Race and Development in Plural Societies: The Case of Guyana

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Guyana is a racially and ethnically plural society comprising six race groups, the relations among whom colour societal outcomes. The race groups comprise Blacks, East Indians, Amerindians, Chinese, White/Portuguese and Mixed. Though ethnic groups often coincide with race groups in the society they are in fact more numerous. Within the East Indian race group for example, there are Hindus and Muslims each forming a distinct ethnic group. The nine Amerindian tribes in Guyana while comprising a single race group can be considered to be ethnically different. Among Blacks, Rastafarians have an ethnic character of their own. Ethnicity and race combine to provide the Guyana society with its essentially plural character. This plurality on the one hand has contributed to the richness and diversity of Guyanese culture and institutions. On the other hand it has been a source of tension and torment, particularly between the majority East Indians and Blacks, induced by mistrust, prejudice and discrimination with concomitant negative impacts on political, social and economic development of the nation.

In this paper I focus on the relationships between race and development in Guyana. I contend that the race factor has caught Guyana in a development gridlock. Conflict between the two major race groups manifest in political mobilization, aggregation and articulation has stymied developmental choices of both over time and weakened the bargaining position of the country as a whole. Not enough attention is being given by policy makers and scholars alike to the race factor and its negative impact on the country's development. I first analyse race and development in colonial British Guiana and later in contemporary post-colonial Guyana.

Race and Development in Colonial Guyana

Race has been playing a determinant role in the multiracial Guyana society. Guyana has been founded on racism and legitimized historically through a doctrine of European racial superiority. European racism was accompanied by ethnic rivalry and competition among the other ethnic groups.

Economic deprivation intensifies racial rivalry, competition and insecurity. Racial insecurity leads to orientations of prejudice and racial discriminatory behaviour. It is a reality in Guyana that racial prejudice is executed by each race group against the others. Such prejudice though unacceptable is normal. It becomes racism however when one race group in control of state or other power systematically uses that power to exclude the participation of other ethnic groups and to deny them opportunities or limit their privileges. The militarised colonial state provided a sheltered atmosphere for the transplant of the ethics of European capitalism, the institutionalized expression of which was the plantation. Sugar, cotton and coffee plantations were set up in Guyana exclusively for the purpose of overseas trade. The goal of plantation production was neither to develop nor to advance the colony and its people.

Europeans came to Guyana as colonizers. The Spanish, French, Dutch and British all played a role in the country's colonial history with Great Britain eventually retaining custody of the colony in 1803. The indigenous Amerindians were either enslaved or forced to retreat further into the forests to avoid European firepower. Failing to find the mythical city of El Dorado, the Europeans turned to plantation cultivation using slave labour. Most of the Amerindians proved to be unwilling captives and many died as a consequence of enslavement.
Africans were imported from West Africa and enslaved and soon provided the bulk of the labour power on the sugar, coffee and cotton plantations. The economic development of European metropolitan countries was the sole purpose for importing people of other races. Africans and other races imported to Guyana were exploited and dehumanized by the plantation economic system. Slavery was abolished in 1833 and other peoples were imported to replace the freed African slaves. The ex-slaves were compelled to serve a five year period of apprenticeship on the plantations. The population of Blacks at the time of emancipation in 1838 was 82,824. Whites in 1851 comprised a meagre 2.8 per cent of the population of the colony (Mandie 1973).

After 1838, Blacks fled the plantations of their former masters and settled in towns and villages. Some of them bought abandoned plantations of bankrupt planters and attempted to engage in cooperative production but with minimal success. The response by the planters to the reluctant Black labour force was to import other races or as indentured labourers. East Indians from the Indian sub-continent, Portuguese from Madeira and the Azores, Chinese from mainland China, and a few thousand Africans were imported as indentures to replace the freed Blacks. The Portuguese and Chinese were soon freed from their indentureship and moved into the area of business and commerce in the urban areas. The reason given for their release from indentureship was their unsuitability for the stringency of plantation labour in the tropics. The truth is however that the Portuguese with their white skins and appearance were preferred by the colonial masters who valued the myth of white superiority which the colonial class was eager to sustain as a basis for an egalitarian order. Hintzen notes that the reaction of the British was to remove the mulattoes or coloureds from their middle class position and entrepreneurial roles replacing them with the formerly indentured Portuguese. After 1840 credit was denied Africans and coloureds in favour of Portuguese. Hintzen further found that “By 1861, 173 out of a total of 296 shops in Georgetown, and 432 shops in the villages were Portuguese owned. From this base they were able to expand into other business ventures and later even to challenge the entrepreneurial dominance of the large English merchants. Thus, the symbolic order of White dominance was sustained with the coloureds moving one rung down the ladder to make way for the Portuguese (Hintzen 1977:15). It is important to note however that the Portuguese were labelled “non white” inspite of their phenotype and European origins. Portuguese labouring on the plantations were called “White niggers” by blacks (Lawrence 1965, Moore 1975). The Chinese engaged in indentured labour but only for a short while. They too were allowed to set up shops like the Portuguese and to engage in charcoal manufacture. In a society in which whiteness and nearness to whiteness assured ascendant status, the fair complexion and paucity in numbers of the Chinese worked in their favour and ensured their placement above the Blacks in the stratification order.

The darker complexioned East Indians replaced Blacks as the plantation labour force and were imported as indentures in such large numbers that they soon became the largest ethnic group in the colony. Between 1838 and 1917, over 236,000 East Indians arrived in Guyana. In 1891, East Indians were 40 per cent of the population and by 1960 became 50 per cent. The Compulsory Education Act of 1876 discriminated against East Indians acquiring education and policies were pursued to deny them employment in the towns. East Indians were further isolated and distinguished by their marital practices, religion, food, dress and life style. These social institutions of the East Indians along with the other structural barriers restricted their participation in the rest of the society and maintained the boundaries of the plantation system.

Blacks in contrast were being educated and were occupying teaching positions in the country’s primary schools as well as staffing the lower offices of the colonial bureaucracy. Blacks provided a sizable urban proletariat and sought to eke out a living from petty jobs. By the turn of the 20th Century, the Guyanese society, with its colonisers and imported peoples, was stratified as follows: at the top of the


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**Source:** Government Statistical Bureau.
hierarchy, senior government administrators, the planter class and top businessmen - all white and British - ruled supreme. Next was a Portuguese entrepreneurial class followed by a coloured or mulatto bureaucratic class and the small population of Chinese engaged in limited commercial ventures. Blacks formed the bulk of the urban proletariat and skilled and semi-skilled labour and were afforded a limited measure of upward mobility, through their acquisition of education, in the teaching profession and civil service. The East Indians who constituted the largest group occupied the bottom rung of the stratification hierarchy and unskilled labour on the plantations. The final ethnic group were the Amerindians who were peripheralized in the remote rain forests in the face of the march of European civilization and its cruel practice of enslaving and exploiting other peoples. Each race group seemed to have a particular niche carved out for it in the social structure of the society by the White ruling class. Each seemed to pursue differential occupational callings and to be accorded differential prestige in a society in which whiteness and nearness to whiteness were the criteria for superior social rankings and social mobility. The ethnic groups in the society initially at least had different cultural practices.

This assembly of strange bedfellows led theorists to place societies in the Caribbean including Guyana within the framework of a theory of cultural pluralism. This theory was developed initially by J.S. Furnival (1939) in studying colonial societies. Furnival noted that each group holds by its own religion, its own culture and language, its own ideas and ways. As individuals they meet, but only in the market place, in buying and selling. There is a plural society, with different sections of the community living side by side, but separately, within the same political unit. Even in the economic sphere there is a division of labour along racial lines.

In Guyana and the Caribbean M.G. Smith (1963) and Leo A. Despres (1967) elaborated Furnival's theory which was concerned with the effects of colonialism as an economic force and saw plural society as a product of colonial expansion. For Despres and Smith cultural and institutional variation among the various race groups in the society were the major variables determining social organisation and social change. For these plural society theorists the varying ethnic and cultural groupings were held together politically, in a social system pregnant with conflict, by the dominant ethnic cultural section of the colonisers. Proponents of the cultural pluralism perspective were reacting to the overconsensual bias of Parsonsian structural functionalism and were pointing to its inapplicability in studying the conflict ridden colonial milieu. A plural society they posit is characterized by cultural sections each displaying its own distinct patterns of socio-cultural integration.

Leo Despres (1967) rethematised M.G. Smith's theory of cultural pluralism in the Caribbean in his analysis of Guyana as a plural society. Despres contended that the separatism or "sociological apartheid" among the groups in the society will result in serious political cleavages and discord after the dominant cultural section withdrew with the granting of political independence to the colony. The subordinate cultural sections will engage in bitter rivalry to assume the vacated positions of dominance. Despres's analysis led him to predict the ongoing rivalry between East Indians and Blacks, the two major race groups in the Guyana society.

Much criticism has been levelled at the theory of cultural pluralism as it pertains to the Caribbean. Foremost among the critics is Malcolm Cross (1972) who argued that "theories of cultural pluralism represent a gross oversimplification of reality. Further, this representation of reality is not merely partial, but is derived from a theoretical framework which is conceptually and methodologically weak." Cross contended that neither racial nor cultural variability form a plural theory, for this phenomenon has to be related to economic theory and the fact of economic exploitation. Cross argues that in all societies conflict takes place along economic boundaries, but in a plural society racial and ethnic differences coincide with these divisions or are made to coincide with them so that instability is more likely to result. In focussing on cultural variations, the pluralists ignore the economic substructure and the relations of production within the society.

While recognising plural society as a culturally disparate but politically ordered unit, pluralists fail to give sufficient attention to the economic factors that induced the colonisers to import peoples of varying races and ethnic origins in the first place. While much criticism can be made of the cultural pluralist approach in terms of its theoretical merit, pluralist theory nevertheless draws attention to the variability of "historically rooted cultures" or "cultural sections" as well as the variety of race groupings in the Guyana society. Cross conceded that the theory of cultural pluralism and pluralism in general have the inestimable value of incorporating racial and ethnic divisions within a conceptual framework. Paul Singh
(1972) also argued that the notion of pluralism is seen as having some explanatory value and not merely as being a descriptive referent. He points out that those who accept a pluralist position are not merely contending that societies or social situations are often characterised by racial and ethnic divisions but that these divisions are important in understanding behaviour patterns. The plural structure is seen as the major structure determining social organisations. (Singh 1972)

Neither plural society theorists nor their critics focused on issues of development which were the raison d'être for the creation of the society in the first place. Slaves and indentured labourers were servants of development in the plantation economy and the colonial society. They were however not beneficiaries of the development process. Colonialism in the Guyana society was economic colonialism which race and ethnicity organised, exploited and divided for economic ends. Prejudice and discrimination were employed to neutralise attempts by the subordinated races and ethnic groups to assert their human rights and communal independence and development. Discrimination was used to deny or limit the sharing of other groups in political, economic and social power. Race in colonial Guyana then was on the one hand a factor in promoting development and on the other a factor in promoting underdevelopment.

In contrast to plural society theorising R.T. Smith advocated the notion of "Creole society" which he saw as having emerged after the abolition of plantation slavery. For Smith this creole phase lasted until independence was granted and the present phase he called "modern society." He states: "The basic facts about creole society are that it was rooted in the political and economic dominance of metropolitan power, it was color stratified and integrated around the conception of the moral and cultural superiority of things English" (1966:234). The dominant value standard in the society was that of the British and all the remaining ethnic groups subscribed to these values because they saw it as the only way to gain upward mobility in the colonial society. Smith saw religion, education, the law, medicine, journalism and the civil service as "forces" contributing to this process of creolisation. He argued that these very forces that were used to integrate creole society "resulted in the creation of a creole elite who by the end of the nineteenth century, was referring to itself as the intelligentsia." This group owed its position within the society to achievement in the sense that it filled valued occupational roles and commanded and manipulated English culture, but it is evident that its members came to believe themselves to be qualitatively different from the other non-Europeans by virtue of their 'refinement' (1967:237).

Smith's notion of creole society is of value in pointing to the fact that not only was English culture dominant, but its acceptance was imperative for upward mobility in the colonial society. The implication of creole society theorising is a repudiation of the cultural pluralist position that subordinate cultural sections were more or less mutually exclusive. The colonial society was as much integrated by the dominant culture as it was by the coercive controls of the colonial state apparatus and the plantocracy.

British culture in so far as it was assimilated by the non-European race groups facilitated the effective westernization of the Guyana society. It effectively transformed Guyana and its Anglophone Caribbean neighbours into poor western countries. The reasons for this are as follows:

1. The various race and ethnic groups internalized the weltanschauung of the English colonial elite and accepted the institutionalized means available for personal upliftment and social development.

2. The pursuance of education and the taking up of professions among a growing middle class intelligentsia resulted in their perceptions of themselves as "superior" to the masses of less fortunate and in no way undervalued to the white colonial elite class. Since whiteness and English cultural symbolisms were associated with superior social standing the "non-white" professionals and middle class now considered themselves as "white" or as Fanon (1967) puts it they were characterised by "black skins white masks."

3. The previously rigid stratification order was now being transformed by allowing members from subordinate groups in the society to become upwardly mobile regardless of skin colour once they have adequately internalised British culture and have attained socially superior roles in accordance with cultural prescriptions.

The assimilation of English culture provided common ground for the various race groups in the society. Having assimilated western culture, the
colonised launched a challenge to colonial rule utilising similar political institutions and laws. The granting of universal adult suffrage, self-government and later political independence came about only after the colonised peoples in general and the middle class in particular, understood and were prepared to maintain British institutions and practices. That is, such concessions were given only after the society was sufficiently "creolised" and the people had adapted to a British way of doing things.

**Race and Development in Post Colonial Guyana**

An analytic excursion into colonial Guyana as it pertains to race and development would reveal that

- Apart from the indigenous Amerindians the other race groups came or were brought to the country for the purpose of plantation production. Apart from Blacks who were imported against their will the other race groups came in quest of wealth and betterment, that is, their own development.

- White Europeans formed a dominant class grouping and controlled both state and economic power. The society was colour-class stratified with whiteness or nearness to whiteness being the ascribed basis for mobility and upper class status.

- Racism was perpetrated as an ideology to justify White dominance and to stigmatise the cultural institutions and practices of non-whites as uncivilised, hedonistic and undesirable. Prejudice and discrimination prevailed in all social relations to deny or delimit privilege and opportunities to non-white race groups. Racism functioned to rationalize an unequal social order. Prejudice and discrimination functioned to operationalise it.

- The assembly of race groups in colonial Guyana grew to accept the dominant English culture and way of life as legitimate and proper. This assimilation facilitated the westernization of the non-white race groups and the society as a whole. R.T. Smith referred to the assimilation process through law, religion, education, the media, political institutions, etc., as "creolisation."

Assimilation into the dominant English culture facilitated upward mobility but did not result in the destruction of ethnic subcultures except in the case of Africans. Africans who were imported and enslaved experienced what Erving Goffman called "the mortification of self" in being largely and forcefully denuded of their own culture and resocialised into British colonial culture as underlings.

- The whole production process in the colony was oriented to an export market in the metropole and was not intended to benefit the country's development. George Beckford points to the "persistent poverty" stemming from the operations of the plantation economy which kept the region in a state of dependent underdevelopment.

- None of the race groups came to the colony with the development of the country at heart. The Whites, Portuguese, Chinese and East Indians came to seek their fortunes and return to their countries of origin. Blacks imported from West Africa, if even they wanted to return would not have known where to go. They were preoccupied with their quest for freedom from enslavement. After slavery the humiliated Black race were preoccupied with asserting their dignity and survival. Amerindians were committed to a traditional way of life in a symbiotic relationship with the rainforest they inhabited. Material accumulation was not and largely remains distant to their value orientations.

- Ethnic conflicts coloured all societal relations and was a constant and common feature of the colonial Guyana. Accommodation among race groups was possible in part through assimilation into British culture. Ethnic rivalries were triggered by the unequal placement of non-whites in the social order, the insecurities stemming from competition in the economic market place; and deliberate efforts of the dominant Whites to foster discord among the other races in an effort to divide and rule.

- Ethnic associations led by middle class operatives emerged during the first half of the 20th century to assert the dignity and human rights of the respective race groups. These
associations described as quasi-atavistic movements by Percy Hintzen were chauvinistic in their operations further contributing to disquiet and insecurity in the colony.

Trade unions emerged and though organised along ethnic lines had a broader working class mandate rather than narrow ethnic concerns. The labour movement provided an organisational springboard for the nationalist political movement. Successful political parties were all backed by one or more trade unions. Trade unions protested for economic, political and social benefits for the colonised masses.

Political parties formed on the basis of ethnic associations were not successful and were in fact discouraged by the electorate. Parties and politicians who openly advocate race have been characterised by a marked lack of success.

The charismatic Forbes Burnham (People's National Congress) and Cheddi Jagan (People's Progressive Party) and the parties they led nonetheless came to epitomise the hopes of Blacks and East Indians respectively. These leaders sought accommodation with other ethnic groups by incorporating members in top positions in their parties and in the governments they led.

Vincent Alexander (1996:13) states:

There is also evidence to show that, in the light of the racial composition of the dominant parties and their claim to non-partisan ideologies and national leadership, a system of de facto brokerage was worked out to stabilise the political forces. Brindley Benn explains that for reason other than ideology, the parties sought to include representatives of the opposite racial groups in their hierarchy and Government offices. Brokerage using influential individuals who are not natural members of the party in question has, therefore, emerged as an institution to stabilise what would otherwise be an untenable situation. The role of these persons are on the one hand cosmetic, while, on the other hand, they use their role as a bargaining chip to gain concessions for themselves and possibly their constituencies, hence lending stability to the system. In other words the political system and its processes are able to survive by virtue of the multiracial image which they seek to project and of the presence of brokers who are able to diffuse the tensions that the domination of one race over the other inevitably causes. In these circumstances, there is obvious racial tension and glaring polarisation around election time, followed by brokerage and concessions between elections.

In post-colonial Guyana development or the lack of it has been internally influenced by nationalism, nationalisation, ideology, leadership and race. Nationalism galvanised by the pre-independence national political movement sought to develop consciousness of kind and of nationhood. Guyana must be sovereign and Guyana was for Guyanese was the generalised orientation. The motto of the nation changed from "We give and we take in return" to "One People, One Nation, One Destiny."

Nationalisation functioned to demonstrate the quest for Guyanisation and was consistent with the tide of nationalist sentiments pervading the society in the 1960s and 1970s. It was also consistent with the socialist ideologies espoused by the two major parties, the PPP and PNC and their leaders. Because of nationalisation and socialism, however, the country incurred a sizeable foreign debt which continues to plague its development quest. It also alienated the support of Western countries oriented to open economies thus limiting the willingness of such countries to aid Guyana's development.

Leadership has played a determinant role in Guyana's quest for development. Guyana has been blessed or cursed with two strong willed, headstrong idealistic demagogues - Forbes Burnham and Cheddi Jagan. These leaders of the two main parties and the two largest race groups at the same time subscribed to socialism and the belief that state power must be used by themselves to execute the will of the masses as they interpret that will. They both demonstrated a marked unwillingness to seek accommodation with each other. They emerged from the same party in the past and until the death of Forbes Burnham were markedly reluctant to unite in Guyana's best interest. The disunity between the two leaders and their parties is reflected in the manipulated disunity between the two major races, Blacks and East Indians. Blacks and East Indians ignored race in 1953 and gave mass support to the PPP - a party they believed could represent their developmental interest and their rights. The persistence of racial conflicts between Blacks and East Indians which becomes sharpened around elections suggests that a change in attitude by the
leadership of the two major parties is important for accommodation. The problem is, however, these parties are themselves authoritarian and non-democratic structures whose leaders make absolutely no allowance for their political succession. As a consequence attitudes are hardened and change and accommodation resisted. An examination of the leadership style of the two leaders would highlight the leadership crisis the country faces and how this crisis impacts on race and development.

Forbes Burnham became the first Prime Minister of an independent Guyana after his PNC party formed a coalition government with Peter D'Aguilar's United Force Party in 1964. By the 1968 elections Burnham rid himself of the United Force and won the elections amidst allegations of rigging. Thereafter he transformed Guyana from British Guiana to Burnham's Guyana. He ruled Guyana with the heavy authoritarian hand of a dictator introducing an idealist and concocted cooperative socialist ideology. It was under Burnham's rule than an alleged 80% of the economy was nationalized, a radical foreign policy was pursued and Guyana launched on a path of so-called self-determined development. The policies of Burnham's government functioned to remove the white colonial middle class and much of the colonial middle class as well in what I describe elsewhere as a "silent revolution" (Danns 1979). Burnham was conscious of the need to address the race question if Guyana was to move forward. His cooperative socialism and introduction of the national service institution were oriented to creating "the new Guyana man" and eliminating the primacy of race in national life. Public agencies were practically forbidden to collect or publish statistics which emphasized ethnic differences. Yet it was the Burnham Government which also introduced four ethnic national holidays, two Hindu and two Muslim, as part of a decolonization policy which emphasized the broad religious as opposed to the Christian character of the Guyana society. The government also legalized "obeah" which was previously outlawed under the British.

Burnham's socialist experiment failed abysmally. His government, disposed to gratuitous welfare policies of free education, free health care and free many things, soon bankrupted the narrow-based economy. Corruption and public mismanagement were additional factors of failure. The drastic decline in Guyana's economic fortunes under Burnham's dictatorship alienated most Guyanese. East Indians, however, perceived the national misfortune as wrought by a dictatorship but by a Black government. "Dem Blackman cause this" was the general orientation. Further, many East Indians felt discriminated against by the Black led government. Earl Bousquet (1996), a PPP activist, in an article on the race issue lamented that out of 29 cabinet ministers in the Burnham government in 1979 only 7 were East Indians. The Guyana's Agricultural Workers Union (GAWU) which supports the PPP and in which Cheddi Jagan was an executive member would call between 300-500 strikes per year in the sugar industry. Sugar is Guyana's largest export and the economy relied heavily on it. The great bulk of the sugar workers are of East Indian origin. There were also frequent reports of economic terrorism as cane fields were repeatedly destroyed by arsonist. East Indians who also dominated the rice industry began cutting back drastically on rice cultivation in the face of low prices and excessive state control of the industry. Many East Indians joined in the underground economic activities aimed at depriving the state of resources while accumulating personal wealth. East Indians predominated in the beleaguered private sector under the Burnham government. There was consequently little enthusiasm for contributing to national development by many East Indians under Burnham's rule. Blacks on the other hand were no less disillusioned but many felt the need to support PNC rule. Whereas East Indians in the sugar industry resorted to persistent industrial action, Blacks who predominate in the Public Service and the military were seemingly reluctant to strike or engage in industrial protest despite the low wages they received.

The unexpected demise of Burnham in August 1985 had a liberating effect on the country and on his party. His Prime Minister Desmond Hoyte replaced him as President in accordance with the Constitution. Hoyte also replaced him as leader of the PNC after some internal dissent between himself and another leading contender Hamilton Green. Green saw himself as the natural successor to Burnham although during his lifetime the "Comrade Leader" as Burnham was known never countenanced the idea of a successor among his top lieutenants. He instead enjoyed if not fostered rivalry among them in a Machiavellian way. Yet, in a public speech before he died Burnham is alleged to have quoted the words of a reggae tune which says "shooting me is a waste, another rasta gwine take my place." Desmond Hoyte set about deliberately and systematically undoing Burnham's socialist policies. He "unmuzzled" the media, repealed several exchange control and trade regulations and in general
created an environment for an open market economy. In the words of Hoyte "political space" was no longer to be monopolized by the government and his party. Finally, with the economy experiencing a major turn around and foreign investment actively courted and obtained, "free and fair" elections were held with former American President Jimmy Carter playing a major role in the democratic transition of the country. Forbes Burnham would never have countenanced Jimmy Carter's involvement. Despite the positive policies of Desmond Hoyte his PNC party, with the negative baggage of his predecessor's rule, was voted out of office.

Many Blacks were angry that Desmond Hoyte chose the democratic path and surrendered power. In the words of popular calypsonian, the Mighty Rebel, "Desi yuh wrong." Hoyte soon expelled his rival, Hamilton Green, from the PNC party over bitter disagreements. Green reacted by forming his own party, the Good and Green Party (GGG). The GGG contested and won a majority of seats on the Georgetown City Council beating both the PNC and the PPP in the process. Hamilton Green became the Mayor of the capital, Georgetown. This development suggests that the stranglehold Forbes Burnham had on the Black vote died with him. The upcoming 1997 general elections will probably demonstrate the end of an era when the Black vote would go predominantly to the PNC party.

The accession to state power by the late Cheddi Jagan and his PPP party was a source of deep pride for East Indians who felt happy to be rid of the PNC and even happier that their own party was in office. The problem however, is that Blacks feel very insecure particularly in the light of emergent policies and practices by the PPP. While prepared to work with the democratically elected government, many Blacks express the concern that they were being hounded out of their jobs in the public service and the public sector. Further, most appointments were going to East Indians almost exclusively and Blacks are being generally marginalised in a sort of reverse discrimination. Blacks further contend that the bulk of tax payers money is being spent in East Indian communities and that Black communities are being purposefully deprived. Black businessmen and contractors report considerable problems clearing imports through an East Indian dominated Customs and Excise Department and obtaining contracts from government. In general, the atmosphere in the Black community is one of deep concern and resentment over their seeming marginalization by the PPP government and its supporters. President Jagan himself exacerbated this situation by a speech made in Toronto, Canada. In this Toronto statement as it became known, Jagan said:

Anyway I am departing from the theme I was developing that the PPP is not an Indian party, and the British and the Americans did not remove me, and put Burnham in because of race. In fact, if they were using race I should have been kept there and Burnham should have been kept out forever because, as we know, Black people are generally at the lowest scale of the social ladder.

Most Blacks interpreted this statement as illustrative of the prejudice and discrimination of a racist President towards them. The statement seems to suggest that Blacks are by nature socially inferior to other races. Cheddi Jagan was out of the country at the time when the statement was made public by Kit Nascimento, a television journalist who was a Minister in the PNC government. Janet Jagan, the First Lady allegedly categorically denied her husband would make such a statement. Moses Nagamootoo Minister of Information allegedly stated that the video tape of the speech was "doctored" and could not have been representative of what the President said. On Dr. Jagan's return, public condemnation by opposition political parties in particular, of his statement led him to assert that he was talking about Blacks in the United States and not Guyanese Blacks. Mounting public pressure led the President to publicly express regret at his statement. Minister of Information, Moses Nagamootoo subsequently announced that the President expressed regret, and it should not be taken as an apology to Blacks.

Cheddi Jagan's Toronto statement rubbed salt in the wound of Blacks already upset at perceived discrimination against them by the PPP government. Whereas under the PNC, the public service unions were reluctant to resort to industrial action, they are now more disposed to doing so in protest against low wages. Workers in the state-owned sugar industry receive consistent increases and bonuses for increased production. Workers in the public service in contrast do not receive similar treatment where wage increases, etc., are concerned. Instead they are told about Government's need to repay Guyana's massive foreign debt. The incomes of most public servants place them below the poverty line.

The PPP government in March 1993 set up a Race Relations Working Group and Task Force headed by Anglican Bishop George. The PNC has objected to Bishop George's appointment viewing him as being a political activist. The work of this
body has made little progress. A race relations commission with legal stature is yet to be established. The PPP government since coming into office has essentially continued the policies of the Hoyte administration. The Guyana economy continues to show positive growth yet widespread poverty persists. Jagan's government has been unable to inspire confidence among Blacks in particular and the nation in general. The upcoming general elections has thrown the country into a mood of apprehension as racial tensions increase. The risks of ethnic strife are very real and the impact on the country's development can be deleterious. In the words of Peter Newman, writing on racial tension in British Guiana in the early 1960s: "It is ironic that the grave riots in February of this year were sparked by the first serious attempt to make Guyanese responsible for their own economic development" (quoted in Nagamootoo 1996). Anglican Bishop, Randolph George (1996) head of the race relations task force correctly sums up the situation: "While conceding that the phenomenon of racism is neither new nor confined to any particular place, we in Guyana owe it to ourselves to look seriously at the growing menace which in the long run can only bring destruction if allowed to take root in our society."
REFERENCES


