Ramesh Gampat, *Guyana's Great Economic Downswing, 1977–1990: Socio-Economic Impact of Co-operative Socialism*. Xlibris US, 2020. xxxiv + 624 pp. (Paper US\$ 32.99)

During Guyana's "great economic downswing," 1977–90, the output of the country's economy declined by almost one-third (32.3 percent). Ramesh Gampat does not exaggerate when he writes, "anyone old enough to remember the terrible socio-economic conditions in Guyana from around the early 1970s to the mid-1980s will also remember the fear, despair and hopelessness that pervaded the land" (p. 18).

In examining this economic catastrophe, Gampat has collected an extensive data set that will be of assistance to future scholars. Further, he combines that information with economic theory to provide important insights into what went wrong. Of particular note are his two chapters that employ the growth accounting methods first developed by Robert M. Solow. Using Solow's methods, Gampat shows that total factor productivity (TFP)—generally understood to be a measure of technological change—was negative in the years of the downswing. As Gampat puts it, "the contribution of TFP to output growth switched from positive in the pre-1975 years to negative during the planned-economy period and the Great Downswing. Something caused the contribution of TFP to change from boosting to depressing economic growth" (p. 268).

Gampat is on sound ground when he insists that economic data and economic theory alone are inadequate tools by which to identify that "something." According to him, "data without a historical understanding of the accompanying socio-political process is data in a vacuum." He goes on, "both context and data are critical for a more nuanced understanding of the historical period of the Great Downswing" (p. 39). But in the pursuit of context, Gampat is not guided by the same theoretical care that he employs in his economic analysis. The result of his failure in that regard is that he falls into the very trap that no less an authority than Robert M. Solow warned against. Solow, in discussing the scholarly literature that studied the slow growth of the British economy, argued that the failure to exercise caution in addressing the "very complicated problem" of measuring the social forces that influence factor productivity risks ending "up in a blaze of amateur sociology" ("Science and Ideology in Economics," nationalaffairs.com/public_interest/detail/science-and-ideology-in-economics, 1970).

Gampat's book teems with "amateur sociology." It takes the form of using the very stereotypes that have for decades so poisoned Guyana's politics. He writes, for example, that Guyana's history reveals "why the Indian acquire (sic) wealth and made himself into the economic man, and how and why the African

was unable to do so but manage (sic) to seize political power as a control valve and affix a transfer/distribution setting." Simplifications such as these provide the basis for Gampat's assertion that "an African government employs political power to enlarge the African share of the economic pie via redistribution even though this ethnic group makes a smaller contribution to the overall size of the pie. On the other hand, an Indian Government uses political power to grow the pie and cultivate a small class of plutocrats, which Africans are now imitating" (p. 5).

It is not possible to verify any of these assertions for the period of the "Great Economic Downswing." The phrases "political man" and "economic man" obviously are not categories that are useful for empirical study, and no income data by ethnicity is available for these years. It therefore is impossible to test Gampat's claims about ethnic group contributions to production, redistribution by ethnicity, or the growth of plutocrats. The only data that he presents that even tangentially bear on these subjects are for the years between 1993 and 2006, years when the Indo-dominated People's Progressive Party was in power. Gampat estimates that during these years "moderate poverty" among Afro-Guyanese declined more than among Indo-Guyanese (p. 450). Why this is so is not clear, but *prima facie* those estimates are inconsistent with Gampat's sociologically-driven hypothesis that ethnicity in power dictates the ethnic distribution of benefits.

Gampat does an exhaustive job in providing data that are useful in the study of the Guyanese economy. But his use of stereotypes in describing the ethnic structure of the country's population does not provide a starting point in explaining why that dramatic downturn occurred.

Jay R. Mandle

Department of Economics, Colgate University, Hamilton NY, U.S.A.

jmandle@colgate.edu