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Ground Level interactions in the Panama Canal Zone

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Ground Level interactions in the Panama Canal Zone

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Abstract

The prevailing academic consensus in the United States of the relationship between the countries of Panama and the United States has shifted during the last two decades. The idea that the relationship between the two nations was based on the United States acting as a beneficent "big brother" to a fledgling democracy is no longer the commonly accepted version of history. Instead, the consensus has moved towards a more unvarnished and nuanced view in which the United States did offer many benefits to the young nation of Panama; the relationship between the two countries was also less nurturing and more imperial and neo-colonial than previously accepted. This research project aims to answer the following question, what were relations like in and around the Canal Zone? Using oral histories of the residents and neighbors of the Canal Zone that were conducted by the Panama Canal Historical Association and Archive at the University of Florida, this research project examines the thoughts, opinions, and feelings of those who lived in the imperial borderland during the US occupation of the Canal Zone. The analysis of these oral histories has led to the conclusion that the United States routinely took advantage of the young country under its dominion while importing a discriminatory and racially segregated system of government into the ten-mile-wide swath of land bisecting the country of Panama. This research project helps to give voice to previously ignored or unheard local voices.