



NEW VISIONS

A PUBLICATION OF THE CARIBBEAN RESEARCH CENTER **SUMMER 2016 • NO. 5**

Celebrating the 32nd Anniversary of the Caribbean Research Center. A proud and unbroken service of research, publications, curriculum development, professional development, international sustainable economic development, inter-university collaborations, study abroad, internships, student and faculty exchanges.
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Words from the Executive Director

CRC Cultural Ambassadors The Montserrat Summer Experience July 16-23, 2016

This year, CRC launched its new international research experience and cultural exchange for MEC students and faculty on a visit to the volcano-ravaged island of Montserrat in the Leeward Islands. Montserrat is a self-governing Dependent Territory of Great Britain that is a full member of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank (ECCB) and The Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM).

The Framework

This research-oriented travel activity is part of the broader CRC agenda for student life enrichment through academic collaboration with faculty in research and publishing, international student exchanges, debating and performing arts.

The Vision

The vision for this summer travel experience for MEC students and faculty may be summarized as follows:

- To expand the College's footprint to become a global presence in education and development, specifically in the Caribbean, a region from which many of MEC's current students come;*
- To elevate MEC's profile to make it an international leader in the areas of research and development as well as a great influence on world policy impacting the Caribbean;*
- To enhance MEC support for faculty research and conference presentations;*
- To foster student engagement with faculty in joint research and publishing, presenting students with opportunities to participate in economic, political and humanitarian work that is both meaningful to them as well as their families and communities.*

Objectives:

- To conduct research on the impact of 21 years of sustained volcanic activity on the environment, especially the soil and air quality and vegetation of the island, as well as the psychosocial effects of the eruptions on the population and the implications for public health;
- To come up with preliminary findings that can be of benefit to policy makers, development planners on the island and future researchers in general;
- To establish an ongoing Annual Summer Research Travel Experience for future cohorts of promising students and interested faculty, in collaboration with the M'rat National Trust, the Ministry of Education and the M'rat Community College, as well as similar institutions in neighboring islands;
- To provide opportunities for MEC students to share their artistic talents with the local community, thereby contributing to the enrichment of life for Montserratian students and community in social and intellectual interaction with MEC students through local workshops, nature tours, radio interviews, surveys and socialization;
- To use this cultural exchange as a means of attracting and recruiting new Caribbean students for MEC;
- To engage MEC students in activities that enrich their personal lives and promote retention;
- To document these academic endeavors for the CRC archives at MEC under the Carnegie Corporation grant to open extended windows for non-travelling undergraduate and graduate students, as well as middle and high school students in NY.

Outcomes:

- Recruitment of first Montserratian student to MEC, Jason Daniel, for Environmental Sciences and first St Kitts student for Liberal Arts;
- Publication of CRC newsletter, *New Visions No. 5, September, 2016*
- Successful completion of first CRC Cultural Ambassadors' tour;
- Optimal motivation of participating faculty and students and readiness for Fall presentation of report.

Cultural Program and Gallery

CRC Cultural Ambassadors participated in the Montserrat Ministry of Education's Summer Escape Program for ages 7-14 as follows:

- Nikisha Abrahams** – Dance instructor for children in the morning and for adults in the evening; Dance and vocal performance at the Annual Community Gospel Concert; Radio interview on Radio M'rat – ZJB;
- Steven Lawrence** - Music instructor for children in the morning and voice instructor for adults in the evening; Radio interview on ZJB Radio; Vocal and instrumental performance at Annual Community Gospel Concert;
- Roderick Hurley Kesed Ragin** - Music instructor for children in the morning; Radio interview on ZJB Radio; Poetry workshop for children and adults; Spoken word performances on Radio M'rat and public concert of the Calabash Festival; Spoken word performance at the Annual Community Gospel Concert;
- Shelleyann Clark-Lambert** - Art and Crafts for children in the mornings; Radio interview on ZJB Radio;
- Clorene Similien** - Art and Crafts for children in the morning;
- Elaina Lawrence** - Art and Crafts for children in the morning;

Public Forum:

In place of the *Annual Professor J A George Irish Lecture Series*, all members of the MEC delegation participated as panelists in a public forum on what it means to be a student at MEC and a Cultural Ambassador for research and cultural exchange. This forum was a uniquely moving event that brought many persons in the audience to tears as students shared the life transforming personal stories of their sojourn at MEC.



VISION and MISSION

Caribbean Research Center at Medgar Evers College

Local Sponsors and Cooperating Organizations



The Montserrat National Trust's main objectives are: to conserve and enhance the beauty of Montserrat; to preserve and rehabilitate historical sites, including but not limited to buildings, monuments, documents and chattel; to preserve the fauna and flora of Montserrat and to make the public aware of the value and beauty of the island's heritage.



Montserrat Arts Council aims to foster development of the arts, uplift the condition of arts and artists & ensure implementation of the Cultural Policy.



Each year the Montserrat Calabash Festival is held during the 3rd week of July, which also commemorates the anniversary of our Soufriere Hills Volcano that became active on July 18th, 1995. Coupled with remembering July 18th, the summer festival provides an ideal opportunity for everyone to join in thanksgiving for blessings, to experience enthusiastic, fun, cultural and interactive activities that showcase who Montserratians are as a people.



The Montserrat Volcano Observatory was established shortly after the first phreatic eruption of the Soufriere Hills Volcano on July 18th 1995. The role of the MVO is to advise the civilian authorities on the volcanic activity and its associated hazards.

The Caribbean Research Center Team

Coordinators:

Dr. J A George Irish, CRC Executive Director/Dean SLAE Milton Lawrence, CRC Caribbean Education Coordinator

Field Research Team:

- **Dr Kobinah Abdul-Salim**, Asst Prof., Biology/Botany
- **Shellyann Clarke-Lambert**, *Environmental Sciences graduate*
- **Steven Lawrence**, *Biology student and musician*
- **Roderick Hurley**, *Psychology student and musician*
- **Kesed Ragin**, *English major and spoken word artist*
- **Elaina Lawrence**, *Honorary Cultural Ambassador*
- **Joel Strothers**, *Environmental Sciences student*
- **Nikisha Abrahams**, *Psychology student & Choreographer*
- **Cherice John**, *Biology student/researcher*
- **Clorene Similien**, *Education & Psychology graduate*
- **Salima King**, *Biology student/Public Health researcher*

MEC Faculty Mentors and Staff Collaborators:

Dr Carolle Bolnet, *Professor of Biology*
Dr Hollie Jones, *Associate Professor, Psychology*
Dr Waldaba Stewart, *CRC Research Coordinator*
Dr Sheilah Paul, *Associate Dean, SLAE*
Shakima Scott, *Assistant to Dean*

Dr Dereck Skeete, *Dean, Enrollment Management*
Dr Maudry B. Lashley, *Assistant Professor, Psychology*
Caeyenne Brown, *CRC Program Assistant*
Dr Ken Irish-Bramble, *Adjunct Associate Professor, SBS*
Kisha Greene, *Purchasing Office*

I

Botany/Conservation Biology Focus Area



Dr. Abdul-Salim,

Dr Kobinah Abdul-Salim and Cherice John

According to Myers (2000), a biodiversity hotspot is defined as a region of high vascular plant endemism (specifically, possessing a minimum of 1,500 endemic species), while at the same time possessing 30% or less of the original natural stable-state vegetation.

The entire Caribbean Islands ecoregion has been classified as one of 34 currently-recognized biodiversity hotspots (Zachos and Habel 2011), due to high plant endemism resulting from volcanic substrates, as well as a long history of negative human impacts on natural habitats (most larger islands have been densely populated).

Even before the eruption of Soufrière Hills volcano on Montserrat, much of the island's original primary biodiversity has been extirpated, with the bulk of vegetational cover consisting of cosmopolitan (widespread) secondary taxa (Lugo et al. 1981). An exception to this has been in the island's Centre Hills region, which had been a rare snapshot of primary Caribbean biota. However, part of this region has been decimated by the recent series of volcanic eruptions, and is the current focus of many of the island's biodiversity conservation efforts (Young 2008). The massive volcanic disturbance in this region presents an opportunity to study how disturbance and substrate-level changes affect how recolonization processes of community assembly and ecological succession proceed. We currently have a very rich set of baseline historical data from museum/herbarium collections, past surveys and checklists, and floristic treatments. In addition, a multinational consortium, the Centre Hills Project undertook an extensive assessment of the region [REF], and the resulting report will constitute a framework guiding future research priorities.

For the weeklong mission to Montserrat sponsored by the Caribbean Research Center at MEC and the Carnegie Foundation, The overall goal of team members of the Botany/Conservation Biology focus area will be to (1) contribute to the research infrastructure established by the Centre Hills Project through scientific work at all levels, and (2) to foster increased engagement and participation of Montserratian and American undergraduate students in training and research in the field. The principal proposal to be discussed will be the establishment of a system of long-term monitoring plots throughout the region, from which decadal censuses of vegetation and fauna can be conducted, as well as periodic studies of geology and hydrology.



The scale of such an undertaking is such that it will require a large sustained capacity of trained professionals and paraprofessionals, and would therefore be suitable for permanent inclusion in the research and training programs in Biology and Environmental Science at MEC, in cooperation with local conservation and educational institutions in Montserrat.

II

A soil and air quality study and its impact; OR metal pollution in plants



Dr. Dereck Skeete

Dr Dereck Skeete, Shelleyann Clarke-Lambert and Joel Strothers

Plants, soil, and water are primary reservoirs that govern that stability of ecosystems as they are critically linked to ground water, human, and atmospheric, animal health. Moreover, they are mediums for contaminants and nutrients.

Within this context, we aim to quantify potentially toxic substances in such point sources. Plant, water, soil, and volcanic ash samples will be collected from select sites and analyzed via atomic absorption spectroscopy (AAS), gas-chromatography-mass spectroscopy (GC-MS), high-performance mass spectrometry (HPLC), and ion-coupled plasma mass spectrometry (IC-PMS).

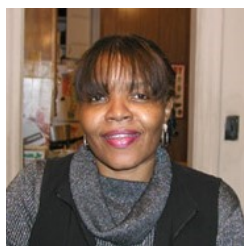
Project Objectives/Student Outcomes:

- 1) Attain an international academic/research experience.
- 2) Learn/conduct standardized sampling of environmentally-relevant samples.
- 3) Learn/conduct laboratory analysis of collected samples using Medgar Evers College's Environmental Analysis Center.
- 4) Write a manuscript for publication in a scientific journal.
- 5) Construct a scientific poster for presentation at future conferences.



III

Dr Carolle Bolnet and Steven Lawrence



Dr. Carolle Bolnet

Gram positive Soil bacteria such as *Actinomycetes* and some species of *Bacilli* are well known for their ability to produce secondary metabolites with medical importance including anti-tumor, anti-inflammatory, and antifungal compounds. Most importantly, they produce a wide range of antibiotics. Since many pathogens have evolved resistance to multiple antibiotics currently in use, a significant amount of

effort has been devoted to isolating *Actinomycetes* and *Bacilli* capable of producing novel compounds to combat these pathogens. Our lab is interested in isolating and characterized secondary metabolites from soil bacteria. So far, out of more than 103 samples, we have isolated 2 interesting soil bacteria from Brooklyn NY that are antibiotic producers. We are in the process of further characterizing these two isolates and purify their antimicrobial compounds. Recently, we became interested in studying microorganisms from soils in the Caribbean area that were affected by volcanic eruption in the hope of finding new species of bacteria manufacturing antibiotics and bioremediation compounds. Our goals are as follow:

Goal #1: *characterize two bacterial species isolated from Brooklyn soils and assess novelty of their antimicrobial compounds*

1. a. To characterize our two bacterial species isolated from Brooklyn soils and assess their novelty, using phenotypic methods that encompassed physiological, and biochemical tests (BIOLOG tests, FAME analysis,) as well as genotypic methods such as PCR and DNA sequencing.
- 1.b. To purify and characterize anti-bacterial and cytotoxic factors using Thin layer chromatography (TLC) , High Performance Liquid Chromatography (HPLC) and Nuclear Magnetic Resonance spectrometry (NMR)
- 1.c. to evaluate the efficacy of the recovery against indicator bacterial strains and mammalian cell lines

Goal #2 *Evaluate the biodiversity of bacteria producing secondary metabolites in soils affected by volcanic eruption in the Caribbean, in collaboration with the Montserrat National Trust;*

- 2.1. To evaluate the microbial biodiversity in soils affected by volcanic eruption in the Caribbean using metagenomics techniques
- 2.2 to screen the antibacterial and cytotoxic potential of the isolates on indicator bacterial strains and mammalian cell lines using Paper disk diffusion assays and bioassay tests in solid media
2. 3. To extract, purify and characterize anti-bacterial and cytotoxic factors using scale-up fermentation techniques followed by Thin layer chromatography (TLC) High performance liquid Chromatography (HPLC) and Nuclear Magnetic Resonance spectrometry (NMR)
- 2.4. To. characterize our volcanic bacterial species and assess their novelty as mentioned in 1.a, above

IV

Dr Kobinah Abdul-Salim Salima King and Elaina Lawrence



The public health of Montserratians maybe compromised due to the lack of inclusion and access to quality healthcare. The goal of my research is to find out why the people of Montserrat are dying from preventative diseases. After reviewing Montserrat Ministry of Health and Social Services 2011 report, I cannot help but notice the correlation of Montserratians and the residence of the South Bronx. Both groups are dying from the same diseases - Hypertension, Diabetes mellitus, and Chronic Respiratory disease. This research is important because it may identify gaps in the health care system of Montserrat.

The potential to isolate socioeconomic factors and increase accessibility to quality health care may provide an opportunity to improve the health of the people of Montserrat.

Study questions:

- Is there a link between volcanic activity and chronic respiratory disease in Montserrat?
- How is SO2 affecting the health of the community?
- Is acid rain polluting the drinking water and food supply?
- Are toxins getting into the respiratory system and blood stream?
- Is there inclusion between the foreign health providers and the longtime doctors/health providers of Montserrat?
- Are cultural differences taken into consideration when working with the community?
- Are they sharing data?
- How is health information being collected?
- Health records on a computer system or hand written?
- Consequence – inaccurate data for research
- Are the health care facilities accessible to everyone?
- What is the doctor to patient ratio?
- Might location be an issue?
- Is preventive care free for everyone?





Dr. M. Lashley



Dr. Hollie Jones

V
**Dr Hollie Jones, Dr Maudry B. Lashley
Roderick Hurley and Clorene Similien**

The purpose of this mixed methodological case study is to explore the psychological impact of the volcanic eruption for residents of the island of Monserrat. The first phase of the research study will employ a quantitative no experimental research design and rely on a survey methodology to examine the predictors of mental health and resiliency/post traumatic growth for a convenient sample of 250 adult residents. The survey will contain psychological measures to allow the researchers to tests hypotheses for the following research questions:

What is the relationship between demographic factors, cognitive appraisal, coping, future orientation, social support and mental health among the adult residents of Monserrat?

What is the relationship between demographic factors, cognitive appraisal, coping, future orientation, social support and resiliency/post traumatic growth among the adult residents of Monserrat?

The survey data will be examined using statistical methods including Pearson correlation and multiple linear regression.

The second phase of the study will consist of in-depth semi-structured phenomenological qualitative interviews with 15 residents. The goal of the interviews is to examine the following research question: What are residents' lived experiences with regard to the past (and possibly impending) volcanic eruption? In the interviews, the researchers will explore the following topics: (a) the effects of the volcano on marriage and familial connections, (b) social support, (c) financial impact, (d) loss, (e) future orientation, and (f) post traumatic growth. Thematic analysis of these data will be conducted to identifying common themes in the participants' lived experiences.



Ambassador Reflections



**Clorene Similien's
M'rat Experience
The Emerald Isle Encounter**

The trip to Montserrat as a Caribbean Research Center cultural ambassador has provided me with insight of the island's ecology and the residents of the island. While conducting a mixed methodological study of the psychological impact of a natural disaster, I've encountered unique individuals that shared their outlook on life and sense of community. Although the current population of Montserrat is under 5,000, there is a sense of community on the island that everyone is of value and each resident is their "neighbor's keeper".

Being part of the case study of Montserrat has allowed me to work alongside several passionate researchers of biology, public health, environmental science, and talented musicians of the Arts. Getting to know my cohort's individual fields of expertise led me to understand more of each individual's field of study as a measure of a greater universal transformation. There is a lot of work that needs to be done to take care of the natural environments of the world and people's psychological perception of life.

Prior to conducting my research, I conjectured that the volcanic eruptions for residents of the island of Monserrat had caused anxiety and stress in their daily living. However, after conversing with several residents regarding their experience of the volcanic eruption and daily life, there are minimal levels of mental stress in their lives. Approximately, 150 individuals were expected to participate in the psychological research survey. Within a small community, reaching the target goal of 150 individuals to complete the survey was not an easy task. Nevertheless, Roderick Hurley and I worked as best as we could to gather as many surveys as possible. Although we did not reach our goal, we learned many valuable lessons for future research projects.

This trip allowed me to explore the practical use of experimental psychology outside of a classroom. What I have gained through this research project is immeasurable. Conducting a mixed methodological study of the psychological impact of a natural disaster on Montserrat has deepened my sense of what makes communities within a society. The value of this trip for future cohorts of students is significant for expanding and the solid foundations of general education Medgar Evers College provides its students. Through real-world research, Medgar Evers College students have the power to self-actualize and develop and maintain high quality professional endeavors.



Joel's M'rat Experience "Transformation: My Montserrat Experience"

Filled with emotions at the thought of this beautiful, loving and historical paradise, one would be compelled to compare this country to heaven. The kind of emotions that are comparable to that of witnessing a newborn child taking its first breath of life. Happiness at its highest climax--that is what sustained my soul during and after my visit.

Prior to my visit to Montserrat, life as I knew it in Brooklyn seemed like merely an empty vessel forged in the streets of New York; there was only a weak pulse of life remaining. Happiness and purpose were not prevalent for practically all of my 31 years of life on this planet. As hard as I have worked to survive through some of the most arduous life experiences, there was no purpose-driven life for me. I guess it's safe to say that this thing called happiness I had never actually met until I arrived at this paradise: Montserrat!

This amazing study abroad experience was made possible by the Caribbean Research Center of the City University of New York at Medgar Evers College, The Montserrat National Trust, Dean J. A. George Irish, Dr. Kobi Abdul-Salim and participating team members. It has given me purpose. I'm elated to say that I'm "reborn". I found my purpose while on this trip; I had the privilege of being embraced and taken in as if I were being welcomed home. I was not just a visitor of a different land. This feeling of love and nurturing that was generated throughout the whole island of Montserrat helped spawn this new awakening of life.

Dr. Abdul-Salim helped cultivate this breath of new life by making me believe in myself, by encouraging me, and by confirming that it will be possible for me to complete my doctoral degree and become what I always set out to be - a scientist. Dr. Abdul-Salim instilled in me the essential components of being a critical thinker, observer, and a seeker of knowledge and education. He is a walking testimony of profound life experiences and scientific research.

It was very important to him that we all, as students, regardless of whether or not our concentration is in the sciences, learn as much as our minds can take in. I can honestly say that in a week, I've learned as much as most students would learn in a year. Dr. Abdul-Salim shared his heart and mind willingly and was extremely passionate about giving us the valuable learning experiences we so desired. He personally made me feel as if I were already ordained a scientist. I was able to see vividly my potential and my ability to be something great. Thank you, Dr. Abdul-Salim!

Learning in the field is crucial to the development of the students who wish to use their concentrations to launch a career. Some things just aren't meant to be learned solely in the classroom, and this trip to the great island of Montserrat is a testament to that principle. To all the members of the Montserrat National Trust: thank you for making our research initiatives possible, and many thanks to you for making them successful. And finally, to Dr. Irish: thank you for changing our lives with this awesome and amazing trip.



Nikisha Abrahams "Montserrat Trip 2016: The Allioagana Experience"

Allioagana or Montserrat is the smallest island I have ever visited. I, like some of my colleagues, didn't know where Montserrat was or even heard of the country before. I have now claimed Montserrat as my new home because of the impact it made on my life. The importance of this trip was for us as Cultural Ambassadors from Medgar Evers College to make connections with the population in Montserrat and to have an ongoing open dialogue with the students of Montserrat.

My first impression of this beautiful island was it reminded me of my homeland, Guyana. I soon learned that a large number of Guyanese were living in Montserrat. The mango trees, banana trees, five finger (star fruit), passion fruit and the sugar cane were all a delight to just sit and eat. Driving through the mountainous island was also very different for me; never thought one would be able to do that. Montserratians are very skilled in their driving. I love the views and scenery you get every time you stand at the top of a hill. The Old Sugar Mill was our home for the week we stayed there and it was truly breathtaking and peaceful. If you want to relax and just take in some fresh Caribbean air, Montserrat is the place to be. Every shop/supermarket, cafe, etc., reminded me of Guyana, another reason why I consider Montserrat home to me. The warm hospitality from everyone on the island was amazing. Everyone welcomed us with open arms and such warm embrace every time we saw them. I call that true Caribbean hospitality.



I truly appreciated everyone that made me feel at home while I was there. Ms. Sarita Francis being one of the hardest working women there made sure we were well taken care of every day. Akeila Clarke our wonderful liaison who made sure she was there every time we needed her, despite the fact she had to work. She made herself very available to us along with Sharlene Lindsay. I truly appreciated both of them taking care of us while we were there.

We met some really great young people also. I initially gravitated to Beanka Chambers, Montserrat's very own talented dancer. She is amazing and I know she will continue to grow and mature in her craft. Montserrat is not only beautiful and blessed with scenery but the island has beautiful people, you never know what the future holds, I might be Montserratian by marriage one day. Mr. Basil Chambers, I enjoyed being interviewed by him on Radio ZJB. Our chant will live on until it happens. OPEN THE FERRY!!!

I gained a lot of knowledge while visiting Montserrat. One being that my nationality, Guyanese make up the highest percentage of the population living there, I was very happy to hear that. I was very happy to be a part of that 12.5%. There were many things that I enjoyed greatly, one being our visit to the exclusion zone of Plymouth. It really hit home for me.

I can't imagine living during the period of the volcano and having to relocate, leaving my home behind and everything I worked hard for. That really saddened me. But even after all that disaster, Montserrat and its people still stand very strong. I admire the strength and courage to keep going and not leave the island all together.



I went to Montserrat solely to give back and teach dance to the students of the Summer Escape Program at Brades Primary School. I enjoyed every minute for the 3 days I was able to do so. The students were so excited to learn and come to learn new moves. The testimonials I received from the kids were truly amazing. They went home every day to practice and were eager to come to class to show me what they remembered. I felt very connected to each student I taught that week. I even had the pleasure of teaching some adults that wanted to indulge in dance. Some of the students from the morning session wanted more, so they attended the afternoon sessions also. I truly appreciated all the love that came my way. Dance is my life and I was very excited to give back in that way.

Another way I am hoping to give back is to open my very first Dance School/ Studio in Brades. It's a dream of mine to have my own dance school and I can't imagine a better place to open it than in Montserrat. Their strength, perseverance and courage will give me all that and more to make my dream come true. I hope to receive all the support I will need to make this happen for the students of Brades and Montserrat as a whole.

If it weren't for the Right Honorable Dr. J. A. George Irish, I wouldn't have been on this trip to experience the best time of my life educationally, socially, emotionally and professionally. My heart will forever be with Montserrat!

Thank You,

- Montserrat National Trust
- Sarita Francis
- Beanka Chambers
- Sharlene Lindsay
- Akeila Clarke
- Chit Chat Snackette
- Norman Castle
- Adrian Edgecombe
- Ms. Walcott
- Florence Griffith
- Lincoln Quan Joseph
- Nanny's Café
- Montserrat Volcano Observatory (MVO)
- Brades Primary School

And everyone who has contributed in any way to making my stay an unforgettable one.



Roderick's
M'rat Experience

Dear Dr. Irish, as a son of the Caribbean I am always excited about a visit to any of the islands, but when I was asked to join the CRC team on the trip to Montserrat my excitement was unprecedented.

It was more than just the excitement of going to the Caribbean, and to an island I had never visited before. I was excited because it would be my first time travelling to do research, and because I felt from the beginning that the trip would be a unique experience presenting unique opportunities for personal growth, networking, cultural exchange, and social expression. Several weeks later, having completed the mission, I am happy to report that this trip has exceeded my expectations in every way.

My role as a Cultural Ambassador was two-fold: student researcher in psychology, and musician. With the guidance of our professors Dr. Hollie Jones and Dr. Maudry Lashley, my colleague Clorene Similien and I designed a mixed methodological research study to examine the psychological impact of the eruption of the Soufriere Hills volcano on the residents of Montserrat. Our research seeks to investigate how residents feel about the volcanic crisis and about planning for the future, and the kind of social support available to residents in order to determine how these factors, along with demographics, relate to mental health, to post-traumatic growth, and to the resiliency in which so many Montserratians pride themselves. Using questionnaires and interviews, we gathered some rich data which I look forward to analyzing and reporting on.

In both phases I interacted with a number of residents. I got a better understanding of the dynamics of a close-knit community, and saw first-hand how friendly, resourceful, insightful and generous the people of Montserrat are. My participation as a musician involved assisting with teaching the children's music class at summer camp in Brades. I was very happy to be able to make a contribution in this way.

Wherever I went on the island, in whichever capacity, I met welcoming, knowledgeable people. I met with public health professionals, psychologists, government officials, and other high level individuals to whom I probably would not have been able to gain access in a much larger society. The Montserrat National Trust offered us tremendous support and helped to ensure that we had a pleasant, enriching experience in Montserrat. I enjoyed the natural beauty of the island, and the wholesome, delicious food that was provided for us.



To me, the highlight of the trip was the Calabash Festival panel discussion where each member of our team shared their personal stories with the students and people of Montserrat. These were very well received, and I believe that the testimonies helped to inspire and encourage those who heard them. I am thankful and honored to be among the first group of Cultural Ambassadors from Medgar Evers College to Montserrat. I see this program as an invaluable means of facilitating the College's mission with regard to international education.



Salima King

“My Montserrat Experience”

On July 16 I had the opportunity to pursue what I love. I traveled to Montserrat on my first international public health research project. I was afforded this experience because of

the dedication of members of the Caribbean Research Center and the Carnegie Foundation, specifically Dr. J A George Irish and Mr. Milton Lawrence. Moreover, Dr. Abdul-Salim, my professor and mentor, was instrumental in the process. For me this trip was incredibly rewarding, because it solidified my desire to become an advocate for public health. However, this trip was not about the individual; it was about the community -- the community of Medgar Evers students building a connection with the students, professionals and the people of Montserrat.

Our trip to Montserrat was an eye opener. We were excited to meet people who looked like us and worked as Environmental Scientists, Volcanologists, and Epidemiologists. Meeting, conversing with and being mentored by them helped us realize that it was even more possible to fulfill our dreams of becoming scientists. I think it is imperative that every student at Medgar Evers, regardless of major, be given this opportunity to learn and apply. We used what we learned in the classroom and applied it in the field. In this experience, knowledge became tangible. Biology students were able to identify layers of sediments; they touched them and took samples from the earth. Some students used their sense of smell to identify one species of plant from another. Sociology students learned to make adjustments to their questionnaire while taking surveys. Active learning in the field allowed us to be more engaged and enthusiastic about learning. Some of us even showed our natural ability to teach. We learned from each other and we felt an increased sense of community. Our learning process became three dimensional. We will never forget our experiences in Montserrat; it is etched into our memories.

I remember while attending a conference, I was approached by a young man who wanted to know more about Medgar Evers College. After my explanation he was curious and enthusiastic. The first question he asked was if Medgar Evers College offered scholarships. I immediately responded that yes, there are opportunities to earn scholarships. In that moment I imagined Medgar Evers opening its doors to a student exchange program. I imagined Medgar Evers being a point of access for educational, political and social development for its students. My belief is that we can create a cross cultural relationship between students at Medgar Evers and students in Montserrat. The possibility exists because Medgar Evers College has a very unique advantage.

Although our population of students and faculty members are small in number, it is very diverse in Caribbean ethnicities. Opening our doors to our people will prove to be a nurturing relationship, because we can offer an environment which allows for a more personable educational experience for all. I can also see Medgar Evers students becoming peer mentors and helping in the transition and cultural adjustments of our exchange student.

On July 16 we left Medgar Evers College as individual students with individual goals, but we came back as a community of students with an overall purpose of enriching and transforming our own community and that of our extended community in Montserrat. I believe that we, the students of Medgar Evers College, have formed an undeniable and valuable connection with our friends and family in Montserrat. My hopes are that we extend open arms by continuing to create new connections in Montserrat and throughout the Caribbean.



Shellyann Clarke-Lambert

“My Montserrat Journey”

My journey as a pre-CRC Cultural Ambassador started when I received a call from Dr. Dereck Skeete asking if I would be interested in going to Montserrat for a special research project led by Dean Irish. The response of “yes” couldn’t come out fast enough. As I ended the call, I stood in my room and did a celebratory dance of excitement. I decided to submit my application in record time, so that if there were any problems I would have ample time to correct them. A week before the anticipated trip I received an email stating that I was ineligible to go on the Montserrat research trip. I was devastated, not only because I couldn’t go, but because I had already prepared myself mentally to do research and work with the children.

Four days before the trip to Montserrat, I called the CRC office for confirmation that I was not going. Unfortunately, it was finalized. **Shellyann would NOT be going to Montserrat.** “How could a person with so much to give back and share be excluded from this trip?” I asked myself. To my surprise, I didn’t have the final answer to that question.

One day before the scheduled trip, I received an email from Dr. Irish, offering to sponsor me. This was an offer I gladly accepted, and one for which I will be eternally grateful. I didn’t know Dr. George Irish before he was willing to fully finance my trip expenses. Little did he know the euphoria of my success will be forever fueled by his generosity and love for learning. This is how my journey as a CRC CULTURAL AMBASSADOR began.

As a CRC Cultural Ambassador I began to realize the real merit of the idea and purpose of this trip. I could travel; I could expand upon my knowledge of a foreign country; I could gain great global experiences that could help my career in the future; I could make an impact in the lives of others; I can make a difference; I could even step outside my comfort zone and grow and learn more about myself in the process. I can use my experience and scientific research to bring about change. The more I thought about it, the more I began to see that this unplanned revision of my future was really an opportunity of a lifetime!

My time in Montserrat was a plethora of new experiences. I was able to meet people with backgrounds very different from my own and experience a new culture. The island is a paradise surrounded by beautiful fruit trees, plants and many different flowers. The topography was different from anything that I have ever seen; the hills and mountains while scarily precipitous, provide a beautiful view of the surrounding sea. I enjoyed the starry nights and experiencing the sunrise and sunset on a daily basis was utterly mesmerizing. There were nights when I lay in bed after a wonderful day and reflected on the beauty of this island; a beauty that deserved to be preserved.

The people are as beautiful as their island. Their beauty did not just pop up one day during puberty. No. They were born with it; it flowed through the veins of their forefathers and had no other choice than to manifest itself in all that they said and did and believed. I had the opportunity to work with some children in a summer program and their love and beauty were so honest and pure that it left me moved beyond words. When I met the older residents I saw where that beauty stemmed from and realized that the love and beauty had matured into something priceless and precious; something that I had never experienced before. Everyone I met on the island of Montserrat made me feel as though I mattered and my efforts mattered even more; I was greatly appreciated. The strength, unity and resilience of the people are qualities that need to be highlighted.

This trip to Montserrat was filled with so many first time experiences that it will forever be archived in my memory bank. As I sat in the Brades Primary School, surrounded by the laughter and voices of children, on that first day, awaiting the start of the summer camp, a little wave and a shy “hello” from the cutest little boy I ever met, highlighted my day. He stood by the curtains which separated the classroom and played his version of “peek-a-boo” with me. My heart melted and was instantly stolen. The little thief’s name was Devaughn Gomes, a witty 7 year old who looked more like 5 years old. He became my first friend and the start of my popularity amongst the other children.

Another highlight of my trip was the hike the nature trails of the Center Hills Mountain which stood 11’000 ft. tall. It was a most grueling climb and it showed (how unfit I was). I certainly discovered that day how far I can push myself when presented with a challenge. The hike was a personal accomplishment that I will never forget.

The trip to the destroyed city of Plymouth was such a profoundly heart wrenching sight that it left a permanent scar in my soul. It was surreal to see an entire city buried in volcanic ash, a permanent remembrance of the desolation that brought about this new resilient civilization of Montserratians.

I met many a wonderful, talented, amazing, and educated persons on this trip. At the Brades Primary school I met Kirk Kentish Brade. He was the Art Director for the summer school and also a Montserrat Police Officer. It was hard to believe that he was a police officer as he was soft spoken and very skinny. He taught me how to do “Paper Mache” and “Wire Bending”. Secondly, I met a Horticulturist/Botanist/Herbalist by the name of Philemon “Ma-p jie” at the Montserrat National Trust/Botanical Garden.



He was extremely knowledgeable on the environmental and medicinal properties of every plant that was grown on the island. After meeting him one would be inclined to believe that he had his PhD in botany and a licensed herbalist but his wealth of knowledge comes from his love and passion for the environment and the island of Montserrat. I learnt that one can be successful in anything that one puts one’s mind and dedication into as long as there is love and passion for it.



I had the honor of meeting the Parliamentary Secretary for Youth, Sports and Culture, Mr. Gregory Willock. He conveyed his fascination for the type of research I was involved in and his admiration for me after hearing me speak at the Panel discussion. He expressed an interest in working with me on future projects. We exchanged contact information and he promised to keep in contact with me. This meeting taught me that if a person possesses a passionate enthusiasm for making a difference, he will be noticed by others who will want to share his cause.

Similarly, being on a radio station and also having the opportunity to come out and meet the community in a panel discussion was another amazingly priceless experience. The success of my research would not have been possible had I not been given this opportunity and support from my amazing teammate, Joel Strothers and the wonderful Dr. Abdul-Salim. I was able to collect over 35 soil samples from various locations across the island of Montserrat. Samples were collected from areas that were affected and not affected by the volcanic ash. After speaking at the panel discussion I was approached by two persons who wanted me to collect soil samples from where they live. My research effort was a great success.

A report to enthusiastically encourage everyone to study abroad must contain the names of the two places where I gained the most knowledge about the island of Montserrat. At the Montserrat National Trust there were seminars outlining the general information on Montserrat’s Social and Economic Transformation post Volcano Disasters, Generalized Mental Health Issues of Post Volcano Population and the research activities of the Center Hills Project and MNT Botanic Gardens. I learnt that there are approximately 1,100 species of bats worldwide and of these 10 species are found on Montserrat and also the bats are the only native mammals on Montserrat. All other mammals were introduced by man.

The visit to the Montserrat Volcano Observatory was filled with a lot of information about the monitoring of the volcanic activity and the use of Diffusion Tubes to monitor Sulfur Dioxide around the island.

The scientists work extremely hard to reduce the impact of volcanic activity by intensely monitoring, researching, educating, and advising the residents of Montserrat.

Lastly, if I had to pick my favorite part of the trip to Montserrat, I would say EVERYTHING! There is so much so say to my future MEC and cohorts of students but what really made my trip memorable was making friends and not being scared of trying new things. People should be accepting and open to everything because this is a once in life time experience. On my trip I laughed, cried, ran, sat still, worked hard, played, made new friends, I tried new things and left behind some old things. Most importantly, I experienced as much as I could and that is something no one can ever take away. Montserrat was amazing...so enjoy every moment!!!!



Steven Lawrence

“M’rat Experience”

I must begin with saying, “Oh Montserrat, proud Motherland, your children raise your standards high”, the first line from the Montserrat territorial

song. I was deeply humbled by my experience. Montserrat's rich culture was easy to fit into because my family background is also Caribbean, specifically from Jamaica.

The Medgar Evers Cultural Ambassadors met with the Montserrat National Trust (MNT), where we were briefed by their specialist in the economic, statistical, environmental, and psychological aspects of pre and post volcanic eruption. The said presentations were extremely informative and opened my eyes to the strength of a people that endured and have recuperated beyond what I thought would be possible. Established schools with diverse curriculum, Festivals/Carnivals, and religious activities all express their strength as a people. As I am both a scientist and musician I had the grand opportunity to do research, teach choral and music theory, and participate in the calabash festival activities.

One aspect of my research was to collect soil samples, another was to learn about the environmental impacts that may affect the micro environment. Interestingly, many who farm use a mix of ash and soil to cultivate their crops.

The farmers are well aware of the minerals within the ash such as sodium, potassium, and calcium. On the other hand, others have not the choice because ash does not dissolve in water and remains a part of the environment. The MNT Botanical Garden also uses a mix of soil and compound extruded from the volcano called Goth sand. Another interesting fact I learned was that volcanoes can be classified by the elements that extrude from them. Montserrat's volcano in Sulfer Hills, the one that devastated the island, is an andesitic volcano. This means that the volcano extrudes a number of compounds such as iron, magnesium, calcium, sodium, potassium; in more volumes, silicon-oxide. It also has a large volume of sulfurous gas in various forms being released into the environment on a daily bases that affects the micro environment and renders the surrounding area uninhabitable. Dr. Bolnet's lab, of whom I am a research assistant too, is focused on the antibiotic production of bacteria. The importance of this research is that many disease causing bacteria are becoming resistant to multiple antibiotic drugs. The volcanic eruptions pose great environmental challenges to the microenvironment. We speculate that bacteria are producing new compounds, to survive the harsh conditions, that can be used bio-medically.

For this purpose I collected soil samples to do further analysis of the microenvironment. We hope that from the tragedies that have taken place new blessings to humanity can be discovered.

It was a joy to share my musical knowledge with the people of Montserrat. The children were so enthused to learn and eager to play music. I had the opportunity to observe their current music teachers form of teaching and they also shared with me their musical form of playing. I encountered some of the most beautiful voices known to my ears. The talent was tremendous and diverse instrumentally. I was asked to take part in the Gospel concert, a Calabash activity, where I collaborated with a Montserratian singer. The experience was overwhelming and I was very happy about how well we were able to work together in efforts to increase relations between Medgar Evers College and the Caribbean. We also had the opportunity to say a few words over the radio which lead to us spontaneously performing at the Calabash festival.

Center Hills, the second youngest volcano on Montserrat, was the site where we hiked. We encountered many naturally occurring plants that were one of humanity's first utensils used to cook, drink, and eat. Also we learned of many of the plants that the natives use for healing asthma, colds, and blood pressure. Our hike guide used a specific sound to attract the Montserrat national bird, it was indeed a beautiful sight. We finally arrived at the top of the trail, it gave a wonderful feeling. For many of us it was our first time on a hike. We encountered trees that had survived every earthquake, hurricane, and volcanic eruption to ever plague the island. After the hike a thought came to me that Montserrat has everything they need in the forest.

Traveling to Montserrat became something more to me than I expected. It gave clarity to what I would will do once I graduate with my BS in Biology and a minor in music and mathematics. I will continue my education and hope to start initiatives similar to what the Caribbean Research Center (CRC) has done. This trip has encouraged me to continue to do research that includes an out-in-the-field experience. I enjoyed learning through interaction and believe that this was a very valuable endeavor. A new flavor I've learned from Montserrat; Guava mixed with Tamarind. Just like its wonderful flavor, my experience at Montserrat, “the delicious taste will always be with me.”



Dean Irish with MEC Cultural Ambassadors at MNT.

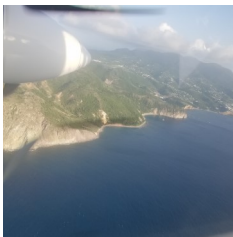


Elaina Lawrence

“Thank Your Emerald Isle“

The trip to Montserrat was definitely worth the scary eight-seater plane flight across from Antigua. I learned a great deal from all of the students on the trip as well as the Montserrattians that we had the pleasure of meeting.

Growing up in Dominica, I remember learning about all the islands in the Caribbean and having to memorize all of the capitals and Prime Ministers, to later be quizzed on. I also vaguely remember being informed about the volcano in Montserrat and the great deal of damage that it caused. Given that I am only nineteen years old, I would not have had the opportunity to see the beautiful island at its peak. Driving through Plymouth was an emotional experience even for me, so I can only imagine how it is for locals, especially those who resided there. After seeing the old pictures of what the town looked like prior to the eruption, it is incredible that the ground that we stood on was once that bustling town.



For a few days during the week I worked along with Shellyanne Clarke-Lambert at the Brades Primary School. We assisted Mr. Kirk Kentish in the arts and crafts section of the school. We collected leaves for painting and made dancing men from wire. The last project we were able to start was the formation of faces for the Paper Ma-

che. The melting pot of nationalities that I met at the Brades Primary School was refreshing. Seeing the young ladies teach each other different hand games from their cultures was absolutely amazing to watch.

I also had the opportunity to work with Salima King, whose focus on the trip was researching the effects of the volcano eruption on public health. We spoke with officials of the Ministry of Health and gathered information on the health profile of the island. I would love the opportunity to continue working with Ms. King on this very important work.

For years all I knew of Montserrat was its volcano, and for that I am sorry. I now know that there is much more to the island than meets the eye. I've gained a new found respect for the people and the strength that they have and pray that they will be able to successfully rebuild a country that has endured so much for so long.



Dr. J.A. George Irish, Executive Director, Caribbean Research Center



Dear Sarita and Ruth

How can I ever thank you enough for the magnificent job you did for us in planning, hosting, coordinating our visit and the diverse range of activities. You surely went far beyond the call of duty to serve in every way possible, even to the point of paying fares for charter and individuals on the Antigua-Montserrat leg.

The CRC Cultural Ambassadors and I are eternally indebted to you for your faithful and highly efficient stewardship.

The students and Dr. Abul-Salim are all ecstatic and raving about the Montserrat experience.

Thanks again and God bless you.

Sarita Francis, Executive Director, Montserrat National Trust



Dear Dr. Irish,

It was indeed a pleasure planning and executing the plans for the hosting of the team under your leadership. I know that we all enjoyed the experience and look forward to further cooperation and collaboration between our two organisations. I hope that the experience will be long lasting and bear fruit in terms of the future research and career development of the members of the team. As you recognize in your email, we had to partner with a number of persons and organisations to assist in this venture and we are eternally grateful to all.

On behalf of the team here at the MNT and all the partners we would also want to thank you and Milton for your guidance and assistance to ensure that this initial project was a success. Milton went above the call of duty to assist in transporting members of the team to various venues.

Kind regards,

Sarita

Dear MEC Team Members,

You all brought something great to our island and we loved sharing our little paradise with you. Thank you too for all your contributions to our children and people. You have touched lives and your impact will last a long time. It was great having you and do continue to promote our island to all the people in your circles. We are resilient and ambitious but the world needs to know that we are fighting to be more self reliant and to leave a better island for the future generations.

Thank you again for the experience of sharing what you do with us.

Best wishes and much love to all.

Sarita

Dr Beatrice R. Allen, Pastor, Retired Educator & Senior Librarian



Dear Friends:

It was great having all of you on our island. You all contributed so much and touched our lives. We look forward to have you all back soon.

Best wishes for success in your studies and all your endeavors.

Dr Ruth Allen

The Emerald Isle: Through the lenses of the CRC Cultural Ambassadors



PHOTO GALLERY



GALLERY

FIELD WORK AND RESEARCH

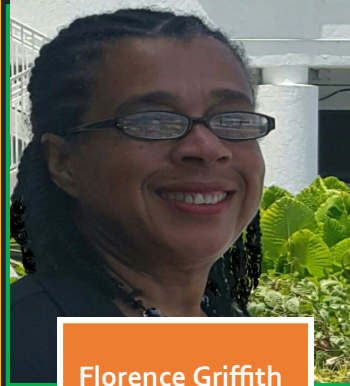


COMMUNITY
CRC Cultural Ambassadors



Caribbean Research Center

It would not have been Possible without them:



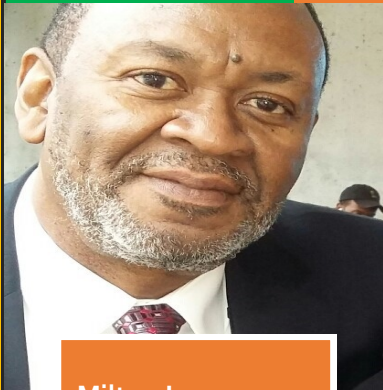
Florence Griffith



Sarita Francis



Dr. J.A. George Irish



Milton Lawrence



Dr. Beatrice Allen



Dr. Waldaba Stewart will be presenting at he Working Symposium on Race and Inequality at the Robert F. Wagner School of Public Service at NYU. On October 13th, 2016.



Dr. Ken Irish-Bramble will be the keynote speaker at the 16th Annual International Conference on Caribbean Literature in St Maarten in November 2016. The conference is sponsored by the University of St. Martin and Morehouse University.



Dr. Clinton Crawford will be presenting on “The Media and the Performing Arts: A contemporary Approach.” at the 19th Annual Eastern Caribbean Island Cultures Conference on Languages, Literatures, and Cultures of the Eastern Caribbean hosted by the University of West Indies in Barbados.



Dr. Keming Liu has been invited as a Plenary Speaker at the 19th Annual Eastern Caribbean Island Cultures Conference on Languages, Literatures, and Cultures of the Eastern Caribbean hosted by the University of West Indies in Barbados. Dr. Liu will kick off the international conference with a lecture on "Cultural Implications in Discourse Analysis: An Eastern Caribbean Perspective."



Dr. John Flateau will be presenting at he Working Symposium on Race and Inequality at the Robert F. Wagner School of Public Service at NYU on October 13th, 2016.



Dr. Yvonne Weekes of the Department of Performing Arts at Cave Hill Campus of the University of the West Indies, will be coming to Medgar Evers College (CUNY) as a visiting scholar. While here, Dr. Weekes will present a public lecture on “Caribbean Culture and Identity” and conduct a Theater Workshop for interested faculty, staff students and members of the local community.



The Caribbean Research Center will be hosting a conference schedule for October 29th 2016, presenting the findings of several Summer 2016 research projects.

PHOTO GALLERY



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