

In Memoriam: Black Solidarity Day Founder Carlos E. Russell



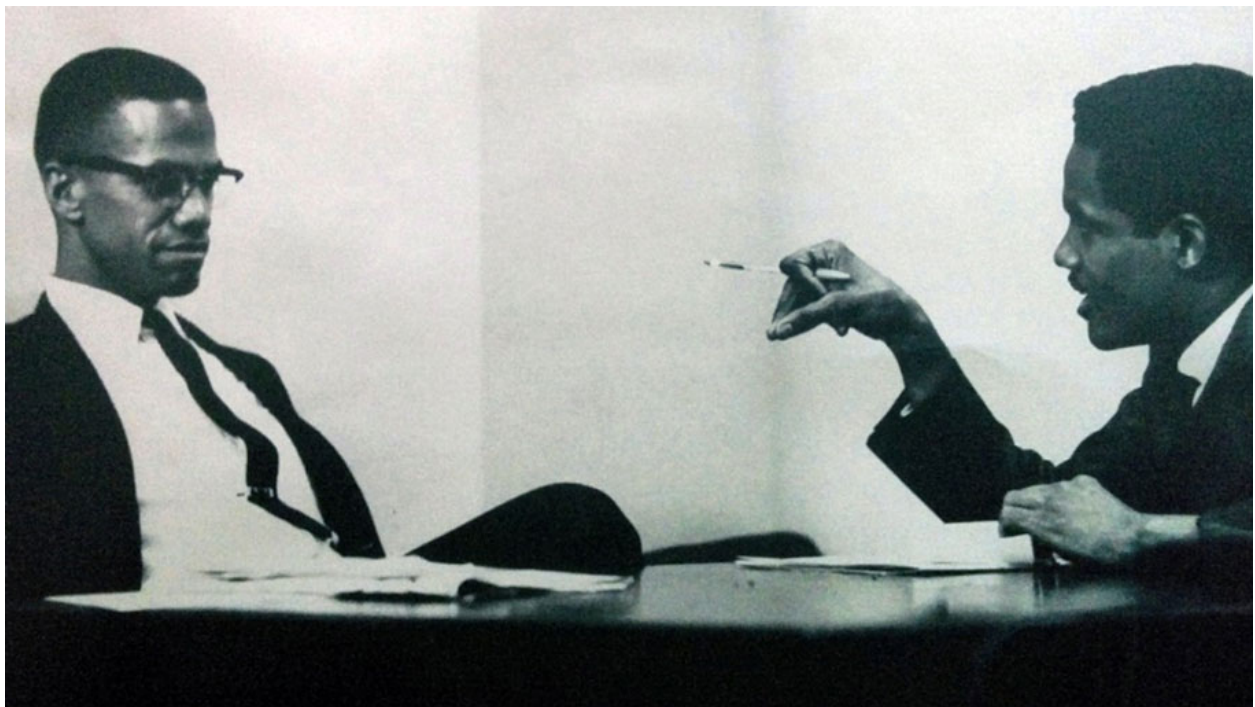
Carlos Russell (third to the right) with Shirley Chisholm (second to the right), and others.

Carlos Enrique Russell, Brooklyn NY resident, visionary, ambassador, historian, literary artist, and professor emeritus via Brooklyn College transitioned in his sleep on July 10, 2018. He was born in the Republic of Panama on August 6, 1934. In 1955, after graduating from the National Institute in Panama he immigrated to the United States on a student visa to attend De Paul University in Chicago, Illinois. In attempting to leave behind what he described as Panama's "rampant racism," he was forced to confront the reality of a deeply segregated and discriminatory U.S. society. After graduating, Russell worked for the Mary McDowell Settlement House in Chicago, and in 1961 he moved to New York and worked at the Albany Community Center in Albany Projects as a youth worker and directly working with gang members, and then eventually with the Fort Greene Community Progress Center.

Russell held a Ph.D. from the Union for Experimenting Colleges (now in the formation of the Union Institute & University), he served as Panama's Ambassador the Organization of American States, Panama's ambassador to the United Nations, and is the recipient of the Order of Vasco Núñez de Balboa, an award awarded for distinguished diplomatic services and contributions to international relations between Panama and other states.

And while serving as the Panamanian Ambassador for the United Nations, he was inspired by Douglas Turner Ward's fictional play "Day of Absence" in which a small town in the South is suddenly devoid of its Black population and is crippled by their absence, established Black Solidarity Day in 1969, held annually on the Monday before Election Day in November, designed to demonstrate the spirit of self-determination and collective responsibility for economic empowerment.

Many present-day activists and luminaries benefit from the legacy Dr. Russell leaves behind. During the 1960's and 1970's, Dr. Russell was a primary organizer for the first national conference of Panamanians which was solidifying the movement of the unification of Black and Caribbean pushback on systematic oppression. He was also one of the creators of "El Bahiano" which is the first Black newspaper and Panamanian newspaper here in the USA written (a member of the Harlem Writers Guild) in both English and Spanish. [Other co-founders noted are Walter Livingston, George Priestly, Aguilla Jimenez and a few others.] Also, he worked Minister Louis Farrakhan, Sr. of the Nation of Islam, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in the initial planning of the Poor People's Campaign, and he had the privilege of interviewing El Hajj Malik El Shabazz (Malcolm X) for *Liberator* magazine of which he was Associate Editor.



El Hajj Malik El Shabazz (Malcolm X) being interviewed by Carlos E. Russell

In 1968 Russell was professor and chair of Field Studies at State University of New York at Old Westbury (he had a strong influence on students in the urban action programs, inspiring and challenging students involved in the formation of the Young Lords) and at Brooklyn College of the City University of New York before becoming Dean of Contemporary Studies. He has also held the position of director of International and Urban Affairs at Medgar Evers College of the City University of New York.

In the 1990's he was a lead curriculum developer, educator, and trainer for the Ella Baker Academy (EBA) [later renamed Ella Baker/ Cleveland Robinson Academy, EBCRA], a program dedicated to create youth leadership using the methodology of "Kingian Nonviolent Conflict Resolution," as part of the New York State Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Commission and Institute in Albany, New York, under the funding and support of Governor Mario Cuomo. Dr. Russell worked with numerous community organizations throughout his life time. He was a guiding light for many, leading some into successful careers in social justice, finance, and politics in both the US and Panama.

As a creative person, he published *Miss Anna's Son Remembers* (1976), which is known as the first book of Panamanian-West Indian poems outside of Panama. Around this time with Anesta Samuel and other cadres, he helped to establish the Panamanian-West Indian Heritage Association inspired by one of the first oral history conferences held in New York City. He also spent many years as a playwright and a producer of community theater, namely "Ode to Panama," performed on stage at Brooklyn Academy of Music. He has written and produced 10 plays and authored 3 books of Pan-Caribbean poetry and a sundry of articles for many local newspapers (associate editor, *New York Amsterdam News*) and journals, and he was the executive producer and host of "Thinking it Through" a nightly radio talk show on WLIB-AM, an urban contemporary gospel radio station licensed to New York, NY.

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