

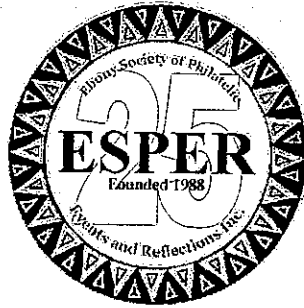
Ebony Society of Philatelic Events and

# Reflections

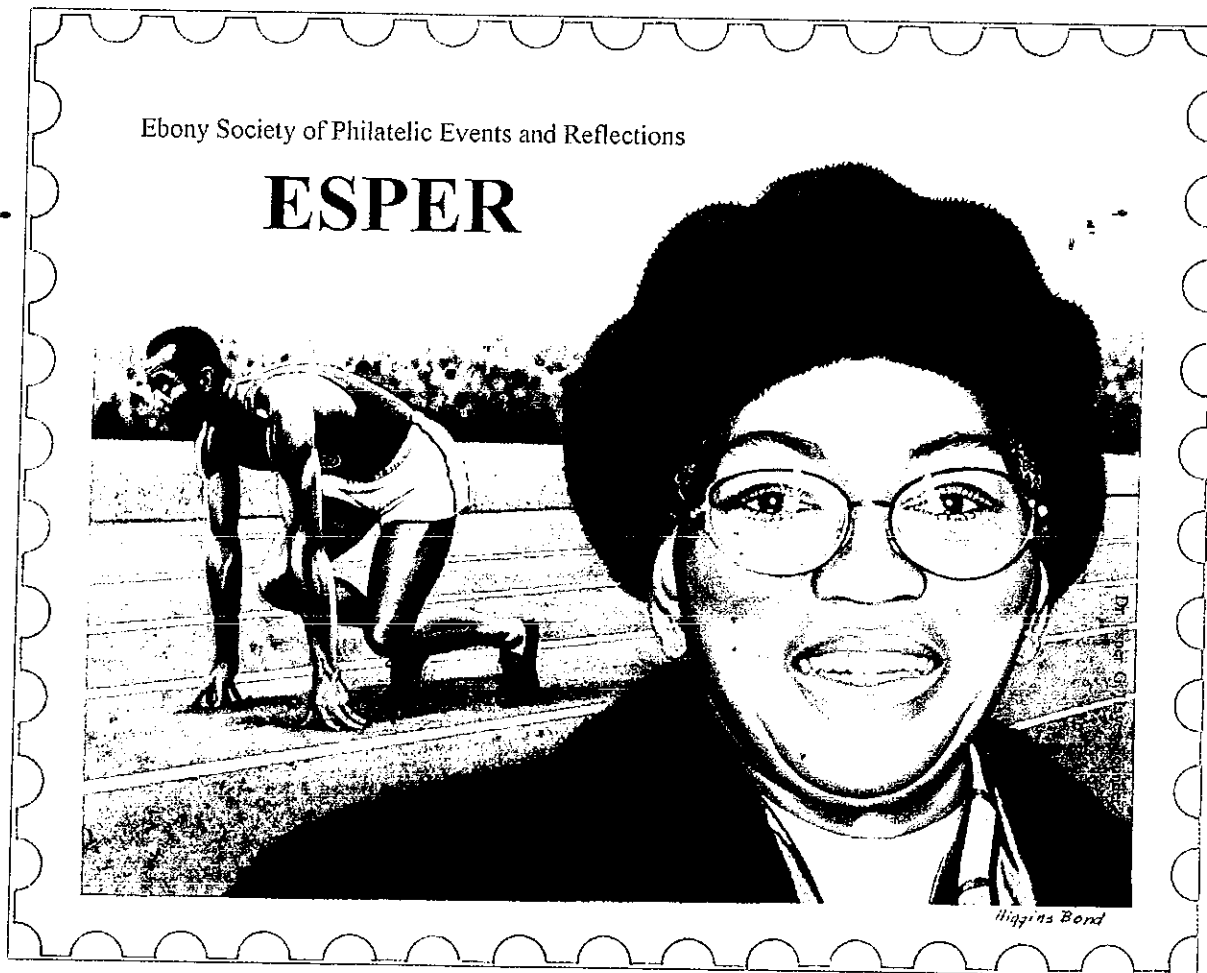
BE LIE SC F I O U S E

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## Celebrating Our 25th Anniversary!



Inspired by Jesse Owens, ESPER has been "stampin' through history" 1988 - 2013.

# In Search of de Laurence

By Calvin Mitchell and Daniel Piazza

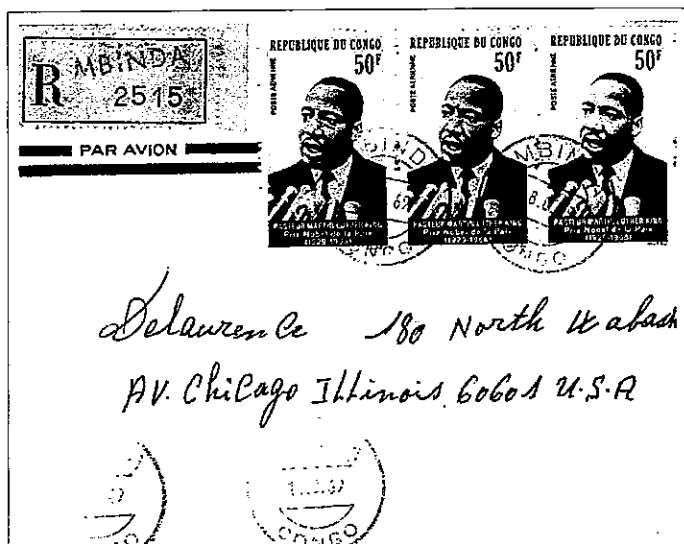


Occultism, Hoodoo, and Afro-Caribbean folk traditions merge with postal history in the form of de Laurence covers. Lauron William de Laurence, a White man born in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1868, founded the de Laurence Institute of Hypnotism and Occult Philosophy in 1900. He began publishing plagiarized versions of medieval and Renaissance magic books and Hindu ritualism manuals, and by 1930 was one of the largest seller of occult books in the world. After de Laurence's death in 1936, his son Velo took over the business.

The company eventually branched out from publishing to include powders, oils, amulets, and fortune-telling cards. Its primary U.S. markets were in the rural South—particularly the Carolinas, Georgia, Mississippi, and Louisiana—where African-American folk magic and mystical beliefs have a long tradition. As African Americans migrated north, many of these traditions continued to be practiced in urban communities. Subsequently, de Laurence advertisements also can be found in metropolitan newspapers such as the *Chicago Daily Defender* and Harlem's *Amsterdam News*.

De Laurence was also one of the leading U.S. exporters to the Caribbean and Black Africa. Customers presumably were mediums, psychics, and Obeah priestesses claiming to possess psychic and supernatural abilities and powers. Books and products were sold by mail order, and covers addressed to the company often bore multiple and colorful stamps. The following are some examples of international covers received by the de Laurence Company over the years.

Figure 1 (below) is a cover from Mbinda, a small rural mining town in the Republic of the Congo near its border with Gabon.



The registered airmail rate of 1fr50c (equivalent at the time to approximately 50¢ U.S.) is paid by a strip of three 50-franc Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. commemoratives cancelled on August 18, 1969. The use of stamps featuring Dr. King is ironic, considering the products the sender was likely purchasing.

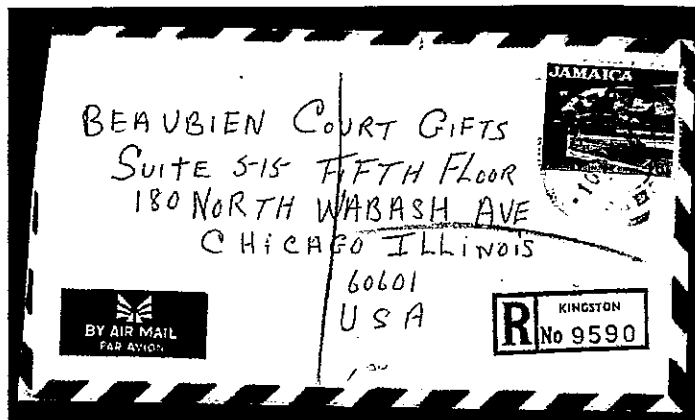


Figure 2 (above) is a registered airmail letter sent from Kingston, Jamaica, on August 10, 1965. It is addressed to "Beaubien Court Gifts," but the address is de Laurence's. The Jamaican government outlawed importation of de Laurence publications. Was Beaubien Court Gifts a subsidiary set up to evade the ban?

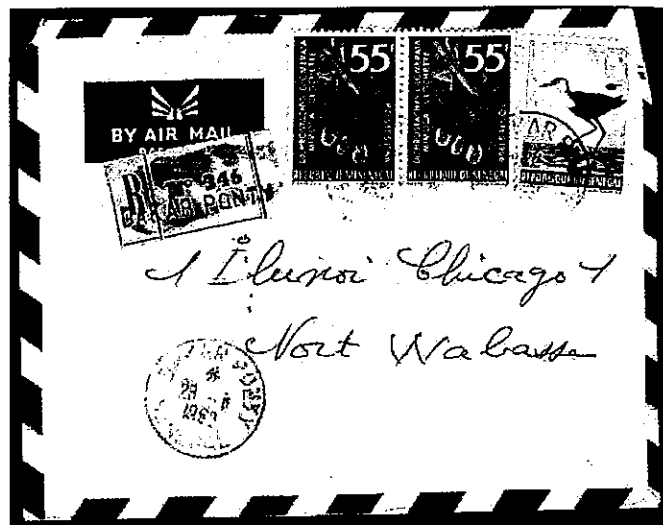


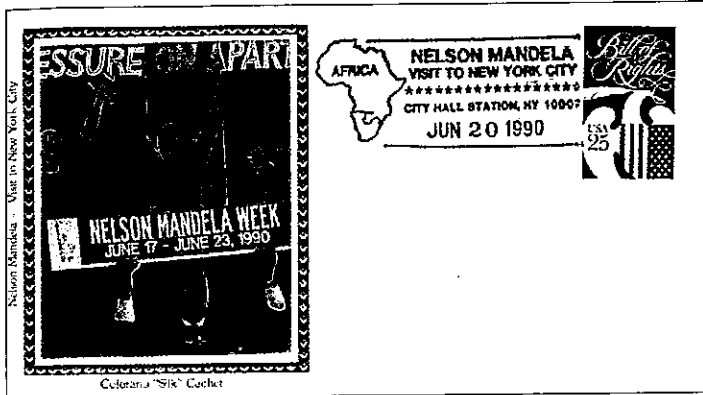
Figure 3 (above) is an interesting cover mailed August 28, 1969, from Dakar-Ponty in Senegal. The registered airmail rate of 1fr25c (equivalent at the time to approximately 42¢ U.S.) is paid with three colorful and attractive Senegalese stamps from the mid-1960s.

The backstamps (Figure 4 on the next page) show receipt at the Chicago Registry Division on September 1 and the post office of delivery, Prudential Plaza Station, the next day. The timely handling demonstrates Chicago postal clerks' familiarity with the de Laurence operation since the letter is very poorly addressed but was delivered without any apparent additional handling.

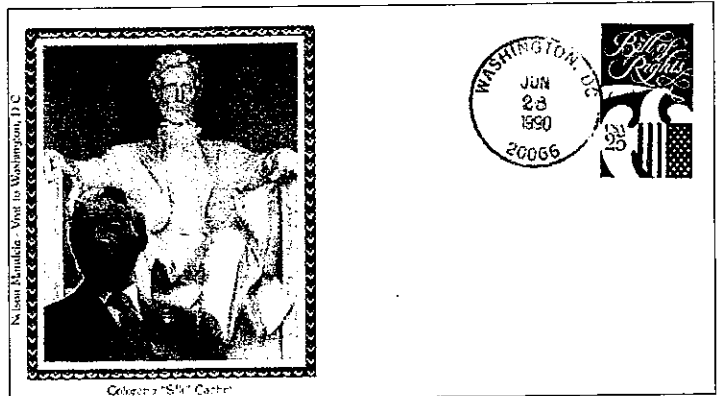
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# Nelson Mandela

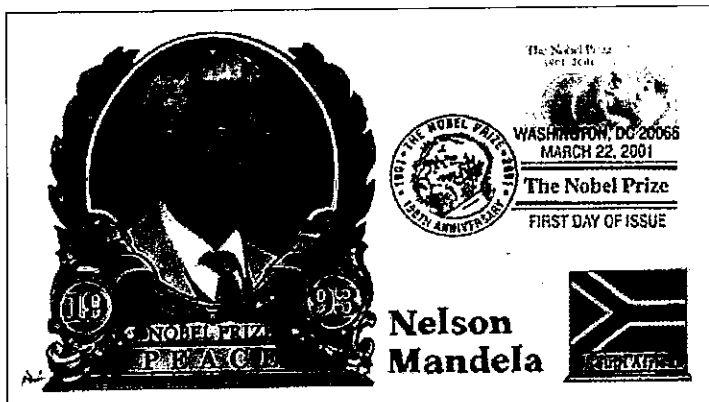
With former South African president Nelson Mandela in the news (He recently celebrated his 95th birthday and continues to recover in a hospital), we offer some covers for reflection. Please keep Madiba in your thoughts and prayers.



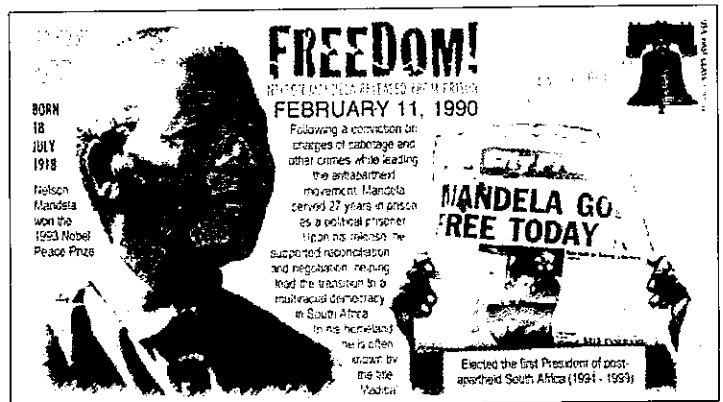
Colorano "Silk" Cachet of Mandela's visit to New York City.



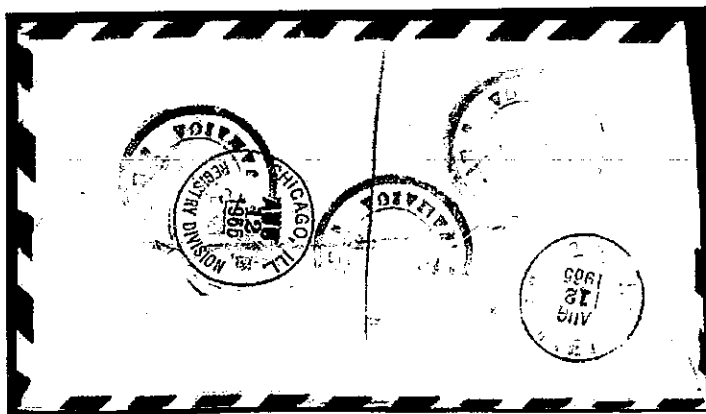
Colorano "Silk" Cachet of Mandela's visit to Washington, D.C.



Commissioned Ooak add-on cover by Bob Emrick, part of a set of fourteen Black Nobel Peace Prize Laureates



Coverscape cachet marking the 20th anniversary of Mandela's release after serving 27 years in prison



We were unable to find any U.S. covers mailed to or from de Laurence. We suspect that this is because collectors were not interested in covers mailed with common domestic postage. We would be interested in obtaining copies or purchasing covers showing usage of domestic stamps. If you have any domestic postal covers relating to the de Laurence Company and would like to discuss your items with us, feel free to email us at flyman2108@gmail.com or dpiazza3@verizon.net.