosts the 1st International Eugene Godfried Memoriam Gathering



(Luis Bennett Robinson, Claudio Martina and Yomini Godfried)

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It has been over a year and three months since we buried our good friend and comrade Eugene Godfried in Curacao. A dedicated internationalist, journalist, Caribbean Specialist, and Musicologist, Eugene passed away as a result of a stroke at 56 years old. On July 6, 2010 his beloved friends and comrades in Guantanamo, Cuba organized the first Eugene Godfried International Memoriam gathering, a full day tribute to one of their favorite sons.

This First International Memoriam coincided with the annual Festival of Fire held in Santiago de Cuba dedicated to Curacao and Brazil. A full bus load of family, friends, and comrades predominantly from Curacao travelled from Santiago de Cuba to attend the day's activities for Eugene in Guantanamo, Cuba.

Our Bus arrived at Jose Marti Park where a wreath honoring Eugene was displayed. Luis Bennett Robinson one of the principle organizers of the gathering spoke along with Yomini Godfried, Eugene's daughter. The group proceeded to a nearby church for a full memorial service in which Guantanamarians could finally say good bye to their very loved and dear friend

and comrade. The service was held in Spanish, English and French. The British West Indian Welfare Center has a strong and long time presence of Haitians, Jamaicans and Barbadians who are Cuban citizens. It was clear from the service the impact and relationship Eugene had with this diversity of ordinary Guantanamarian.

After the church service a rainbow colloquia was held at the British West Indian Welfare Center where a panel of friends and comrades spoke about Eugene's life. There was a revealing of a photo plaque of Eugene placed on the wall, dedicated in his honor. Rodulfo Vaillant, president of Santiago's National Union of Cuban Writers and Artist (UNEAC) and a good friend of Eugene was in attendance for this dedication.

There was also a wonderful cultural presentation at the Center as well as a full presentation at the Teatro Mella by the Compañía Ballet Folkórico Babul of Guantánamo. This was a very fitting cultural tribute to Eugene who loved the music and culture of Guanánamo. Another significant salute was a visit to Antonio Maceo Park, a tribute for one of Cuba's Black generals and hero who fought in the Ten Year War and the War for Cuban independence. Flowers from Eugene's Memorial were left on the wall of a beautiful mural of General Antonio Maceo.

Before we began our return trip back to Santiago de Cuba, we meet at the Guantánamo Cuban Institute of Friendship Between People (ICAP) for a presentation of awards and discussion for the proposal of the Second International Eugene Godfried Memoriam.

The First International Eugene Godfried Memoriam was a strong beginning to recognize the work and dedication of Eugene Edward Godfried Presilia. Eugene's work and dedication was in the same spirit of Che Guevara. A native of Curacao, Eugene's display of internationalism brought with it personal and family sacrifice. Eugene was a man of the people; he lived, worked and walked with the people. He took the time to speak and learn from them. When Cubans like Carlos Moore fled and criticized the Cuban Revolution, Eugene endured the hardships to assist the Cuban people in breaking the blockade and helping to solve some of Cuba's problems caused by a long history of capitalist exploitation of the Island. The spirit of Eugene's intervention on behalf of the Cuban people is what Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. called a "Dangerous Unselfishness," a concern about the danger of what will happen to others if he didn't help, instead of the danger to himself if he did help.

Eugene had very good and vast contacts with other leaders of the Caribbean and used them wisely to build support for the Cuban Revolution. He organized tours and visits for people to come and learn about Cuban society, its history, culture, and politics.

In his many visits to the United States, he often tirelessly did radio interviews and spoke at universities, with community groups, and to individuals about the value and importance of the Cuban Revolution. Even when he was sick; armed with a cell phone, a video camera, a laptop

computer, and access to the internet, Eugene would push himself to tell the stories of the Cuban Revolution and Caribbean history.

While Eugene was no saint, his love and struggle for humanity, equality, justice, freedom and power for working and oppress people are all worthy virtues to be honored.

-- Tony Van Der Meer, 7/15/10