

CHAYA!

DINNER WITH THE MAYA.



CURATED BY: ANABEL FORD



**Closing of Archaeological Exhibit—
“EXPLORING SOLUTIONS PAST”**

Keynote Speaker: Joseph Palacio Ph.D.
Theme: Anthropology, Archaeology, and Vision
Mexican Cultural Institute
Belize City, Belize
January 27, 2020

ANTHROPOLOGY, ARCHAEOLOGY, AND VISION

I am deeply grateful to Dr. Anabel Ford for inviting me to share with you some of my thoughts on the significance of anthropology and archaeology in my formation and the ways I have tried to integrate them into my wide-ranging work in Belize during the last fifty years and more. The bulk of this work took place within the University of the West Indies School of Continuing Studies, now called the Open University campus in Belize. My particular aim in this presentation is to focus on the influences that over time shaped my perspective to indigenize and even Belizeanize education in a broad sense. It is within this broad framework that Dr. Ford and I have shared ever since she started doing archaeology in Belize some decades ago. What started as a permit given to her on my approval by the Minister with responsibility for archaeological excavations has blossomed into commonalities between her and me on the significance of plants and other living biota for Belizeans – those living here hundreds of years ago as well as to us their faithful descendants in this day and age.

I was recruited into the fledgling Department of Archaeology in 1964 to uncover Belize's past for the following reasons:

- To see what previous Belizeans had left behind
- To contribute to a budding tourism industry
- To build interest in the protection of antiquities as legal entities

These three points do not do justice to the singular vision that the first political leader of Belize had toward archaeology. That was the Honourable George Cadle Price. I was fortunate to know him and to share discussions with him in government offices in Belmopan, at archaeological sites which he frequently visited, and at public events. His vision was to see archaeology as a tool to restore to the past a continuity extending to the present day. In short, he saw one Belize extending from the distant past onto the unknown future. Our role as living beings, therefore, was to do as much as we can to recover from the past for the benefit of the present and the future.

In the rest of my presentation I will trace some highlights in my academic formation after finishing VIth Form at St. John's College in Belize City in 1963. Those were the heady days of the birth of the "peaceful and constructive revolution" headed by George Price. It is not surprising that my first two jobs

concentrated in rural Toledo District in two government departments. The first was the Forestry Department and the second the Co-operative Department. While the Forestry Department introduced me to the tail end of the period when forestry was the main economic lifeblood of our country, the Co-operative Department introduced me to a new introduction to our economic well-being, namely the working together by women and men as teams in small scale rural and urban development efforts, such as in agriculture, fishing, producing starch, among other cottage industries.

My initial training toward being the first archaeologist in Belize started at the University of Toronto in Canada between 1965 and 1968. The several courses I took included the humanities and introductory social sciences.

Toward my M.A. at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, Canada I specialized in anthropology with a focus on Mesoamerican archaeology. To deepen my background in Mesoamerican archaeology I studied for two years at the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico. I will have to admit that my experience in Mexico City was more in the revolutionary function of education. My fellow students spent more time leading demonstrations and marches to reform the socio-politics of Mexican society than taking courses in archaeology. If I did not learn too much in my chosen discipline, I learned a great deal of the function of education in Latin America – namely to be fearless in transforming the very foundation of the socio-polity. Fortunately, I was able to return to Winnipeg, Canada to finish my M.A. in anthropology with specialization in archaeology at the University of Manitoba.

My preparation to lead a revolutionary role in the theory and practice of anthropology took place at another institution, which was no stranger to introducing fundamental changes in academia, the University of California at Berkeley. There I did my doctorate in social anthropology with focus on economic development within the Caribbean. On my return to Belize, I worked at the University of the West Indies for over twenty years, where I was fortunate to apply several of the ground breaking changes that I had been exposed to during my studies abroad.

I will share with you some of the topics in which I have concentrated through applied research combined with several publications. They include:

- Indigenous peoples, especially the serious erosion by de-indigenization that the government of Belize and the larger society continue to impose on both the Maya and the Garifuna
- Land – extensive history of land use and ownership in my home village of Barranco starting from the late 1800s to 2000
- Multiculturalism, the gift to the world that Belize continues to grapple with
- Peoplehood – the several methods of social and economic survival that the Garifuna people pursue for themselves and their descendants.

In conclusion I would argue that the discipline of anthropology is suited with a variety of tools to help us understand our problems of development. A primary tool that remains missing, however, is vision. Indeed, vision is the primary ingredient that the scholar himself injects into the discipline. Here again I refer to the special gift the Leader of our Nation passed onto us. Earlier I mentioned that in archaeology he had a vision of a discipline that could build Belize, wrenching it from the tentacles of colonialism. All of us need to ask ourselves how are we attempting to give body to that vision in our work and thought?

J.O. Palacio Ph.D.

Jan 24, 2020

EXPLORING SOLUTIONS PAST

In partnership with:

Mexican Cultural Institute - Belize

Museum of Belize

Institute of Archeology

National Institute of Culture and History

Cordially invite you to the closing event of the exhibit:

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CHAYA!

DINNER WITH THE MAYA.

Featuring El Pilar

Archeology Under The Canopy

and The Maya Forest Garden

January 27 2020 - 6:00 PM

Mexican Cultural Institute - Belize

Newtown Barracks & Wilson Streets

Belize City, Belize.

Hospitality sponsored by: Duke of Edinburgh Awards Belize