

THE SILVER WOMEN

THEIR LIVES, THEIR LABOR, THEIR LEGACY

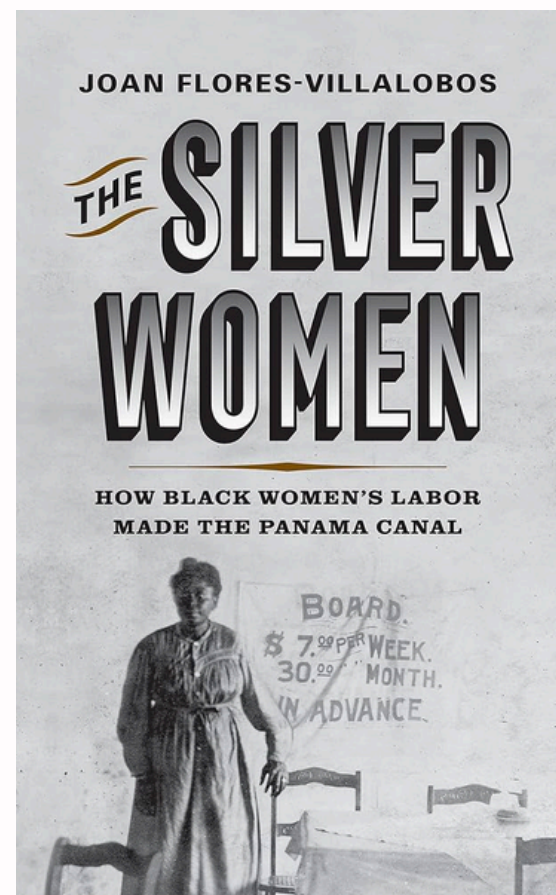
In *The Silver Women*, historian Joan Flores-Villalobos brings us into the vibrant, resourceful world of the West Indian women who were the beating heart of the Panamá Canal Zone, women whose legacy deserves to be told, retold, and never forgotten. With the generous permission of Professor Flores-Villalobos, we present this excerpt from the Introduction to *The Silver Women*.

Into this arrangement came West Indian women like Jane Hall, who were, for the most part, not official employees of the Canal Commission. As Black women, they inevitably had to deal with the racialized labor scheme and spatial segregation that defined the Canal Zone, but as uncontracted workers, they did not have to function strictly within the roll system. Jane Hall owned her own independent businesses – three boardinghouses in Culebra that sheltered Silver workers who could not acquire decent housing from the ICC [Isthmian Canal Commission]. She charged rent in silver because it was what workers had, but sometimes paid in gold for services and, as in her civil case, sued to receive back rent in gold. Other West Indian women similarly evaded the binaries of the roll system, moving across white American "Gold" spaces in their work as domestic servants, higglers (market women), and laundresses, and demanding gold as payment from their clients.

West Indian women like Jane Hall played a crucial, double-edged role in the Canal construction. On the one hand, they built a provisioning economy that fed, housed, and cared for workers, in effect subsidizing the construction effort and its racial calculus. But, working outside the umbrella of the ICC, they also found ways to skirt, and at times challenge, the legal, moral, and economic parameters imperial authorities sought to impose on this migrant workforce to function beyond the boundaries of silver and gold.

As historians since the 1980s have firmly established, the Panama Canal was realized as much through the exploitation of a racialized class of workers as it was by American ingenuity. What is less visible, and less understood, is the project's dependence on the domestic and care labor of West Indian "Silver women".

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West Indian women sustained Silver Roll workers, providing food for those underfed by the segregated Canal Zone area, laundering clothes daily for those who worked in dusty construction sites, and fostering links with legal and commercial institutions in their newfound homes on Panamanian territory. . . . In short, West Indian women's labor made the United States' imperial project possible.



The stories of the Silver Women do not end here. We hope you will continue the journey with us and join CGM's Silver Legacy Book Club this April, where The Silver Women will take center stage for a month of rich conversation, reflection, and celebration. As an added gift to our community, we are pleased to offer a discount code for those who wish to purchase the book directly from the publisher — simply reach out to us and we will share the code with you. It is also available on Amazon. Email us to join the Book Club.

Sugar's Story: Emily Amelia Lewis Griffith

She was known to her family simply as Sugar. Her full name was Emily Amelia Lewis Griffith, a Barbadian woman who arrived in Panama in 1910 without a contract, without an official welcome, and without any of the protections afforded to the men recruited to dig the canal. She came because the man she loved, William Edward Griffith, had been taken there five years earlier as a blacksmith, leaving her behind with a child and a decision to make. She made it. She crossed the water.



Emily Amelia's story is known to us because her daughter, Adica Moore, remembered it. In a 2020 oral history collected by Pan-Caribbean Sankofa and preserved in the George A. Smathers Libraries Digital Collections at the University of Florida, Adica bore witness to her mother's life in the Canal Zone: the segregated silver housing where four families shared a single outdoor washroom, the silver schools, the silver commissary book, the racially divided world that structured every aspect of daily existence.

Women like Emily Amelia were the invisible infrastructure of the Canal Zone. They cooked, washed laundry in nearby rivers, kept boarding houses, sold food from baskets, and raised children in a landscape that alternated between tropical beauty and institutional cruelty. They held no labor contracts and appeared in almost no official records, yet they subsidized the construction of one of the world's greatest engineering achievements without wages or recognition.

When one of her children died of “the pox”, the family buried their loss at Corozal Cemetery, the Silver Roll's sacred ground and the very earth CGM Foundation works to
Continued, next page.

to protect. Emily Amelia's choices reflected both her circumstances and her convictions. Most of her children were born at home with a midwife, but for Adica's birth, she made her way to Santa Ana Hospital, determined to secure whatever institutional protections she could. That same resolve shaped how the family put down roots: she and William Edward purchased their property in Rio Abajo from a Black Canal Zone police officer, securing a foothold in a world that offered precious few to Silver Roll families.

Adica Moore grew up to become a living witness. Adica worked at the Balboa Clubhouse and the Gorgas luncheonette, while her sister, Doris Ann Griffith Sealy, worked at the Gamboa Commissary and Gorgas Hospital. Thus, building their own place in the community their mother had helped sustain. Decade after decade, Adica joined hundreds of Afro-Caribbean descendants in commemorative rides organized by SAMAAP, stopping at excavation sites where Silver Roll workers had literally moved mountains. Today, Adica and her niece, Felicia Morgan, still reside in the family home in Rio Abajo, and the family's legacy extends beyond memory into art: Sugar's great-granddaughter, Giana De Dier, has emerged as a prominent collage artist whose work carries the Afro-Caribbean inheritance forward.

It was CGM Foundation founder Frances Williams Yearwood who conducted the 2020 oral history interview now archived at the University of Florida and cited by historians worldwide. Just weeks ago, Frances celebrated Adica's 102nd birthday in Panama. The last surviving child of Emily Amelia and William Edward's nine children, Adica remains a living bridge between the world her mother built and the descendants who carry that legacy forward.

When Emily Amelia died, she was laid to rest at Corozal beside her husband. Their graves are not footnotes. They are the foundation.



Celebrating Adica's birthday in March.



Lillian, Sugar's daughter and mother of Felicia



Felicia and Giana, Sugar's granddaughter and great-granddaughter, 2025 (L-R)



Happy 102nd Birthday, Mrs. Adica Griffith de Moore!

GROUNDS KEEPING



Progress at Mt. Hope



Restored Corozal Grave



Gatun Stairs Restored

MOUNT HOPE - On January 27th, Mt. Hope Liaison Kimaura Oztolaza and CGM Panamá President Arcelio Hartley met with committee members, neighbors, and interested persons to discuss ongoing concerns and the shared vision for Mt. Hope Cemetery. The group agreed to hold in-person meetings every 3 to 4 months to share updates, coordinate cleanup efforts, and ensure that community voices are heard at the municipal level. In a show of collaboration, the Municipal recently reached out for assistance with weed killers, which CGM was happy to provide.

On the infrastructure front, plans to rebuild the adjacent prison are underway, and President Hartley has communicated directly with municipal representatives that the area's drainage system must be addressed as construction progresses. A nearby bus depot under construction runs along the same drainage path, making this a pressing priority.

On the maintenance side, one municipal team cuts grass weekly, and two on-site workers make daily cuts. The grounds are been well-kept, and CGM hopes that momentum continues as the rainy season approaches.

COROZAL - Arcelio Hartley and Bernadette French recently met with the Minister of Culture, Maruja Herrera in a productive discussion focused on the long-term care of Corozal Cemetery. A key outcome of the meeting was confirmation that a purchase order for maintenance services will be published imminently, with work expected to begin between mid-April and early May. The contract is structured for one year, with the option to extend for up to three years, a promising sign of sustained institutional commitment to the cemetery's preservation.

GATUN - Panama Canal Authority (ACP) restored the stairs to Gatun Cemetery and installed new drainage gutters.

UNIVERSIDAD DE PANAMÁ
VICERECTORÍA DE INVESTIGACIÓN Y POSTGRADO
INSTITUTO DE CRIMINOLOGÍA
PROGRAMA: MAESTRÍA EN ESTUDIOS CRIMINOLÓGICOS

"PROFANACIONES, VANDALISMO Y VIOLENCIA POST MORTEM: UN ANÁLISIS CRIMINO-ANTROPOLÓGICO DE LA PERCEPCIÓN Y MANEJO DE CEMENTERIOS EN ESTADO DE ABANDONO, DE LA REGIÓN METROPOLITANA DE PANAMÁ".

Trabajo de investigación presentada como requisito para optar al título de Magister en Estudios Criminológicos
AUTOR: PRIETO NUÑEZ, JOSE LUIS

FECHA: 31 DE MARZO 2026 HORA: 2:00 PM LUGAR: SALÓN DEL ICRUP, 4TO PISO, FACULTAD DE DERECHO Y CIENCIAS POLÍTICAS

Los cementerios son el espejo moral de la sociedad: cuando las tumbas son profanadas, las lápidas destruidas y el abandono se vuelven paisaje, no son los muertos quienes están en crisis, sino los valores de los vivos.
Jose Luis Prieto Nuñez

KEEPERS OF THE LEGACY - CLASS OF 1966

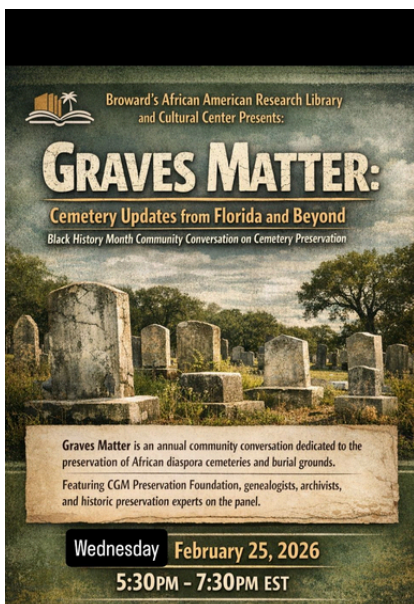


CGM is especially grateful to the **Class of 1966** for their generous donation.



Celebrating their Reunion in Panama, 2026

CGM & SANKOFA ON THE MOVE



CGM Shared Progress & Challenges (virtual), Feb. 2026

CGM, Sankofa & Cybernews share a table, SAMAAP Feria Afroantillana, Feb. 2026



Our Black History Month Watch Party, Feb. 2026



CGM discusses Corozal conditions with American Battle Monuments Commission, March 2026



CGM has been invited to participate in May 2026.

Visit Us

CGM: <https://www.cgmcmeterystation.org/>

Visit us here to learn about the work we are doing and how you can help.

Pan Caribbean Sankofa: <https://www.cgmcmeterystation.org/pan-caribbean-sankofa> - Visit us here to learn about the collection of oral histories of West Indian Canal workers and their families held at the University of Florida’s George A. Smathers Libraries archives.

Contact Us - Follow US

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Telephone: 407-815-4971 Google Voice- You can leave a message

Facebook: CGM Preservation Foundation

Instagram: @cgmcmeterystation



Click here.

HONOR HER LEGACY



For just \$15, adopt a grave at the historic Silver Roll cemeteries of Corozal, Gatún, or Mt. Hope.

These West Indian women helped build a nation.

They deserve to be remembered.

\$15 | One Grave | Monthly Care

Thank you for your continued support

To fulfill our mission, CGM relies on the financial donations from our supporters like you. Please donate whatever you can to our efforts. Donations can be made directly to the following:

Banco General (Panama)

Cuenta Corriente: #03-38-01-125719-1

Nombre: Fundacion para la Preservacion de los

Cementerios de Corozal,Gatun y Monte Esperanza

C-G-M Cemetery Preservation Foundation (U.S.A.)

P.O. Box 120663

Clermont, Florida 34712

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**Thank you for reading
and sharing our quarterly
newsletter!**