

PAUL SOLOVAY
Junkanoo History:

When the curator of the National Gallery of the Bahamas saw my “Active Camera TM “ technique featuring musicians and dancers he invited me to shoot the Bahamian festival known as Junkanoo.

Initially I had no idea what this 2 day holiday was all about or how important it was to Bahamian culture.

What I learned and what I photographed proved to me what a great match maker the curator was.

Junkanoo, most folklorists agree, resembles the West African John Canoe, a festival said to be celebrated by West African slaves. And a tribute to Prince John Canoe who outwitted his English masters.

From there the celebration came to the new world in the 16th or 17th Century and settled in the Bahamas. But although its name evolved to Junkanoo, the cause for celebration remained the same: Freedom.

In the pre-emancipation era the slaves were allowed a special holiday at Christmas time (Boxing Day and again on New Years Day) during which they were allowed to leave the plantation, visit relatives and hold a grand dance.

Soon this merry-making by the slaves took on a particular form. Costumes became prevalent and changed in due course from cloth to a paper fringes feathers and vivid paint and parading became more organized during the 20th century.

Today's Junkanoo extravaganza has become the most entertaining street carnival of not just The Bahamas, but of the world. With the costumes, dance and music inspired by different themes by different groups each time, preparations literally take months and bring together men and women from all different walks of life. But through all its reiterations and changes Junkanoo remains a collective expression of freedom and that ultimately is what my Active Camera TM has captured.