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'Living in the gun mouth' : race, class, and political violence in Guyana

Argues that whatever racial antipathies exist in Guyana today are not the same of those of the 1960s. The author reviews the 'racial violence' of the 1950s and 1960s. He concludes that the politics of that era was a complex process in which many elements were involved and not simply the outcome of racial antagonism or the reassertion of colonial hegemonic values.

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“LIVING IN THE GUN MOUTH” : RACE, CLASS, AND
POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN GUYANA

[T]he history which became part of the fund of knowledge or the ideology of the nation, state or movement is not what has actually been preserved in popular memory, but what has been selected, written, pictured, popularized and institutionalized by those whose function it is to do so ... all historians, whatever else their objectives, are engaged in this process inasmuch as they contribute, consciously or not, to the creation, dismantling and restructuring of images of the past which belong not only to the world of specialist investigation but to the public sphere of man as a political being.

(Eric Hobsbawm 1983:13)

Early in 1975 I visited a village in Guyana where I had lived for the whole of 1956. As I walked along what is rather grandly named “Main Street,” an old man greeted me and we exchanged a few words before I moved on. The incident was hardly noteworthy, but one phrase, repeated several times – half anguished and half defiant – has remained clearly in my mind. He said, “Doc, we are living in the gun mouth here; living in the gun mouth.” The phrase conjured up images of cannon and siege, even perhaps a war of attrition carried on by armies arrayed against each other and securely dug in for the long haul. But there was no visible warfare; no cannons; no smell of cordite or landscape of ruin. This apparently peaceful village of rice farmers showed definite signs of increased prosperity compared to 1956, with some splendid new houses and a vast proliferation of tractors and agricultural machinery.¹ However, it was very noticeable that almost all of the 250 Afro-Guyanese who had lived peacefully in this predominantly East Indian village for many, many years, were gone. Both the dramatic image of living “in the gun mouth,” and the disappearance of the

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Africans, had their origin in the events of the 1960s during a period of what is usually called "racial violence."

In a piece of inspired anticipation Brackette Williams begins her 1991 book on Guyana with a long reference to the problems of Serb-Croat relations in Yugoslavia. At the time she chose that opening there was little indication that the state of Yugoslavia was likely to disintegrate in the immediate future, nor of the eventual virulence of the "ethnic cleansing" that has accompanied that disintegration. Nor, I am sure, did she intend her discussion of Serbs and Croats to suggest any such radical *dénouement* for Guyana. However, Guyana experienced something of that particular sickness for a short time in the early 1960s; there was expulsion of minorities from rural communities, beatings and killings, and even proposals for dismantling the state and creating two "ethnic nations," African and East Indian. What began as a vague suggestion by some members of the Afro-Guyanese elite in the early 1960s was taken up and formalized as a proposal of The Society for Racial Equality and is still discussed by Guyanese inside and outside the country.²

In 1953 the then colony of British Guiana had its first elections under a new constitution intended as a first step toward independence. A socialist party, the People's Progressive Party (PPP), led by Dr. Cheddi Jagan, an Indian dentist, and Forbes Burnham, an African barrister, won handily and took office. One hundred and thirty-three days later the British Government announced that the constitution was suspended because of "communist subversion." In 1955 the party split into two factions and in 1957 Burnham formed the People's National Congress (PNC) leaving Jagan as leader of a depleted PPP. After 1957 the contest between these two parties was increasingly couched in terms of a struggle between Africans, represented by Burnham and the PNC, and Indians, represented by Jagan and the PPP. This was the background to the "racial violence" to which I referred earlier. From December 1964 to October of 1992, Guyana was governed by the PNC as a virtual, and occasionally as a nominal, one-party state, effectively containing, but not eradicating, the conflicts and resentments that had been expressed during those years of violent confrontation between Indians and Africans. Now that the PPP is back in office after the first reasonably free elections in 28 years the configuration of forces appears to be remarkably similar to that in the 1960s.

The People's Progressive Party continues to find its main electoral support among Indo-Guyanese voters, and the People's National Congress is still regarded as the vehicle of Afro-Guyanese interests. If the causes of the violence of 1962, 1963, and 1964 was an upsurge of racial antipathy rooted in primordial identities and expressing itself in the struggle

over political power, then it is logical to assume that the very same racism will assert itself once again. We have grown used to assuming that racial and ethnic conflict is inevitable – even natural – and in the world-wide scale of violent conflicts Guyana is hardly worth more than a passing mention. In this paper I argue that whatever racial antipathies exist in Guyana today are not the same as those of the 1960s; that the recasting of the politics of the 1960s in terms of racial antagonism was not an automatic reversion to “primordial identities,” or even the reassertion of colonial hegemonic values, but a complex process in which many elements were involved, and in which even social scientists played a part. As such it raises interesting questions about how we choose to interpret political conflicts, about the images we adopt when we formulate research problems, and the way in which research becomes entangled in political processes.

Questions of race, ethnicity, and cultural pluralism are already the stuff of academic analyses of Guyana's ills, and those analyses are – and have long been – themselves a part of the political process in that unfortunate country, contributing not a little to the shape it has taken. Practically all of those writing about Guyana, and I include myself, invoke history, more or less explicitly, to enable understanding of the events with which we deal. Unfortunately the “history” is often of the most general kind, purporting to establish the root causes of present-day divisions and antagonisms in the society. Thus Clive Y. Thomas (1984:83) has identified “racial disunity” as hampering the “objective unity” of the Guyanese working class; he attributes it to the introduction of indentured immigrants after the abolition of slavery and the process that “created a functional basis in the division of labor among the two ethnic groups of sugar workers [Africans in the factory and Indians in the field], and later generated two distinct areas of settlement near to each estate: the so-called African and Indian villages.”³

Brackette Williams has shown in convincing detail how the contradictory ideologies of egalitarianism and hierarchy operate in social practice in the daily life of Guyanese, and I cannot praise too highly the quality of her analysis and the depth of her understanding of the process of cultural struggle in the everyday life of that country. However, her discussion of the way in which the various “racial/ethnic groups” were incorporated into the hierarchical structure of colonial society refers once again to a generally familiar image of historical development.⁴ How did the hierarchy of apparently specialized positions come to be accepted by all the participants? She contends that:

formal policies and informal practices of both the dominating Anglo-European elite and the subordinated diverse elements of the non-elite population combines to form a framework of objective and ideological constraints within which the racial/ethnic groups developed different adaptive strategies for subsistence and social mobility (Williams 1991: 148).

This is a familiar argument, used to explain how the image of the "Land of Six Peoples," each with their special functions to fulfil, came to exist in the first place, as well as the supposed actual distribution of "races" through the occupational system. Demurring slightly from Lee Drummond's argument (1974:51) that the stereotypes of "racial/ethnic" types become detached from any specific material processes, Williams (1991:152) contends that this break is possible only because the stereotypes themselves were originally "tightly tied to the production of groups, of group identities, and of patterns of conduct among members of these groups"; subsequently the stereotypes were explained in terms of "blood," or race itself. I do not contest the accuracy of her historical material, but does it follow, as she asserts, that the relations among the subordinated non-European groups during the establishment of Anglo-European dominance "set the terms of the politics of cultural struggle in contemporary Guyana" (Williams 1991: 154), implying that the politics of cultural struggle have been shaped by those very terms over a long period of time?

Finally, it has been the constant refrain of so-called plural society theorists that Guyana is made up of sections that differ fundamentally in culture, and that whatever fragile unity exists is made possible only by the dominance of one superordinate section. Thus M.G. Smith (1984:110-11) contends that the unified independence movement of the early 1950s inevitably disintegrated,

[S]ince, in addition to differences of race, colour, ecology, social organisation, historical experience, religion and the like, the two segments [Creole and East Indian] were anchored in very different cultures and kinds of social structure, and accordingly differed profoundly in their economic needs and interests, even though their members seemed superficially to belong to such common inclusive classes as the "peasantry" or "proletariat". In other words, the unity forged by Jagan and Burnham in 1953 was more superficial and illusory than it seemed; and so were the prospects of Indian assimilation, Guyanese integration and modernization.

The implication of all these invocations of Guyana's past is that it would take a major revolution to render that past neutral – or at least less potent – in shaping the present. Without conceding the potency of that imagined

past I want to argue, as I have previously, that a revolution of sorts was in process of being made. As Clifford Geertz (1971:362) observed some years ago,

The men who raised this challenge [of creating a proper "nationality" in the modern manner], the nationalist intellectuals, were ... launching a revolution as much cultural, even epistemological, as it was political.

In British Guiana that revolution was stopped dead in its tracks by outside agents working upon the very forces that nationalism was striving to overcome. Discussion of this period cannot be divorced from questions of value and of international politics, nor can it ignore the important part played by the nationalist intellectuals and the manner in which they shaped and trimmed the ideologies through which the struggle for power was conducted. However, I do not suppose that one can attain a complete understanding of the process of social transformation by concentrating solely upon the macro-structures of the state and its articulation with cold war politics. Although I begin with a brief recounting of the background to, and the nature of, the so-called racial violence of the 1960s, it is important to ask how and why the general populace responded in that particular way to the actions of national leaders and their patrons in London or in Washington, Havana or Moscow, and how social scientists have chosen to interpret those events.

BACKGROUND TO "RACIAL VIOLENCE"

When I arrived in British Guiana in May of 1951, I entered a society where Anglo-European hegemony was not yet ghostly, to use Brackette Williams's image, but very much alive. Queen Victoria's birthday was still celebrated as "Empire Day" on May 24 with a school holiday, free cakes and drinks for schoolchildren, a message from the monarch, and a parade in the capital, led by the Governor and Colonial Secretary on horseback. These ritual spectacles of Empire did not neutralize the pervasive discontent and opposition to colonial rule that had been growing for many years and had been given additional impetus by other theatrical events over the previous decade.

The visits of a series of investigators and royal commissions appointed to make recommendations for alleviating economic distress and countering the violent protests that had swept through the region during the late 1930s were the occasion of intense public interest: in January and February of 1939, the West India Royal Commission led by Lord Moyne held

public hearings in Georgetown. The proceedings were relayed from the hearing chamber to a large public gathering on Bourda Green. Both the sugar industry and the British administration were harshly criticized by a stream of witnesses ranging from clergymen (most of them either British or Canadian) to trade unionists, professionals of all kinds, politicians, leaders of voluntary associations, and representatives of both the East Indian Association and the Negro Progress Convention. The memoranda submitted to the Commission by the various bodies are a rich source of information on discontent, but also on the nature of racial stereotypes. Thus, the East Indian Association stated unequivocally that East Indians did not wish to lose their racial and religious identity, preferring to retain contact with Mother India, though willing to work with others for the social and economic betterment of the country. The Sugar Producer's Association (the focal point of white economic power) submitted a memorandum that described the African Guyanese sugar worker as "essentially a gay, emotional person, fatalistic in his attitude to life, and as a rule taking no thought for tomorrow. His main requirements" they said "are food, shelter, bright and attractive clothing, a little spare money for rum and gambling, and the opportunity for easy love making" (Chase 1964:94). A young journalist who covered the hearings wrote subsequently, "it all added up to laying bare in all its nakedness the social history and present plight of a deprived people" (Drayton n.d.:21). Sir Walter Citrine, the British trade unionist who was a member of the Commission, felt it necessary to try to neutralize the frequent allegations that disturbances and discontent had stemmed from "communist subversion," a formula that was to play a crucial part in the events of 1953.

The recommendations of the West India Commission were radical and far-reaching, at least within the possibilities of a colonial order as exploitative as that of Britain, and a whole apparatus of "development and welfare" was set up. Political theatrics continued in British Guiana with the visit of the Constitutional Commission that arrived in December of 1950 and departed in mid-February 1951, bringing political issues into the forefront of social consciousness once more. There was another parade of witnesses in a series of public hearings, and once again the opportunity existed for the airing of racist sentiments. Such sentiments were rarely expressed but the Commission was moved to observe that while the Indian population had previously been inclined to "resist assimilation" it now had come to a "realisation of their permanent place in Guianese life and to a demand for equal participation in it," a challenge that "has stimulated the other races into closing their ranks" (British Guiana Constitutional Commission 1951:14). They continued:

Race is a patent difference and is a powerful slogan ready to the hand of unscrupulous men who can use it as a stepping stone to political power ... We do not, however, wish it to be thought that life in British Guiana is dominated by racial tension, or that there are not many heartening signs of the development of a genuine Guianese outlook ... We were ... impressed by the amity with which peoples of all races live side by side in the villages, where mutual dependence is, of necessity, recognised. It was reassuring to find that racialism spoke with a hesitant voice in public, and that virtually no proposals for communal representation were made to us (British Guiana Constitutional Commission 1951:14-15).

The Commission recommended a constitution for British Guiana that established universal adult suffrage to elect a legislature from which a majority of the executive would be drawn. The details of the constitutional arrangements are not important (details may be found in the report of Constitutional Commission, or in R.T. Smith 1980); suffice it to say that these reports, along with the rising tide of expectations throughout the British colonies, stimulated an enormous interest in the coming elections scheduled for the spring of 1953.

In the period immediately before the elections of 1953 there was considerable dissension within the People's Progressive Party over the wisdom of adopting an extremely radical left-wing posture. The local newspapers, and particularly the *Daily Argosy* (a vehicle for official and big business interests), maintained a persistent barrage of criticism against the communist leanings of the PPP. Several of the early supporters of the party left because of their embarrassment over the tone of the PPP party organ, *Thunder* and it so happened that the majority of them were Afro-Guyanese. This does not mean that all the party "radicals" were Indo-Guyanese; among the most militant were Africans, Chinese, and persons who would have been classified as "Mixed" or "Coloured." However, Burnham had the largest popular following, especially in Georgetown where he was an active trade union organizer. Although he was urged by many of his friends to leave the party, he refused because, as he frequently said, it was important to maintain the party as a genuinely multi-racial vehicle for political reform. The most vociferous opponents of the PPP were actually Indo-Guyanese, and Jagan (1966:Chapter VII) has provided a very full, and generally reliable, account of the configuration of parties and factions, including their use of racial appeals, during the campaign leading up to the elections of 1953. He has also described the week of crisis following the electoral victory of the PPP, a week during which there was intense rivalry between Jagan (1966:137-9) and Burnham over the distribution of ministries and nominations for the positions of State Councillor. Unfortunately there is no comparable written account by Burnham.

During the 133 days that the original PPP held office, there is no record of conflict among the party leadership, which is not to say that it did not exist. The parliamentary group provided a common front against the governor, Sir Alfred Savage, and in favor of a number of measures that were later referred to as evidence of a communist plot to subvert the constitution (see British Guiana Constitutional Commission 1954; Jagan 1966; Henfrey 1972; R.T. Smith 1980). When the constitution was suspended on October 9, 1953, Burnham and Jagan went together to London to brief the Parliamentary Labour Party leaders, just as a collection of Guianese opponents of the PPP rushed off to consult with the British government, then led by the Conservative Party under Winston Churchill. They subsequently went on an extended tour of Europe and India together, but without winning the enthusiastic support of the Indian government. In the editorial Introduction to a collection of Burnham's speeches, clearly written with Burnham's approval, the editors say:

Before the restrictions, Burnham travelled to England with Jagan to protest the British decision [to suspend the constitution]. He knew, however, that Jagan's devotion to the communist cause transcended his commitment to his own country. As a nationalist, Burnham was already questioning in his own mind the wisdom of continuing his alliance with Jagan ... By the time they had returned to Guiana, Burnham had made up his mind to part company with Jagan unless the latter was prepared to put Guianese nationalism above posturing as an international communist (Burnham 1970:xix).

Whatever the historical accuracy of this statement it is clear that Burnham carefully positioned himself as a moderate against Jagan's radicalism, and the 1954 commission reporting on the causes of the suspension of the constitution identified Burnham as "the leader of the socialists in the Party" as against Jagan and five others who were "enthusiastic supporters of the policies and practices of modern communist movements and were contemptuous of the European social democratic parties, including the British Labour Party" (quoted in Jagan 1966:199-200). The events of the period between the elections of 1953 and the attainment of independence in 1966 have been detailed in a number of publications so that I shall present here only the most schematic account.⁵

In 1955 Burnham attempted to seize control of the PPP from Jagan but merely succeeded in splitting the party leadership into two factions. Burnham's editors laconically report that "Burnham defeated Jagan for the party's leadership at internal party elections" (Burnham 1970:xx), whereas Jagan has a complex ten-page discussion of the events, claiming that Burnham had engineered an illegal party congress, packed with his

supporters. Jagan and his supporters walked out of the meeting, which proceeded to replace Jagan with Burnham as Leader of the party and demote the most militant of Jagan's supporters to minor positions in the leadership. The details are not particularly relevant to an understanding of the fact that these manoeuvres were designed to reduce the influence of the "extremists" and enhance Burnham's position in the eyes of the British and the United States. It paralleled the 1952 expulsion of the "radicals" from the Jamaican People's National Party. Burnham was perfectly well aware that the split in the party could encourage racial polarization, and in that respect it was quite different from Jamaica. Indeed he warned against such a development in an article published in his faction's edition of *Thunder* (Burnham 1970:7-8).

The first election to be held under a revised constitution, with limited powers assigned to the elected representatives, was held in August of 1957; both factions of the PPP contested the elections, along with a number of smaller parties. When the results were announced the Jagan faction had won nine of the fourteen seats, the Burnham faction three seats, and two other, anti-communist parties, one seat each. Following these elections Burnham absorbed the more conservative, and predominantly African, United Democratic Party, forming a new party under the name People's National Congress. This could be interpreted as a further move to the right on Burnham's part but it also consolidated the racial basis of his support. The next step forward in the resumption of progress toward political independence for British Guiana came with the elections of August 1961 that were widely accepted to be the prelude to the negotiation of independence. Political forces had been concentrated by this time into just three significant parties. Apart from the PNC and the PPP, a new party had appeared under the label United Force (UF). Under the leadership of a successful Guianese businessman, Peter D'Aguiar, it absorbed most of the extreme anti-communist forces. By this time there was a general recognition that a coalition government would be best for the country, since the support of the principal parties was now divided along lines that coincided with both urban-rural divisions and race, but all attempts to effect a reconciliation between Jagan and Burnham failed. For all the declarations of the various leaders, they increasingly had to cater to the interests of constituencies that were perceived to be racial. However, the rhetoric of the campaigns concentrated on other issues, with the UF taking a strongly anti-communist line against the PPP, and Burnham attacking the PPP as extremist, in the hope that the fear of communism would sway the rural Indian farmers, rice millers and shopkeepers. In the event the PPP won twenty of the thirty-five seats, while the PNC won

eleven and the United Force four. Jagan was named Premier and the stage seemed set for a rapid move to independence, especially as Burnham had been vociferous in declaring that he would press for immediate independence no matter which party won a majority of seats. In fact, the victory of the PPP in the 1961 elections was the prelude to a prolonged campaign of destabilization aimed at removing Jagan and the PPP from control of the country.

Large sums of money were poured into the country from the United States to support activities aimed at toppling Jagan's government, activities ranging from the financing of religious, newspaper and magazine campaigns to the organizing of strikes and disturbances. In a speech delivered on November 5, 1961 to the Annual Congress of the PNC, Burnham outlined his strategy for political action in the wake of the PPP victory. He began by making a case for proportional representation on the grounds that the PPP had won 20 seats in the Legislative Assembly with 93,000 votes or 42.6 percent of the votes cast, while the PNC with 89,000 or 41 percent had gained only 11 seats, and the United Force with 16.3 percent of the votes cast had won only 4 seats. He observed that "the PPP regardless of what its leaders may say or think, represents to its adherents and supporters as well as to their opponents an Indian racial victory" (Burnham 1970:15), and went on to say that "the People's Progressive Party is not to be retained, but contained and repelled" by the PNC.

Joining increasingly with D'Aguiar and the UF, Burnham launched an unrelenting attack on every proposal made by the PPP government, fomenting demonstrations and strikes that led to arson, violence, and various forms of civil disobedience. Unable to contain the unrest with the police resources available, Jagan was forced to ask the British to send troops to restore order. At the same time, he attempted to break the strikes by depending upon Cuba to supply gasoline and to provide a market for Guyana's rice. There is no doubt that Jagan moved closer to the USSR and its satellites as the United States and Britain became firmer in their resolve to remove him. And they saw the opportunity in the imposition of proportional representation that permitted a coalition of the PNC and the UF to assume office following the 1964 general election. Treating the whole country as one constituency, the PPP secured 109,332 votes, the PNC 96,567, the UF 26,612, and four minor parties gained only 2,929 among them. The PPP was awarded 24 seats, the PNC 22, and the UF 7 seats, giving the PNC-UF coalition a majority of five, enough to justify the British Governor in asking them to form a government. From that point forward the United States threw its support behind Burnham, who quickly cast off his dependence on the UF, seized control of the state apparatus,

and ensured that future elections would produce favorable results for him and his party.⁶ As Arthur Schlesinger (1967:713) wrote in his account of the Kennedy administration, "With much unhappiness and turbulence British Guiana seemed to have passed safely out of the communist orbit."

The struggles of these political leaders over control of the state and its organs has to be seen in the context of global forces of economic and political domination. They shaped their ideologies, strategies, and tactics in accordance with their perception of what was possible in the world arena. But what enabled them to carry along their supporters? The White Paper published by the United Kingdom Government on October 20, 1953, setting out the reasons for the suspension of the constitution, included among its allegations the charge that the original People's Progressive Party had attempted to impose a totalitarian form of government that included the "organization of small cells for recruitment and indoctrination" (British Guiana Suspension of the Constitution 1953:11). If this had been true it would have been an extremely interesting development, but when one looks at the situation from the bottom up, so to speak, the perspective is quite different.

LOCAL AND NATIONAL HIERARCHIES

Such a perspective is suggested by a number of different developments in anthropology. The growing influence of Foucault (already on the wane in some places), the appeal of Gramsci's writings (1971:12) on ideology and the importance of the hegemonic force of civil society as opposed to direct domination by the state and its coercive power; and the burgeoning literature on resistance and subaltern studies all direct attention to the articulation of power that is diffused throughout the lower levels of complex societies. In a recent paper, Diane Austin-Broos (1992:294-95) has suggested that the tendency to identify the

political ... in terms of nationalist or class-based movements responsive to colonialism or neo-colonialism, and [to use] the "cultural" ... to denote all those other modes of practice and imagery that are not especially concerned with the domain of the state

is a mistake that neglects the importance of a "politics of moral order" that is in no way subservient "to the logic of a politics of state." Her specific analysis of Jamaican Pentecostalism has limited application to Guyana, but it converges nicely with Brackette Williams's (1991:29) admonition that:

Rather than insisting on class analysis, if our interest is in disclosing how inequalities stemming from objective conditions are exacerbated or left unremedied by nationalist ideologies and ethnic reactions, we must provide detailed accounts of how ideological fields operate to sustain the pragmatic subordination and the divisive intents of a diverse population.

And by the same token those detailed accounts will show how politics are carried forward in diverse domains. Instead of asking how a society-wide system of classes is represented at the level of local communities one can ask more profitably how systems of power are represented or contested there, and how they articulate with class and status groups in a wider structure of inequality.

Paying attention to the micro-processes of status contestation fits with a reconsideration of Max Weber's work on class, status, and power. The standard interpretation of Weber is that he took Marx's concept of class and decomposed it into class, status, and power. Every sociology student learns the simple definitions of these concepts, derived, usually, from the inadequate translations by Gerth and Mills (Weber 1946). To reduce economic, prestige, and power considerations to "variables" not only does violence to Weber's intentions, but fails to grasp the complex interpenetration of these abstracted elements. Weber used a number of different concepts that are usually all translated as "social stratification." His preferred term was *Gliederung*, meaning articulation or structure, with articulation being much closer to Weber's intention than stratification, and more useful as an image of class/status distribution. I rely here upon Daniel Wolk's (1994) recent reconsideration of Weber's work that has uncovered shortcomings in the translations of Weber's texts, leading to serious distortions of his intentions. Weber's concepts of class situation and status situation are still most useful for mapping the terrain of structures of inequality; that is, the pattern of distribution of class and status that defines a structure or order of inequality. However, they demand consideration "from the bottom up."

The patterns of distribution of the material and symbolic conditions of life among groups, and categories of individuals, define their situations of both class and *Stand*, or status group. Social scientists have generally interpreted Weber to mean that social class and social honor can be measured as the attributes of individuals which can then be aggregated to reveal the structures of inequality. This oversimplifies a complex and subtle argument, as Wolk demonstrates.

Weber regarded *Stand* – honor or prestige – as the decisive distributive element in a social order, but he recognized that it applies to *groups*, and not to individuals. This is why style of life (*Lebensführung*) is such an

important element in the self-characterization of groups; these styles of life are in competition with one another, so that it is *the relations among groups*, not individual characteristics, that are at stake. To attempt to score individual prestige on a uniform scale of ranking is quite useless (and impossible in practice) since each status group asserts the value of its style of life without necessarily conceding a position of inferiority in a status order. Therefore, one has to study and record the oppositional characterizations of groups. At their simplest these may involve statements such as "those people are ignorant" in contrast to us, who are educated (a commonly heard sentiment in Guyana); or those people have disorganized families, as opposed to us who really value families; but the contrasts may be much more complex and subtle. The sudden increase in the number of villagers building personal Hindu shrines in the 1970s seemed to have a great deal to do with racial polarization stemming from the 1960s that had deflected Indians from expressing status through "creolization." Not that such a process had been halted; many, perhaps most, East Indians living in Georgetown continued to be conspicuous consumers of imported goods. I often wondered just what was being said by the rice farmer on the West Coast Demerara who, in the 1950s, had a glass garage built for his American car.

Class situation is different from status situation in that it applies to individuals who specifically do not form a group. But class situation is not merely possession or non-possession of goods. People become a class when they are subject to the same market conditions where the life-chances, as Weber puts it, depend upon the control of material property, which in turn permits the conversion of mere wealth into capital, facilitating the monopolization of the "opportunities for making profit through exchange." Class situation in this sense is *not* just a matter of income distribution, but takes into account the influence on life-chances of being able to dispose of marketable objects. Although these are "material" objects, Weber uses the word *sachlich* (material) in such a way that it can include all kinds of impersonal things such as book-keeping systems, expert ways of doing things as disparate as business dealings, political lobbying or controlling material objects. When seen in this light, Weber's concept of class is quite close to that of Marx, but broadens somewhat the concept of "control of the means of production."

Unlike Marx, Weber regarded the persistence of status groups in modern complex societies to be one of their most fundamental features. Groups based on kinship, race, religion or other "primordial" characteristics are joined by others that are the very products of the apparently rational-legal and bureaucratic processes of modern society. Among the most important

of these are the products of modern educational institutions that claim the right to distribute certificates, degrees, and diplomas, thus controlling the admission of individuals to the charmed circles of the "educated." In modern economies the market is a mechanism for the balancing of interests in a purely impersonal and non-subjective manner that makes it the ideal-typical case of pure economic order, in which "pure class situation, nakedly and unambiguously, visibly to everyone, looms as the power that determines everybody's destiny" (Weber 1968:953). Even so, a new kind of *ständliche* development takes place as bureaucrats create new status groups based on education or certification, limiting entry to their ranks on the basis of possessing degrees, certificates or diplomas. Within the organizations that produce "qualified" individuals, status distinctions based on the most trivial activities appear, such as those among different fraternities, sororities or sporting activities. It is not difficult to see the relevance of this for the modern Caribbean. Pierre Bourdieu (1984:102-3) has shown how the actual designation of groups by occupation really serves to mask the true basis of their recruitment and membership.

The members of groups based on co-option ... (doctors, architects, professors, engineers, etc.) always have something else in common beyond the characteristics explicitly demanded. The common image of the professions ... is less abstract than that presented by statisticians; it takes into account not only the nature of the job and the income, but those secondary characteristics which are often the basis of their social value (prestige or discredit) and which, though absent from the official job description, function as tacit requirements, such as age, sex, social or ethnic origin, overtly or implicitly guiding co-option choices ... so that members of the corps who lack these traits are excluded or marginalized.

For all the reasons outlined here, it is more useful to follow Weber (and Wolk's reconsiderations of his work) and refer to "structures of inequality" than to use the dubious concept of "social stratification," and to view such structures as the articulation of a complex series of status groups. Class and status groups are inextricably intertwined, each conditioning the other rather than being separate "variables" in a calculable matrix.

If we now return to Guyana, following Diane Austin's advice to consider the way in which power is concentrated within various status groups rather than asking how class and race segment the society as a totality, we may be able to attain a better understanding of the course taken by violence in the 1960s. It would be unrealistic to expect that concepts of race, stereotypes, or whatever we want to call the residues of Anglo-European hegemony, will simply fade away.⁷

Discussions of "integration" that assume it to mean complete homogeneity, as opposed to "pluralism," are hardly worth consideration. The discussion of Caribbean societies has been imprisoned in the straightjacket of the plural society debate for far too long; any reasonable discussion of post-colonial society must take into account the conflict and contestation that inevitably accompanies any process of nation building or state formation. As Bourdieu points out, at the level of professional organization, various forms of social origin, including putative race, will long continue to be a part of the process of group formation, even in those groups that are supposedly rational-bureaucratic. The question is not whether cultural constructions of race continue to exist in the modern world – they do – but under what conditions does "race" or "ethnicity" come to be a major fault line in the society, making for violence of the kind that was seen in British Guiana in the 1960s. What does ethnography tell us about the way in which race and cultural differences infused the quotidian experience of rural Guyanese and their status considerations?

AFRICAN GUYANESE AND THE VEHICLES OF THEIR RELATION TO COLONIAL SOCIETY

I first went to British Guiana with the express intention of studying a "Negro village." That fact is, in itself, an interesting commentary on the manner in which anthropological problems were formulated in the early 1950s. Without going into the details of the manner in which colonial interests shaped anthropological research, suffice it to say that both official and academic forces inclined anthropologists working in the British colonies to focus upon the study of supposedly coherent entities within colonial societies. Thus, contemporaries going to Africa formulated projects for the study of this or that "tribe," while work in the Caribbean was focused upon this or that "racial/class group." Lloyd Braithwaite did his first study in the village of Blanchisseuse, considered to be a remote "Negro" village in Trinidad, not far from Melville and Frances Herskovits's field site of Toco, and he followed it up with the study of a predominantly East Indian community near Port of Spain. However, both Braithwaite and I attempted to locate our studies in a wider context of colonial society, and this was already the period when Fernando Henriques was writing about the color/class system of Jamaica, and Julian Steward and his students were attempting a portrait of Puerto Rican society as a whole. Still, even those efforts worked through the medium of the community study and with a particular vision of the totality within which the community was embedded.

After a few weeks of surveying I found what was widely recognized to

be a "very African" village on the West Coast Berbice. This designation was used by the villagers, who had a lively sense of the founding of the two original sections of the village by groups of ex-slaves who pooled their resources and purchased title to the land. As I explained in my first book on British Guiana (1956), that land had been passed down to the present inhabitants with a strong presumption that it should not be alienated to "strangers" in general and to East Indians in particular. Just to the west of August Town (a fictitious name) lay one of the largest East Indian villages in the country, the village that has been described in detail by Marilyn Silverman (1980) under the name of Rajgahr.⁸ The farmers of that village were desperately short of rice land and cattle pasture while August Town residents had large amounts of uncultivated land that they were unwilling to sell, or even to rent. The generalized fear of losing land had been formalized in a village council resolution during the 1930s, asserting that title to village land would not be granted to any person not born there – including immigrant spouses, regardless of race.

In spite of this, relations between August Town and Rajgahr were, while not exactly close, at least cordial in 1951. Rajgahr men frequently stopped off in August Town rum shops on their way home from the sugar estate at Bath; Rajgahr women regularly sold vegetables in August Town at the early morning market (see Plate I in Smith 1956, facing p. 32); the East Indian headmaster of the Rajgahr Lachmansingh Memorial Canadian Mission (Presbyterian) School lived in a rented house in August Town; some August Town people regularly went to weddings in Rajgahr, especially since they had kin there through intermarriages among Africans, Chinese, and East Indians that had taken place over many years; and some August Town rice farmers had their padi milled by Rajgahr millers. An August Town African had been an elected member, and even elected Chairman, of the Rajgahr Village District Council (Silverman 1980:54-63). August Town proper was bordered on the east by a private estate owned by a family of East Indians who were very much a part of what I referred to as the August Town elite. That family sold the estate after I left, but when I returned for a further three months fieldwork in 1975, the estate was owned by yet another East Indian who had greatly improved the estate house and was successfully growing rice on a large scale. The old store in the middle of the village that had been owned by a Portuguese family was now splendidly improved but owned by an East Indian popularly known as "Nutcake," not because of any presumed mental peculiarities, but because he had started out some years earlier as a vendor of coconut cake and had gradually increased his fortune to the point where he was able to buy and improve the old store and purchase a hire car in

which he made a daily run to Georgetown and back.

I could go on to detail the ways in which the tissue of everyday relations involved individuals severally identified as African, East Indian, Chinese, Portuguese and so forth, relations that were largely blanked out by the decision to study "an African village," and showed complicity in the ideological vision of British Guiana as a "Land of Six Peoples." However, I also want to stress the fact that the processes of "cultural struggle" described by Brackette Williams involved few elements deriving from Indian/African relations, partly because of the relative segregation of August Town and Rajgahr, but also because Anglo-European hegemony was all too real and had not yet become ghostly. The August Town elite – head teachers, the Portuguese store keeper, the wealthy Indian family – and its extensions in the district including the District Commissioner, the Police Inspector, the Medical Officer, and the English Manager of the nearby sugar plantation, all ordered their status striving in relation to the signs and symbols of British domination. The headmaster of the August Town Congregational School, who was very much a local African person, had a photograph of himself prominently displayed on the wall of his house flanked by photographs of the current King and Queen of England, while on the opposite wall were prints of "The Artful Dodger," "Oliver Twist," "Duty Calls," and "The Hero's Return." Individuals like this mixed freely with persons of other "races," as when they played bridge or attended each other's parties, and they represented to the village population the mode of their articulation with the colonial society.

When the report of the Constitutional Commission was published in October 1951, it aroused very little interest in August Town. Many people thought that universal adult suffrage was a mistake since it would inevitably result in large-scale bribery and corruption, and insofar as anyone had an opinion on the matter it was just as likely to prefer that British Guiana continue to be run by outsiders, as that it should be independent. Among the more politically aware, the major struggle was perceived to be a struggle against the poverty and backwardness imposed by an exploitative economic system represented by "King Sugar" in particular, and colonialism in general. As the campaign for the 1953 elections gathered momentum this relative apathy dissipated and August Town, like other rural areas of British Guiana, became caught up in the excitement of a new beginning. However, the rising fortunes of the People's Progressive Party did not result in the creation of new status groups in August Town; traditional elites and the general populace divided their support among a number of parties and individuals, and insofar as they rallied to the PPP, they were attracted by Forbes Burnham's accomplishments as an orator, as

a Guyana scholar, a barrister, and all the other marks of mastery of English culture.

Although August Town was, and is, a poor village, it had long been closely articulated with many aspects of colonial society. I have described elsewhere the remarkable absence from Guyana of syncretistic African Christian churches, especially when compared to Jamaica (R.T. Smith 1976b). African villages in Guyana have generally been tightly integrated into churches controlled from the capital, Georgetown, and ultimately from Britain or, in the case of the Catholic Church, more recently from the United States. August Town's Anglican and Congregational Churches claimed the allegiance of the vast majority of villagers, while only a minuscule number of people belonged to small chapters of the Jehovah's Witnesses. At the same time there was a lively, but generally clandestine, participation in various forms of African-derived religious practices ranging from spiritual healing to witch-finding to "Cumfa" rituals (see R.T. Smith 1976b:327-32). In an ideal-typical way they could be said to be comparable to Jamaican Pentecostalism in that the participants were predominantly women even though the controlling agents, such as drummers and ritual specialists, were frequently men, and that they gave women some sense of empowerment in situations of general subjugation. During the nineteenth century there was an upsurge of African religiosity but it seems not to have consolidated into syncretistic churches, probably because the Christian church schools provided the means for status "upliftment" and for some limited occupational mobility into urban trades and into teaching, nursing, and the police (see Rodney 1981:Chapter 4). The Christian churches in the African villages were centers of social empowerment at the same time that they were instruments of hegemonic domination by the colonial state. They developed their own hierarchies of clergy, lay clergy, schoolteachers, and other officials that reflected both class differences and male domination, but most of these people were tied by kinship to a wide range of people in the villages. School teachers constituted the main body of the village elite and connected it directly with the colonial society through their membership in various local government bodies, and in the case of one individual, through his nominated membership of the Legislative Council.

THE "PROBLEM" OF EAST INDIAN "ASSIMILATION"

As I pointed out above, the recourse to history, or to cultural differences, to explain the contemporary situation in Guyana tends to shift into a focus on the "problem" of East Indian "assimilation" to some hypothetically

homogeneous national culture. Even so fanatical a proponent of the plural society view of Guyana as M.G. Smith (1984:110) eventually saw Guyana as a two-segment society: Creoles and East Indians. It is, then, worth asking how rural Indian communities have articulated with colonial society since the 1950s. So long as discussion revolves around a supposed opposition between "plural society" and "common culture" or "common values," it is likely to degenerate into the listing of similarities and differences that are held to add up to identical, or disparate, institutions and norms. A similar problem arises if a sharp and exclusive distinction is made between "class" and other forms of social identifications based on "race," "religion" or "culture." The communities formed by East Indians differed in several significant ways from those formed by African ex-slaves. We can leave aside the sugar plantations where the plantation management exercised considerable control, even over the establishment of religious organizations of one kind or another (see Jayawardena 1963), until, first, organs of the central government, and then organized trade unions came to be vehicles for the articulation of plantation workers' interests. I shall concentrate on the rice-growing village of Windsor Forest that I studied in 1956 and again in 1975, and the village named Rajgahr studied by Silverman in 1969-70. Space does not permit a detailed analysis and comparison of these two villages but certain aspects of their contrasted experience are revealing.

Rajgahr was founded in 1902 as a government land settlement for former indentured immigrants in lieu of return passages to India. By 1911 there were 623 residents, though it is likely that laborers resident at Plantation Bath worked some of the land which they had been allotted without moving into the village. Rice was grown both as a subsistence crop and for sale though many inhabitants continued to work on the sugar estate. Although Rajgahr was a government land settlement, it was incorporated as a Country District with a council of seven members appointed by the central Local Government Board. The one church in British Guiana that had been active among East Indian immigrants was the Canadian Mission Church, (thus indicating yet again the manner in which colonial social institutions segmented the population); its head, the Reverend Cropper, had been the resident minister at Plantation Bath where most of the Rajgahr residents had formerly lived. When the village council was formed, Reverend Cropper was appointed as a member along with a series of other prominent persons who were both literate in English and, for the most part, Christians. Silverman provides a wealth of detail on the manner in which Rajgahr's internal politics developed over the years from the founding of the village until 1970, when she left the field. Because it was a

village district with its own council, the politics of the local community was focussed in that arena. This is very different from Windsor Forest.⁹

Windsor Forest was an active sugar estate at the beginning of the twentieth century but repeated inundation by the sea and the company's failure to maintain the sea defenses, led them to abandon the plantation, leaving the resident laboring population of East Indians, Africans, and Chinese to fend for themselves. A few pieces of land were sold or given to the residents, and eventually the colonial government acquired the estate at execution sale in order to protect its interest in outstanding debts. The residents gradually converted the sugar lands to cattle pasture and rice land, the factory was broken up and sold to help pay the cost of repair to the sea wall, and eventually the government decided to convert the estate, and its neighbor La Jalousie, into government land settlements. The colonial government made the fateful error of offering plots of land to the residents on 99-year leases at a fixed rental of \$6.00 per acre per annum (one British West Indian dollar equaled approximately 55 cents US in 1956; in 1994 one Guyana dollar was worth less than one cent US). In return for this rent, the government undertook to provide all maintenance of the estate, including sea defense and water control costs. The administration of the village was effectively vested in the regional superintendent of "Government Estates: West Demerara." Although a locally elected Advisory Council had been instituted it had little power and was not a forum for local political and factional conflict as in Rajgahr. However, this does not mean that such conflicts were absent. On the contrary: Windsor Forest's development as a rice growing community closely paralleled that of Rajgahr, with the same growth of internal differentiation as millers and shopkeepers emerged as a new village elite. However, in Windsor Forest the vehicle for status striving was not the mobilization of factional support for village council office, but religious organizations.

The three major religious organizations in 1956 were the Muslims who operated a mosque, a school for teaching Urdu and Arabic, and a boy scout troop; the Arya Samaj, a Hindu reform group that owned a small meeting place and a school for teaching Hindi; the Sanatan Dharm Maha Sabha, the orthodox Hindu group that operates a temple complete with salaried priest and a small Hindi school. The Bharat Sevashram Sangh, a Hindu splinter group commonly known as "the Bengalis," was relatively new and relatively small. These organizations each had a full complement of officers, such as President, Secretary, Treasurer and committees of management, providing ample scope for the working out of factional politics. The articulation of status groups within the village was expressed through complex arguments and discussions of religious doctrine. Individuals as-

piring to leadership roles within the various organizations would pore over sacred books and secondary works so as to be able to make impressive and informed speeches on various public occasions. There can be no doubting the sincere interest of many of these individuals in the details of religious doctrine, but at the same time the language of religious dispute was also the language of factional conflict. The most influential men were those with an ample economic base, either as store keepers, rice millers, or large farmers; religious knowledge and piety were additional qualifications for status group leadership.

When the election campaigns gathered momentum prior to the 1953 elections there were numerous independent candidates and small parties that appealed with varying degrees of indirectness to Indian voters. Silverman has shown that the formation of the PPP provided the basis for the formation of a new faction in Rajgahr (Silverman 1980:115-30). In Windsor Forest, there was a tendency for the religious groups to align with national parties. The Muslims were generally sympathetic to parties that opposed the PPP, while the Arya Samajists were the most receptive to radical reform. In both communities the development of racial polarization in the early 1960s led to a consolidation of electoral support behind the PPP, but there was no automatic alignment of all Indians with that party. In Rajgahr at least one prominent leader became a member of the People's National Congress when it was formed by Forbes Burnham, and in Windsor Forest there continued to be strong opposition to the perceived "communism" of the PPP. More importantly, the struggle between the parties at the national level did not remove the importance of local status groups nor did it totally permeate them.

CONCLUSION

A more careful analysis of the internal structure of apparently segregated rural communities than I have been able to make here would show how schematic are the depictions of the fundamental social and cultural separation of the African and Indian "communities" as they are so often called. There is nothing in their internal structure to suggest such a fundamental separation. In the early 1950s there were fundamental divisions among both Africans and Indians over the issues of "communism" and "capitalism," divisions that led to varying levels of alignment with political parties committed to these ideologies. However, Silverman's detailed analysis of the internal politics of Rajgahr shows clearly that it was never simple primordial identity or deep cultural divisions that produced political alignments. Economic and status interests determined the alignments of

local factions within a complex articulation of contesting status groups.

In the period of intense conflict designed to remove or retain Jagan and the PPP as the controllers of the state apparatus, a period that lasted for only a few years, from 1961 to 1965, racial confrontation dwarfed the status defining significance of local groups, and that struggle has certainly affected social relations at the most mundane levels in the period since then. However, at the risk of being labelled optimistic, not to say naïve, I am uneasy with theories that assume either the inevitability of that very conflict, or the equal inevitability of its consequence in the future. In 1995 it is important not to allow the historical imagination to become settled upon the idea that disabling racial conflict was, and therefore is, inevitable. The most pessimistic, and also exaggerated, account of Guyana's ills that I have seen recently is a paper written by Ralph R. Premdas of the University of the West Indies, Trinidad, entitled "Ethnic Conflict and Development: The Case of Guyana." There is an almost apocalyptic tone to the paper, detailing the pervasive "ethnicization" of politics since the 1950s, and arguing that the hostility between Africans and Indians has even divided overseas Guyanese communities. Yet his arguments are not too far removed from those I have set out above. He traces the situation at the beginning of 1992 to the odd concatenation of circumstances that occurred in the 1950s as the original PPP fell apart from a combination of external interference and failure of leadership on the part of Burnham and Jagan. However, he also assumes a pre-existing "pluralism" in the population of British Guiana exhibited in residential and occupational segregation, with a concomitant segregation of voluntary associations such as trade unions, religious organizations, and so forth. As with most models of the society constructed in terms of a macro-image of social relations, this one ignores or minimizes the many areas of social life where relations did not conform to the assumed determination of race or "ethnicity," but Premdas is too good an observer of social reality to completely overlook data that do not conform to this image.

Brackette Williams's work was carried out in Guyana during the most repressive period of PNC domination, when Burnham attempted to convert himself from a client of the United States into the leader of a Third World socialist state, thus pre-empting Jagan's claim to be the authentic leader of an authentic socialist party.¹⁰ She viewed this situation as one where;

[E]thnic groups in Guyana stress cultural traits, interpret their experiences, and organize the functions of ethnic culture with one eye on preventing the other groups from taking over particular material opportunities that they believe should belong to their group, and with the other eye on the future construction of putative homogeneity and its institutionalization in civil society as they struggle over who should inherit the power relinquished by the Anglo-Europeans at the end of the colonial era (Williams 1989:438-39).

And she strikes a somber note as she generalizes her insights to say that "ethnicity labels the politics of cultural struggle in the nexus of territorial and cultural nationalism that characterizes all putatively homogeneous nation states," implying, and not without reason, that all nation states, because of the very basis of their construction, must marginalize "peripheral categorical units" (Williams 1989:439).

However realistic a conclusion this may be, it seems to short-circuit the consideration of bases of status group formation other than race, and to over-stress the importance of the putatively homogeneous nation state as the only significant reference for constructing a transformist hegemony, perhaps because of the very tendency of any discussion of "ethnicity" to lead toward that outcome identified by Max Weber (1968:394-95) when he wrote of the "disutility of the notion of 'Ethnic Group'."

[T]he notion of "ethnically" determined social action subsumes phenomena that a rigorous sociological analysis ... would have to distinguish carefully: the actual subjective effects of those customs conditioned by heredity and those determined by tradition; the differential impact of the varying content of custom; the influence of common language, religion, and political action, past and present, upon the formation of customs; the extent to which such factors create attraction and repulsion, and especially the belief in affinity or disaffinity of blood; the consequences of this belief for social action in general, and specifically for action on the basis of shared custom or blood relationship for diverse sexual relations, etc. — all of this would have to be studied in detail. It is certain that in this process the collective term "ethnic" would be abandoned, for it is unsuitable for a really rigorous analysis.

Premdas has half-acknowledged that by the early 1950s "something of a shared locally derived 'creole culture' had emerged" in British Guiana, but that the years of intensifying polarized conflict "practically destroyed all these shared institutions and practices" (Premdas 1992:25). But is this true? The state apparatus may have been dominated by the People's National Congress embodied as an African party, but it surely embraced a large number of Indians, especially in local government bodies, and the party itself succeeded, no matter how cynically, in recruiting Indian mem-

bership. By the early 1980s, the PNC had deployed enough patronage at the local level in the rural areas to persuade many Indians to offer at least nominal allegiance, and some offered a great deal more. One day when I was talking to another anthropologist in a Georgetown bar, in the company of a very old friend of mine from Windsor Forest, I asked him what was involved in his job as a local party organizer in the village. He answered that it was largely to take note of subversive talk such as he had just heard from us, and report it to "the authorities." He was only half joking.

One other aspect of the Guyana case is important. Daniel Miller, in a study of Trinidad, has been impressed by the dualism of attitudes toward the nation-state;

on the one hand, a passionate nationalism, and a sincere concern with the history, and achievements of the country including its symbolic elements such as the national anthem. At the same time I heard politicians bemoan the lack of these concerns, and found in other contexts ... quite the opposite sense of self-denigration and antipathy to the idea of being Trinidadian.¹¹

The same is certainly true of Guyana and the Guyanese. Both Guyana and Trinidad are now, and always have been, creatures of modern capitalist expansion, and although it is justifiable to consider their internal dynamics, and even their attempts to create nations out of the remnants of colonial states, one cannot ignore the continuing reality of dependence, in all senses of that term, nor the incorporation of a wider hegemony into their very constitution. The ideology of the People's Progressive Party of the 1950s was socialist, universalistic, and full of bluster about creating a completely new society. It has been remarked frequently that Jagan's socialism was also peculiarly American, but however that may be, it was certainly egalitarian, universalistic, and individualist. Now that his party is back in office he has embraced the idea of building a market economy and encouraging outside investment. But apart from such economic development strategies, the Guyanese people are now, and always have been, deeply affected by what has been called globalization.

I suggested at the beginning of this paper that "history" has been used by social scientists studying political conflict in Guyana in such a way that it has directed attention away from the complexity of the conflicts, and onto the stereotyped images of how Guyana was created and what continues to be its real underlying structure. Is this a denial of the relevance of history for anthropological analysis? Of course not. Rather it is a call for what Sydel Silverman (1979:433) called the "responsible use of historical material ... a collaboration [of anthropology and history] in which the

work of each discipline can nourish that of the other.” Unfortunately the overwhelming interest of students of Guyana, whether historians or social scientists, has been in the roots of recent social conflict, to the extent that one historian has shaped his investigation of nineteenth-century Guyanese history around the dubious project of “testing” the plural society versus stratification theories (Moore 1987). However, I have been primarily concerned with the recourse to more distant history as a means of supporting analyses of recent events, a procedure fraught with problems of its own, as Orlando Patterson (1982) pointed out some years ago. Daniel Miller (1994), in a novel but creative way, has employed a very generalized history in his study of Trinidad. Arguing that Trinidad is a salient example of the problems of modernity, he contends that:

from its inception Trinidad has been the creation of the global economy, and continues to have little protection from the buffeting of larger economic trends ... The Caribbean was itself the creation of a modernist scheme established with unusual clarity and completeness by Europeans, and today the IMF and World Bank continue to exert this peculiar rationality of economics, if in less extreme fashion (Miller 1994:24).

Building upon his previous work on mass consumption, work informed by an unusually broad understanding of both philosophy and anthropological theory, Miller recognizes the diversity of the origins of Trinidad’s population and the salience of ethnicity in self-representation. However, he also perceives a generalized sense of oppression deriving from the experience of colonial domination that has “created a culture of disparagement of the powerless and emulation of the powerful” (Miller 1994:22), a culture that has been vividly depicted in the various writings of V.S. Naipaul. Even more significant are the conclusions derived from a careful examination of material culture where he found that “ethnic distinctions were of minimal importance to the selection of objects and their juxtaposition in home design” so that there were “evident discrepancies between what people expressed in language and what they seemed to value in action” (Miller 1994:10).

Guyana is not Trinidad of course, but certain aspects of their development and present condition are similar. In both cases local people are working to create systems of value with materials, both real and ideal, that derive not only from their immediate environment and their historic experience, but also within a global system that is just as important to them. There is no reason to believe that the “nationalist intellectuals” of today are any less creative than those to whom Clifford Geertz referred, and much reason to hope that they are a good deal wiser. The deeply pes-

simistic Ralph Premdas (1992:26) writes that Guyana has passed "the collective insanity threshold" that produces crippled personalities seeking psychological redemption through communal parties led by apocalyptic personalities that are no longer the means of aggregating political interests but are more like psychiatric clinics. But where does he publish this analysis? In a discussion paper for the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development. So that in the midst of despair there is hope.

NOTES

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1. See Hanley (1979) for an account of technological change in this village.
2. The population was classified in the 1946 and 1964 censuses as follows:

	1946	%	1964	%
East Indian	163,434	43.5	320,070	50.1
African	143,385	38.2	199,830	31.3
Mixed	37,685	10.0	75,990	11.9
Amerindian	16,322	4.4	29,430	4.6
Portuguese	8,543	2.3	6,830	1.1
Chinese	3,567	1.0	3,910	0.6
European	2,480	0.7	2,420	0.4
Asiatic (mainly Syrian)	236	0.1		
Not Stated	49			
Totals	375,701	100.00	638,480	100.00

No census figures have been published recently and racial classifications are no longer given in official statistics. However, massive migrations during the 1970s and 1980s – to Canada, Britain, and the United States mainly but also to neighboring countries in the West Indies and Suriname – have probably offset any natural increase.

3. This argument was used by Jagan (1966:Chapter XVI), the leader of the PPP.
4. I do not mean to imply that her discussion of historical developments is simplistic. In fact she has some very interesting and detailed discussions of the Amerindian and Portuguese groups that go far beyond the usual narrative.
5. See R.T. Smith 1971, 1976a, 1980; Newman 1964; Reno 1964; Jagan 1966; Despres 1967; Glasgow 1970; Henfrey 1972; Lutchman 1974; Danns 1982.
6. See Jagan 1966; R.T. Smith 1971, 1976a; Reno 1964; Despres 1967; Glasgow

1970; Henfrey 1972; Lutchman 1974; Danns 1982 for detailed accounts of events leading up to this election.

7. They may not be residues of Anglo-European hegemony of course; the modern world system is sufficiently saturated with racist stereotypes, and reports of such stereotypes, that it can quickly replenish any fading images.

8. Maintaining these fictitious names, once an anthropological convention, is a waste of time. Anyone in Guyana can easily recognize which villages are being written about, and indeed Marilyn Silverman provides a map of her area with the correct name of "August Town" clearly marked, just as I referred to her "Rajgahr" by its correct name in various places.

9. See R.T. Smith 1957; Smith & Jayawardena 1958, 1959, 1967; and Hanley 1975, 1979 for fuller discussions of Windsor Forest.

10. The bitterest blow of all for Jagan was being asked (instructed?) by the Russians and Cubans to cooperate with Burnham (R.T. Smith 1976a:222-23).

11. This passage is quoted with permission from the manuscript draft of Miller 1994, but I have been unable to find it in the published version.

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