

ABSTRACT

Guiana and the Shadows of Empire: Colonial and Cultural Negotiations at the Edge of the World

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Nowhere in the world can objective study of colonialism and its effects be more fruitful than in the Guianas, the region of three small states in northeastern South America. The purpose of this thesis is threefold. First, the history of these three Guianas, now known as Guyana, French Guiana, and Suriname, is considered briefly, emphasizing their similarities and regional homogeneity when compared to other areas. Second, the study considers the administrative policies of each of the country's colonizers, Britain, France, and the Netherlands, over the period from settlement to independence. Last, the thesis concentrates on current political and cultural situations in each country, linking these developments to the policies of imperial administrators in the previous decades. By doing so, this thesis hopes to show how an area that should have developed as a single polity could become a region of three very distinct cultures through the altering effects of colonialism.

Guiana and the Shadows of Empire:
Colonial and Cultural Negotiations at the Edge of the World

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A Thesis

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To my daughter, Madison, for reminding me how joyful learning should be

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Ask most casual students of history when the time of colonialism came to an end, and they will point to the 1960s, an era when a significant portion of Southeast Asia and Africa declared independence and joined the United Nations. A student of history in the Americas may even suggest the 1980s, when a significant number of Caribbean islands experienced the same transition. Few, if any, would consider twentieth-century South America a viable answer. It is here, though, in the northeast corner of the continent known as the Guiana Shield, where the Caribbean Sea fades into the Atlantic Ocean, that the vestiges of European colonialism can be the freshest and most acutely perceived. The Guianas, composed of Guyana, French Guiana, and Suriname, are the ideal historical laboratory in which to study the cultural effects of European colonial influence.¹ Unlike Africa and Southeast Asia, this region was, culturally speaking, relatively homogenous before contact, with scattered groups of Arawak, Carib, and Akawoi Indians living along the coast. Physically, the area possesses a high degree of uniformity, with geographical, geological, and ecological similarities that warrant calling the whole region by one name (Guiana). Yet, after four centuries of European colonization, the countries formerly known as British Guiana, French Guiana, and Dutch Guiana have developed widely

¹ The spelling of each of these countries is varied. For the purposes of this paper, Guiana will be used in reference to the overall region or when discussing the area from a cultural perspective. Original colony names like Berbice, Guyane, and Demerara will be used when historically accurate. Otherwise, British Guiana, French Guiana, and Dutch Guiana will be employed when referring to the colonies after their final delineation in 1815. After independence in the 1970s and 1980s, the independent nations' names of Guyana and Suriname will be used.

differing cultures, now possessing little in common. What once was a region only delineated on a map is now the quintessence of diverse colonial enterprises.

The Guianas' remoteness and obscurity contributed to their allure as an untapped blank slate for potential northern European investment. The generous area of land, roughly 181,000 square miles and comparable in size to California, is an area of transitions. As noted, the Guianas straddle the coasts of the calm Caribbean and the more turbulent Atlantic; they also mark a significant terrestrial transition, sitting high on a rocky, mineral-encrusted outcropping—the Guiana Shield—but falling away to the south into the verdant breadth of the Amazon Basin. Along the northern shores, alluvial deposits formed from the tidal undulations of the Atlantic Ocean, along with silt deposits carried by wide interior rivers emptying into the sea, have created alternating series of mangrove forests and parallel sand reefs up to ten miles inland, further isolating this already geographically detached region. A description from 1788 indicates that the early colonists and explorers saw a strikingly similar land. In the account, John Gabriel Stedman noted that, “Some parts of Guiana present a barren and mountainous aspect,” but that the “uncultivated parts of Guiana are covered with immense forests, rocks, and mountains. . .and the whole country is intersected by very deep marshes or swamps, and by extensive heaths or savannas.”² What the region lacks in size is made up for in natural abundance.

² John Gabriel Stedman, *Narrative of a Five Years' Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam in Guiana on the Wild Coast of South America from the Years 1772-1777* (1790; repr., Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1972), 23.

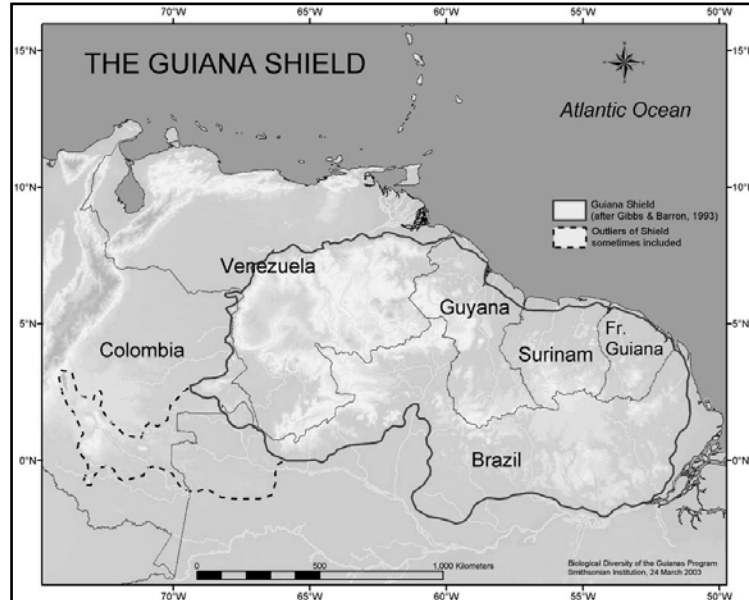


Figure 1.1. The Guiana Shield³

The Guianas were unique in their location and in their Northern European exploration. This interstice between Caribbean and Atlantic, highland and lowland, remained unexploited by either Spain or Portugal throughout the early years of European colonization—Spain’s territory ended at the Orinoco River delta, while Portugal’s Brazilian territory faded northward into the Amazon.⁴ Outside the areas of effective political settlement of either the Spanish or Portuguese empires, this “in-between area” came to be known as the “Wild Coast” and represented the only territory vulnerable to northern European colonists, entrepreneurs, and pirates in South America. Rumors of the existence of a lost Inca kingdom, El Dorado, deep in the jungles of Guiana, sparked the imaginations and greed of British, French, and Dutch explorers alike. After Sir Walter

³ Smithsonian Institute, “Biological Diversity of the Guiana Shield,” Smithsonian Museum of Natural History, <http://botany.si.edu/BDG/index.html> (accessed November 27, 2009).

⁴ Ian Rogoziński, *A Brief History of the Caribbean, from the Arawak and Carib to the Present* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 1999), 43.

Raleigh's initial explorations in 1594, further inroads into the Guianas were made. In 1595, Captain Lawrence Keymis expanded upon Raleigh's surveys by charting the mouths of all major rivers; in the next year additional charts were made under Captain Leonard Berrie.⁵ Keymis and Raleigh returned on a second voyage in 1616, again in search of the city of gold. More tangible goals, too, existed along the Wild Coast. For the British, the potential of an additional colony capable of sugar production presented itself. The French exhibited interest in the area as a possible outpost from which to strike at Spanish ships. The Netherlands, as will be illustrated later, treated Guiana as an addition to its ever-growing trade network.

British, French, and Dutch exploration of the area continued throughout the early seventeenth century while the Spanish busied themselves with Mesoamerica and the Andean regions. It was the Dutch who made the first lasting attempts at colonization, first exploring the area under the command of Abraham Cabeliau in 1598,⁶ then establishing a permanent trading and salt mining settlement in Guiana in 1616.⁷ The replacement of the Spanish military complex by a more trade-friendly Dutch presence in the Caribbean also allowed for increased British and French influence. Britain and France concentrated their colonizing activities in the Antilles islands northwest of the Guianas at first, but actively participated in exploration of the area. In 1602 and 1616,

⁵ Raymond T. Smith, *British Guiana* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 13 and G.C. Edmundson, "The Relations of Great Britain with Guiana," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6, Fourth Series (1923): 2.

⁶ Odeen Ishmael, "The Guyana Story, Chapter 8," The Guyana Organization, <http://www.guyana.org/features/guyanastory/chapter8.html> (accessed December 2, 2008).

⁷ D. A. G. Waddell, *The West Indies and the Guianas* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967), 39.

for instance, Sir Walter Raleigh led exploration missions up the Orinoco.⁸ The area from this point forward was tensely shared among the three powers, Dutch, French, and British, who wove their ways in and out of the written history of the region in an often confusing manner. A short excerpt from Stedman's 1788 account reveals all three nations actively pursuing separate goals in the small space:

In 1634 a Captain Marshall, with about sixty English, were discovered in Surinam [sic] employed in planting tobacco, according to the relation of David Piterse de Vries, a Dutchman, who conversed with them on the spot. In 1640 Surinam was inhabited by the French, who were obliged to leave it soon after, on account of the frequent invasions which they justly suffered from the Caribbean Indians, for having, like their neighbors the Spaniards, treated them with the most barbarous cruelties.⁹

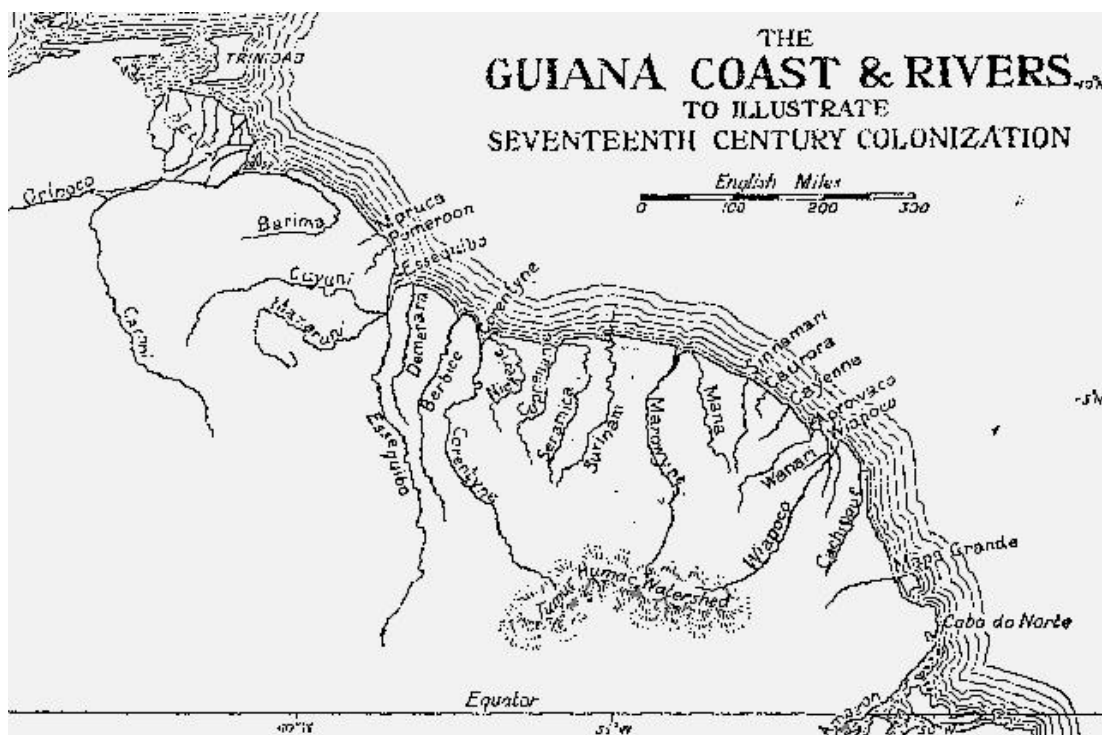


Figure 1.2. The Guiana Coast and rivers¹⁰

⁸Rogozinski, 44.

⁹ Stedman, 26-27.

¹⁰ Cornelis Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean and on the Wild Coast* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1971): 78.

Eventually, wars among the three northern European powers and the frequent renegotiation of treaties affected the power structure in Guiana. Portions of the Dutch colony changed hands several times over the next two centuries, as international conflicts like the War of Spanish Succession (1701-1714) provided ebb and flow of power. The Treaty of Breda (1667) awarded France territory in the Guianas, and by 1781 the British, fresh from defeat in the American War of Independence, were refocusing their North American colonization efforts on the Guianas.

This long and convoluted history of the Guianas suggests a fascinating story from a little-known corner of the world—a microcosm of the political and military struggles of Western Europe from the late sixteenth to the early nineteenth century. As European explorers pierced the jungle looking for the golden wonders of El Dorado and traders exchanged sugar, coffee, gold, timber, and slaves, the settlers of the Guianas continued to develop an identity and sense of place, experiencing isolation and exclusion. Sir Walter Raleigh’s 1596 publication *Discovery of the Large, Rich, and Beautiful Empire of Guiana* gives an excellent first account of northern Europeans’ reactions to the region’s bounty and potential, and continues in his *The Discovery of Guiana, and the Journal of the Second Voyage Thereto*. Raleigh wrote on a theme that would be elaborated by colonists and historians alike—from a cultural perspective, the Guianas had become far detached from the Spanish and Portuguese holdings in South America. Yet from a geographic perspective, they did not easily fit in with their Caribbean neighbors, even though most of the islands by 1750 were British, French, or Dutch.

The legacy of these tussles for territory and cultural assimilation persists in the cultural expressions of the modern states which inherit this shared history. The British

colony, Guyana, would achieve its independence in 1966. The Netherlands' Suriname followed suit in 1975. French Guiana remains a *département* of France as part of the *Outre-Mer* region, a throwback to the age of complete foreign control and imperialism. In a soccer-mad continent, Guyana's most popular sport is cricket. In Suriname, at the head of the Amazon rain forest, buildings are still constructed in classic Dutch style, with steep, stepped roofs and white clapboard façades. In French Guiana, French foreign legion regiments patrol regularly, guarding the Kourou Space Center, chief satellite launching facility for the European Union.

These states, while possessing a common demography, a common geography, and a common ecology, retain few cultural similarities of any kind, and thus warrant study. As a whole, the history of the Guianas can serve as an illustration of colonialism's effects. Unfortunately, this broader history has yet to be written. Though there are studies on each colony independently, and more studies on the British, French, and Dutch systems of colonial government, very little has been done to *reincorporate* the three now-separate entities into a comprehensive study. The historical question presents itself: why did a close group of three tiny states, which share significant similarities in geography, demography, resources, and common isolation, develop so differently, and what are the differences among the French, Dutch, and British colonial experiences that have resulted in such cultural variation? How are full integration (in the case of French Guiana), home rule (Suriname), and Commonwealth membership (Guyana) able to co-exist as acceptable political policies in a basically homogenous region? Only by studying the histories and cultures of these three states as a whole can these questions be addressed and understood.

The purpose of this work will be tripartite. First, the goal is to provide a general geographical description of the Guianas, then a history of the exploration and early settlement of the area between the Orinoco River and the Atlantic Ocean, in order to explain the reasoning behind the region's colonization by the British, French, and Dutch. From this explanation of the initial calculations behind colonization, the work will next proceed into an analysis of colonial management of each of the three Guianas, in turn, highlighting differences in political administration and philosophy. Finally, cultural differences among the three will be considered, and connections between their modern cultures and their colonial administration will be made.

Source material for this study is varied across subjects and times. Besides the initial primary sources from Raleigh, two other publications, John Gabriel Stedman's *Narrative of a Five Years' Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam in Guiana on the Wild Coast of South America from the Years 1772 to 1777*,¹¹ and Simon Cohen's *Historical Essay on the Colony of Surinam* (1788), will be utilized to shed additional light on the century of juggling ownership following the 1667 Treaty of Breda.¹² After the initial treatment of the Guianas as a whole during the exploration and colonization period, the text will deal with each colonial venture in turn, beginning with the Dutch. The purpose of these sections will be to deal with the colonial policies of England, France, and the Netherlands during the two full centuries of European rule in the Guianas.

¹¹ John Gabriel Stedman, *Narrative of a Five Years' Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam in Guiana on the Wild Coast of South America from the Years 1772-1777* (1780; repr., Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1972).

¹² Simon Cohen, trans., *Historical Essay on the Colony of Surinam* (1788; repr., New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1974).

For the Dutch colonial experience, the literature begins with treatments of the Dutch West India Company and the policies of trade incorporated by the Dutch business interests in the Caribbean. C. R. Boxer's *The Dutch Seaborne Empire*, though not a recent work, is still an excellent history of the establishment of the Dutch West India Company, or WIC (and its eastern counterpart, the Dutch East India Company, or VOC), and can actually act as a primary source, illustrating the Dutch pre-independence viewpoint.¹³ Negative French experiences in the initial chapters of the colonies' history led to a different approach toward the Guianas than either the British or Dutch would utilize. That shifting focus will be elaborated upon with the help of Robert Aldrich's *Greater France: a History of French Overseas Expansion*.¹⁴ Finally, initial colonization efforts by the British are best rendered by Peter Newman's *British Guiana: Problems of Cohesion in an Immigrant Society*¹⁵ and Raymond T. Smith's *British Guiana*.¹⁶ These and other sources will cast light on the beginnings of each of the colonies and establish the direction each would take in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Before taking on such a task, it would be prudent to ask, "Why give so much attention to such a little known, seemingly insignificant corner of the world? Of what scholarly or practical use can such a study be?" Other than a fascinating tale of three separate journeys toward self-determination, the story of the Guianas is microcosmic; the Wild Coast and the islands of the Caribbean, over the course of five centuries, have been

¹³ Charles Ralph Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire, 1600-1800* (New York: Knopf, 1965).

¹⁴ Robert Aldrich, *Greater France: a History of French Overseas Expansion* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996).

¹⁵ Peter Newman, *British Guiana: Problems of Cohesion in an Immigrant Society* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964).

¹⁶ Raymond T. Smith, *British Guiana* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962).

relegated from the center of world interest to its scattered margins. The factors driving these countries from fame to obscurity and transforming a cohesive Guianese territory into three separate, unique polities are the changing forces of imperialism. To comprehend how “Guiana” became “The Guianas” is to recognize the transformational ingredients of colonialism.

CHAPTER TWO

Homogeny and Hegemony

Guiana was not always a divided entity. Before the arrival of European ships, Guianese territory was the home of scattered tribes of Arawaks, a group of indigenous people spread across the entirety of the Greater and Lesser Antilles, from Cuba south all the way to the Guiana coasts. Inland, similar tribes, also of Arawak descent, occupied the green expanse of the Amazon and Orinoco Basin, from modern day Venezuela into the Brazilian state of Mato Grosso.¹ Rather than a collection of clearly differentiated ethnic groups jostling for territory, as could be found in North America or Africa at the time, Guiana was populated by successive waves of relatively homogenous peoples. Most evidence suggests that the Arawaks immigrated from the Orinoco and Essequibo River Basin in Venezuela and Guiana into the northern islands, and were then supplanted (and, occasionally, eaten) by more warlike tribes of Carib Indians, who had departed from these same river valleys a few centuries later.

Little doubt exists that the Arawak and Carib tribes were mortal enemies. From the earliest accounts, Arawaks warned even Columbus to steer away from Carib lands, and were horrified when he did not heed their warnings.² The Carib were well known across the Antilles and into South America for their prowess in warfare and their taste for

¹ Information on Arawak distribution can be found in: Ian Rogoziński, *A Brief History of the Caribbean, from the Arawak and Carib to the Present* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 1999); Paul Radin, *Indians of South America* (New York: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1942); and J.H. Parry, *The Discovery of South America* (New York: Taplinger Publishing Company, 1979).

² Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797* (London: Methuen, 1986), 17.

human flesh, and a relatively constant power struggle with the more sedentary Arawaks was the norm in the region. Much like the centuries-long rivalry between the English and French, however, the ebb and flow of power between them, along with a great deal of intermingling, created a hybridized culture in some of the margins. This included Guiana. The cultural hybridization, despite the political rivalry, had reached such a level that, by Columbus' arrival in 1492, the Carib/Arawak culture complex was basically homogenous in Guiana.³ Further illustrating this homogeneity, population estimates of the entire Caribbean region suggest no more than 750,000 inhabitants combined.⁴ With ethnically mixed tribes made up of so few people scattered over such a vast area, a very loosely unified culture can be attributed to the entire area of the Caribbean, despite any animosities existing between its two main components.

Though, for centuries, these tribes did indeed engage in heated warfare, the Arawak and Carib descendants shared more than they fought over. Both groups relied on intensive cultivation of the cassava as their staple food, both used hammocks as their preferred bedding, both shared pottery and basketry techniques and aesthetics, both possessed a high-ranking medicine man who ritually drank the juice of the tobacco plant, and both shared an understanding of the universe that included many gods and an elaborate code of justice and revenge.⁵ The revenge culture, in particular, was common among all the Guianese tribes, but also unique when compared with other groups in the nearby area. For the South American Carib and, through cultural exchange, their Arawak

³ Paul Radin, *Indians of South America* (New York: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1942), 11-13.

⁴ Franklin W. Knight, *The Caribbean: the Genesis of a Fragmented Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990): 6-7.

⁵ Radin, 52.

adversaries, the culture of revenge killing was elaborate and well-organized. For those who had experienced wrongs, there were four options: direct violence, poisoning of the guilty party, sorcery, or becoming a *kanaima*, a type of ninja-like secret assassin.⁶ The concept of the *kanaima* could be witnessed throughout the Arawak and Carib groups of the area, and is one of the foundations of the unique pan-Guianese basic culture.

In short, separation from the other Antillean islands made the tribes of the Guianas different—they were clearly less interested in cannibalism, for example. Additionally, unlike their neighbors to the south, also isolated by natural barriers, they did not use the blowgun.⁷ Cannibalism seems to have been limited to ritual and associated with the capture of enemies in Guiana, and evidence even suggests that the practice was not originally a Carib or Arawak norm, but was instead introduced *after* European contact by the Tupi-Guarani,⁸ a group of tribes whose contact with the Arawak/Carib cultures increased after trade began. By factoring in the unique geographical features of Guiana and its resulting isolation from the islands by water and from Venezuela and Brazil by mountains and thick jungle, a “Guianese” culture of environmentally influenced, locally specialized Arawak/Carib descendents emerged.

It would be oversimplification to suggest the Arawak/Carib Indian complex in Guiana was without variation, but variations in the Guianese Arawak/Carib complex appeared less striking than tribal dissimilarities. There was, as could be expected from such a vast area, a large number of different tribes under the Arawak/Carib umbrella. Across the Guiana Shield region, there were seven recognized tribes in addition to the

⁶ Radin, 68.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 73.

Carib and Arawak: the Akawaio, Arekuna, Macushi, Patamona, Wai Wai, Wapishiana and Warrow.⁹ These tribes continue to exist today, and share much of the same pan-Guianese characteristics mentioned earlier. Though each tribe had a distinct language they still maintain, all the tribal dialects closely resemble the Arawak and Carib language families and share many “crossover” words. Other cultural similarities across the Guianas follow the same pattern as the linguistic relationships, again stressing the homogeneity of the region when compared with other large pre-colonial territories. Most of this cultural resemblance relates to the unique geography of the region, which isolated the Guianese tribes from outside influences and held them together until their cultures began to hybridize.

The Guianese food economy, for example, possesses commonality across the three modern-day polities. Cassava was cultivated and extensively utilized by all the Guianese tribes as a staple starch.¹⁰ Pre-contact Arawak/Carib inhabitants placed importance on fishing and shellfish collection, and received the great majority of their terrestrial protein from agouti and iguana.¹¹ Because Guianese indigenous groups maintained a coastal bearing, and their prey required little strength or physical prowess to bring down, a fishing-intensive, hunting ritual-free society developed. This culture transferred easily to ecologically similar Caribbean islands. Baking culture also reflected homogeneity; a lack of *metates*, or grinding stones, at Guianese pre-contact sites suggests that the early inhabitants relied on softer varieties of maize than their other American

⁹ United Nations Development Program, “Indigenous Peoples,” DevNet UNDP Development Site, <http://www.sdn.org.gy/gallery/mm/indigenous.html> (accessed November 8, 2009).

¹⁰ Radin, 50.

¹¹ J. H. Parry and Philip Sherlock, *A Short History of the West Indies*, 3rd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1971), 2.

counterparts, and were more apt to turn to cassava for bread flour.¹² Basketry and pottery also possessed uniformity in style and preparation.¹³ The basketry and pottery, along with other material culture, is generally shared across the Caribbean, into the Guianas, Venezuela, and portions of South America.

Culinary, material, and linguistic culture, then, was indicative of a single, unified culture at the point of contact and, indeed, over a century later, until Europeans achieved a quantifiable foothold in the area. So indistinguishable were the various tribes from one another, at least to European eyes, that the entirety of the Guianese population was delineated only by their stance toward Europeans—hostile tribes were grouped together as “Caribs,” while friendly tribes were marked as “Arawaks.”¹⁴ On the face of it, this observation generally held true, as the Europeans had extreme difficulty delineating the tribes based on their appearance, religion, language, or behavior. Nonetheless, the tribes had not yet completely congealed into one pan-Guianese entity by the early seventeenth century, so the distillation into two groups was still a classic European oversimplification and an indicator of European misunderstanding of the region, and a lack of interest in increasing that understanding. The tribes, culturally analogous and territorially amorphous, spilling across rivers and frequently cohabiting regions, constituted the original “Guiana,” a land without predetermined political boundaries. Perhaps the words of Raymond T. Smith in his book, *British Guiana*, serve best here, “The present-day borders of British Guiana are of relatively recent creation and represent the limits of British power and influence in the area rather than the limits of any original natural or

¹² Parry and Sherlock, 2.

¹³ Ibid., 3-4.

¹⁴ Smith, *British Guiana*, 12.

social units.”¹⁵ Indeed, before the current divisions, from the seventeenth century onward, “Guiana” was used to refer to all areas between the Orinoco, the Rio Negro, and the Amazon, and was seen so much as a unified, isolated entity that it was often referred to as the “Island of Guiana.”¹⁶ Whatever the Europeans found was in no way pre-demarcated for their convenience.

Thus, the culture juxtaposed against the colonizers on the northern coast of South America, then, was generally uniform from the Antilles south into the Guianas. The explorers who trickled in over the first century of contact interpreted the sparse population and seemingly uniform culture as a blank slate upon which to create colonies. The first century, however, was only a century of exploration; real attempts at settlement began at the very end of the sixteenth century, a full hundred years after Columbus first spotted the coast in 1498.

The first explorer to see real colonial potential in the region was Sir Walter Raleigh, who made voyages to the region beginning in 1594-1595. Raleigh’s visit to the Wild Coast possessed a dual purpose. The most publicized rationale behind his voyage was his search for El Dorado, the fabled city of gold, which he claimed to find in Guiana, in the capital city he called Manoa. His praise for the amount of gold that could be found in Guiana was at the center of both of his published works on the country, *The Discoverie of the Large, Rich, and Bewtiful Empyre of Guiana*, published first in 1596, and *The Discovery of Guiana, and the Journal of the Second Voyage Thereto*, published in

¹⁵ Smith, *British Guiana*, 11.

¹⁶ Robert Harcourt, *A Relation of a Voyage to Guiana* (1613; repr., London Hakluyt Society Press, 1928), 4.

1606.¹⁷ In both, Raleigh discusses at length the gold-yielding potential of the country, claiming more gold abundance here than even in Peru.¹⁸ To drive the point home, the captain enumerates those tribes of the region possessing gold plate, and the list is impressive: the “Indians of Trinidad,” the “cannibals of Dominica,” those of Paria, the “Tucaris, Chochi, Apotomios, Cumanagotos,” in the northern region, and the “Guanipa, Assawai, Coaca, Aiai, and the rest” in Guiana.¹⁹ Listed separately based more on their location than on any cultural uniqueness Raleigh could discern, these groups all possessed one key component in common; according to Raleigh’s estimation, nearly every tribe in the Guianas possessed gold, and most in the nearby area were willing to trade the Guianese treasure.

The most striking example of Raleigh’s prospector-esque boosterism is his extensive description (generally based on hearsay) of Manoa, which he claimed to be the famous “City of Gold” sought by nearly every European explorer of the century. In Raleigh’s assessment, Manoa and the surrounding kingdom of Guiana were in some way related to a branch of the Inca royal family, pushed out of Peru by Pizarro but maintaining a large portion of the kingdom’s wealth.²⁰ In his journal, Raleigh assures the reader that he himself had seen the riches of Guiana and Manoa, and declares that, throughout the Guiana Shield, there could be found “more rich and beautiful cities, more temples adorned with golden images, more sepulchers filled with treasure, than either

¹⁷ Sir Walter Raleigh, *The Discoverie of the Large, Rich, and Bewtiful Empyre of Guiana* (1596; repr., Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1968) and *The Discovery of Guiana, and the Journal of the Second Voyage Thereto* (1606; repr., London: Cassell, 1887).

¹⁸ Raleigh, *The Discoverie of the Large, Rich, and Bewtiful Empyre of Guiana*, 10-11.

¹⁹ Raleigh, *The Discovery of Guiana, and the Journal of the Second Voyage Thereto*, 40-41.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 131-141.

Cortez found in Mexico or Pizarro in Peru.”²¹ Whatever his motivation, Raleigh’s insistence of Guiana’s wealth was clear.

Walter Raleigh’s guarantee of Guiana’s riches can now be interpreted in one of three ways. First, Raleigh may have, in fact, been telling the truth, and the riches of Guiana have since been lost to the jungles and the progress of time. If this is so, we must assume an economic goal for the later occupation, exploration, and colonization of the area. However, the possibility that Manoa was a pure fabrication must also be considered. If this was a “fish story,” Raleigh may have simply been engaging in reputation-padding one-upmanship, hoping to be favorably compared to Cortez and Pizarro. A less obvious, more politically astute goal may lie behind the myth of Manoa, though, and from a logical standpoint, one that may fall more in line with Raleigh’s personal ambitions and dreams. It was no secret that he envisioned an English empire stretching from the Amazon through the Orinoco and into the southern Antilles, acting as a barrier against Spanish hegemony in the Americas and an obstacle to the free flow of Spanish trade.²² The publication of his work extolling the virtues of Guiana may have been a step toward fulfilling this personal goal; rather than enticing the Crown with military strategy, he may have thought it more effective to tempt with riches, just as he had done with accounts of the richness of Virginia. His final warning to the monarch, that “whatsoever prince shall possess it, shall be greatest, and if the king of Spain enjoy it, he will become unresistable [*sic*].”²³ This push for English involvement in the

²¹ Raleigh, *The Discovery of Guiana, and the Journal of the Second Voyage Thereto*, 139.

²² Smith, *British Guiana*, 13.

²³ Raleigh, *The Discoverie of the Large, Rich, and Bewtiful Empyre of Guiana*, 100-101.

interstice between Spain and its American empire placed Raleigh at the vanguard of English imperialism, seen along with Humphrey Gilbert and John Dee (the first man to use the term “British Empire,” in the 1630s), as the “prime movers” of imperialist thinking.²⁴ Whether or not Manoa was his fabrication, Raleigh succeeded in connecting himself with an imperial vision for England that centered upon Guiana.

Guiana’s other early explorers, the Dutch, worked from a different set of priorities during the century of Guianese exploration.²⁵ In the eighty years between 1568, when the Netherlands became a loose affiliation of Walloon and Flemish provinces, and 1648, when the Treaty of Münster was signed with the Spanish, the Dutch practiced the delicate art of cobbling together different ethnicities and religious faiths into a viable economic entity.²⁶ When beginning an empire, the Dutch concerned themselves more with trade and establishing viable networks and outposts, rather than claiming tracts of land to act as a buffer against neighboring states. Because their homeland was only recently integrated, they were not concerned with a lack of territorial cohesion abroad.

This change in focus is clearly illustrated by the difference between Sir Walter Raleigh’s comments in his diary and those of his contemporary, Adriaen Cabeliau, the clerk for the December 1597 Dutch exploration mission of Captain Jacob Cornelisz.²⁷ Cabeliau relates the voyage, which seems to be a survey of Indian groups and areas of potential trade partnerships. Though the Dutch party visited places described by Raleigh as having gold deposits, they found none, and further suggested that,

²⁴ Hulme, 90.

²⁵ French exploration of the area was sparse at best during this time, and will be discussed later.

²⁶ Charles Ralph Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire, 1600-1800* (New York: Knopf, 1965), 2.

²⁷ Joyce Lorimer, “Introduction,” in *Sir Walter Raleigh’s Discoverie of Guiana* (Aldershot, UK: Hakluyt Society Press, 2006), xc.

There is up that river [the Orinoco] in the kingdom of Guiana certainly much gold, as we were told by the Indians from there as well as by our own Indians here present, and the Spaniards themselves say so; but for people busied with trade it is not feasible to expect any good therefrom unless to that end considerable expeditions were equipped to attack the Spaniards.²⁸

After a bitter war with the Spanish, the Dutch were in no position or mood to challenge Spanish military authority in the region, but instead chose to “busy themselves with trade” and seek alliances and friendships with as many of the tribes as possible in the area, hoping to gain their trust and business, rather than subduing the region by force. This Dutch approach would color the way Guiana, particularly Suriname, would be administered in the years to come.

²⁸ Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean*, 487.

CHAPTER THREE

Guiana Asunder

One of the most difficult aspects of studying pre-1815 Guianese history is confirming which European power truly controlled portions of the Guianas and when. From its original exploration by Raleigh (following its discovery by Columbus and later explorations by Vespucci and Balboa), Guiana was colonized in staggered, truncated attempts; the coast and the interior of the country were hellish for European colonists, who often succumbed to the torrid climate, the myriad of dangerous fauna, or the tropical diseases flourishing there. As a result, Guiana retained much of its homogeneity over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth century despite efforts at colonization—no one was successful enough to superimpose a European culture upon any one area of the country.

For the British during this period, the entire Caribbean provided a more attractive staging location for privateering than for long-term colonization. Particularly after the outbreak of war with the Spanish in 1585, English privateers were numerous, bringing in between £100,000 and £200,000 per year from raids on treasure ships and Spanish colonies.¹ Dutch privateers also challenged the Spanish ships, especially after 1606. In 1604, the Spanish began dealing harshly with Dutch trading ships not involved in direct trade with the Iberian colonies, and this harsh treatment was met with increased Dutch

¹ John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1985), 147.

privateering, rather than trading.² The penalties culminated in the hanging of some Dutch trading ship crewmen by Venezuelan governor Sancho de Alquiza in 1611.³ Privateers, and even some small-scale Dutch trading posts established in 1613, were met with even more force (the trading posts on the Essequibo and Corantijn Rivers were completely destroyed),⁴ thanks to a *cédula* passed through the Spanish Council of the Indies under sponsorship of King Philip III. Though the Spanish and Dutch were officially at war in Europe for most of this period, the isolation of the Guianas had, up to the point of increased violence and retribution, buffered it from the war and allowed trade to continue. After the enlargement of military presence and increase in retributive actions, trade almost entirely ceased between the two countries, creating a deep chasm between the Spanish and Dutch territories of the area and permanently severing the connections between Iberian colonies in South America and those of the Dutch.

As the Dutch distanced themselves from the Spanish, rather than acting as middle men they were forced to establish their own trading posts and forts, spurring the colonization of the Guianas, which were the least Iberian-controlled areas of the continent. Following the destruction of their trading posts in 1613, the Dutch returned in 1615, founding a new settlement at present-day Cayenne (later abandoned in favor of Suriname), one on the Wiapoco River, and one on the Amazon.⁵ By 1621, a charter was granted by the Dutch States-General, but even a few years prior to the official chartering a fort and trading post had been built at Kijkoveral, under the supervision of Aert

² Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean*, 62-63.

³ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁵ *Ibid.*

Groenewegen, at the confluence of the Essequibo, Cuyuni, and Mazaruni Rivers.⁶ Dutch hegemony would continue to be established along the Wild Coast.

The British also were participating in small-scale attempts at colonization, primarily to provide a base from which to exercise privateering expeditions against the Spanish in the Caribbean. By 1604, a British settlement had been built under the sponsorship of Charles Leigh on the Wiapoco River.⁷ The Dutch, however, dominated the territory of the Guianas throughout the seventeenth century; either they were the colonizers or the managers of trade. One British colonist remarked, “The Dutch gave what they wanted and took what they liked.”⁸ Either way, the situation in the Guianas was clear—the Spanish controlled Venezuela, the Portuguese controlled Brazil, but the isolation of the Guianas would allow non-Iberian groups to establish a presence there, under the economic sponsorship of the powerful Dutch.

The differences between the Spanish model and the Dutch model for Caribbean and South American administration were plain; while the Spanish were an invested, land-owning and territorially expansionist group, the Dutch were trading-intensive, colonizing only enough to secure trade outposts across the region. Unlike the Spanish, the Dutch entrepreneurs who participated in the colonization attempts of the seventeenth century were as interested in trade with the indigenous as they were in long-term settlement or commodities production.⁹ This close relationship with the indigenous groups led the Dutch to use native opposition to Spanish incursion to their advantage, building a wall of

⁶ Smith, *British Guiana*, 13.

⁷ Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean*, 76.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Peter Newman, *British Guiana: Problems of Cohesion in an Immigrant Society* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 17.

allied tribes between their Guianese settlements and the Iberian lands of Venezuela and Brazil.¹⁰ This effectively allowed first the Dutch, and later the English and French, more free rein to colonize than they would have had otherwise, and gave the Dutch a reputation as a culturally tolerant colonizing force, interested more in trade alliances than in subjugation of the locals.

The early seventeenth century character of the Caribbean and South America was not constructed in a multinational way, but more a dichotomous one—a land of Iberians and northern Europeans (British, French, Dutch). But by the middle of this century, the Iberians were so far removed from Anglo-Franco-Dutch areas that the Guianas began to be seen as British, French, or Dutch, rather than as non-Iberian. Thus, Dutch accounts of the founding of Guianese territories differ from British and French ones. For the Dutch, the 1621 charter was generally noted as the official beginning of Dutch hegemony. For the British, though, the founding of Suriname was set at 1650, with the founding of the first colony by former Barbadian governor Francis Willoughby, Lord Parham.¹¹ The differing views on which country controlled which area were as confusing then as they are to present historians. This confusion and competition over what belonged to which country is telling, however; the Guianas were still homogenous as late as 1650, insofar as they were not fully controlled by a single colonizer, but were more a collection of tiny, fragile settlements in a sea of inhospitable jungle. Though the Dutch were recognized by the Spanish as the rightful owners of the Guianas in the 1648 Treaty of Münster,¹² the

¹⁰ Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean*, 76.

¹¹ Simon Cohen, trans., *Historical Essay on the Colony of Surinam* (1788; repr., New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1974), 28-29.

¹² Reynold A. Burrowes, *The Wild Coast: An Account of Politics in Guyana* (Cambridge: Schenkman Press, 1984), 3.

cultural influence on the area was so weak that, in an ironic twist, the Dutch founded what was to become British Guiana, while Willoughby and his English colonists founded, in 1650, what was to become Dutch Guiana.

In present-day British Guiana, the Dutch had begun spreading their territory. Though still clearly more focused on maritime trade and its support than territorial consolidation, unlike their British and French counterparts, the Dutch were the first to really succeed at establishing permanent settlements. Several heavily-fortified, sparsely populated trading posts were much easier to secure and maintain than the sprawling farming communities attempted by the other northern Europeans, so they achieved the first real success. Three significant outposts, on the Essequibo (reestablished in 1621 after its destruction in 1613), Berbice, and Pomeroon Rivers, anchored a trading network in which the Dutch traded with the indigenous tribes for cotton, dyes, and exotic woods.¹³ This network, which spread south to the Rupununi River and west to the Orinoco, would be the primary focus of the Dutch until the mid-eighteenth century, rather than plantation farming.

Besides the settlement along the Essequibo founded in 1621, the first Dutch permanent settlement, and one of the anchoring communities of what would become British Guiana, was Berbice. Founded in 1627, the administration of Berbice was, like other Dutch trading outposts, very localized and disconnected from other colonies; in fact, Berbice would be administered separately from Essequibo (and its later sister colony, Demerara) for two hundred years.¹⁴ The colony first came under the direction of Abraham van Pere of Vlissingen; he and his descendents, all merchants, ran the colony as

¹³ Smith, *British Guiana*, 15.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

“*patroons*,” semi-feudal leaders who appointed the local, ground-level leader, or *commandeur*.¹⁵ Berbice was, like Essequibo, a trade stronghold ruled by a merchant elite.

Thus, the original Dutch Guianese colonies existed as corporate ventures above all else. Local trade and commerce decisions were made by these *patroons* and *commandeurs*, and all imports and exports between the United Provinces and their American colonies were coordinated through a central corporation, the Dutch West India Company (WIC). The WIC, like the older Dutch East India Company (VOC), were founded to maintain trade through commercial and even military activities, as both were granted their own armed forces to defend forts and strongholds.¹⁶ It is important to recognize that, though the West India Company did maintain an army and conduct military operations, particularly against Spain, the central Dutch focus was on commercial expansion above all else. Some historians, including Cornelis Goslinga, posit that the WIC was “designed primarily as an instrument of war against Spain.”¹⁷ Though Goslinga’s work is excellent and crucial to this study, issue must be taken with this supposition. Contemporary chroniclers like Lieuwe van Aitzema did claim that the WIC was created “to inflict losses on Spain,”¹⁸ but Goslinga misinterprets this as a focus on war. Direct competition with the Spanish was certainly foremost on the Dutch agenda; however, territorial expansion through military confrontation was clearly not, as the Dutch never committed a notable number of ground troops to either the Caribbean or

¹⁵ Smith, *British Guiana*, 18.

¹⁶ Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean*, 90.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

to the Guianas. The “infliction of losses on Spain” was meant in the commercial sense, and follows the pattern of Dutch concentration on maritime and inter-indigenous trade begun in the sixteenth century.

The pattern of isolated, scattered settlements based on the securing of trade networks and not the expansion of territory continued to be the *raison d’etre* of the Dutch administrators throughout the seventeenth and into the eighteenth century, until a new *commandeur* was appointed in 1742. In this year, Laurens Storm van ‘s Gravesande took over the region. He held the position for three decades, coordinating the development and expansion of the Dutch colonies from his Netherlands home in Soestdijk.¹⁹ Gravesande’s tenure brought significant change to the colonies, though his policy was in many ways an extension of his predecessor, Gelskerke’s. Gelskerke had begun pressing for change from a trading focus to one of cultivation, especially of sugar. The area east of the existing Essequibo colony, known as Demerara, was relatively isolated and possessed few organized indigenous tribes, thus containing only two trading outposts during Gelskerke’s term of office.²⁰ Demerara, though, showed great potential as a sugar-cultivating area, so the *commandeur* began shifting focus toward the development of the region, signifying his intentions by transferring the administrative center of the colony from Fort Kijkoveral to Flag Island, on the mouth of the Essequibo, further east and closer to Demerara.²¹ These operations were carried out by Gravesande, acting as the Secretary of the Company under Gelskerke. Upon Gelskerke’s death, Gravesande continued the policy of Demerara expansion and the move to sugar cultivation.

¹⁹ Smith, *British Guiana*, 16.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 15-16.

²¹ *Ibid.*

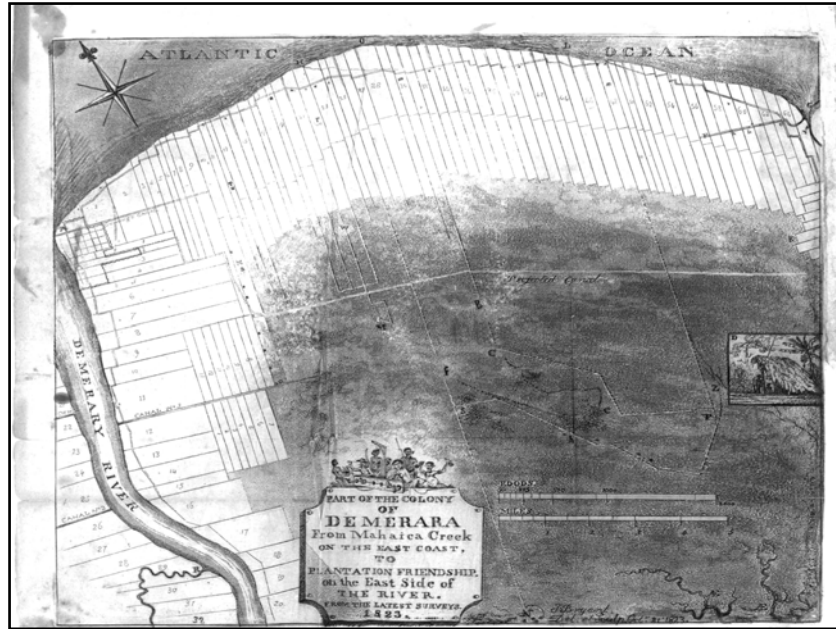


Figure 3.1. Map of Demerara Colony, to the right of the Demerara (Demarary) River (Essequibo Colony is located along the Essequibo River, west of the Demarara)²²

In 1746, Gravesande, in an attempt to spur the growth of the Demerara region, declared it open to settlement. Rather than the practice of the Spanish, or the English and French, which will be discussed later, Gravesande deferred to his Dutch cultural heritage and declared the region open to settlement not just from his own countrymen, but to any interested parties, including Englishmen.²³ The plan worked—in four years Demerara needed its own *commandeur* (Gravesande appointed his son to the position), and by 1760 the colony boasted ninety-three plantations, thirty-four of which were English.²⁴ With the switch to sugar cultivation, Dutch settlement had gradually moved down the river banks to the coast, where the crop was more easily grown. Because of the shift,

²² Image available from Wikimedia Commons, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Demerara_1823.png.

²³ Smith, *British Guiana*, 15-16.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Demerara outgrew Essequibo and became the jewel in the Dutch Guianese crown, and Gravesande's legacy continued through a College of *Kiezers* (Electors), a group created by him in 1743 to nominate representatives of the new private plantation owners in Demerara to sit on the Guianese-wide Council of Policy and Justice.²⁵ His leadership in the fledgling colony's growth period stabilized the entire Dutch portion of Guiana.

Other than the founding of three economically and militarily viable colonies in Guiana, the Dutch also provided the foundations of their eventual unification. A period of war and eventual decline of Dutch influence in Essequibo, Berbice, and Demerara followed at the end of the eighteenth century, and the colonies actually changed hands between the Dutch and British several times in the last decades (which will be discussed at greater length in the portion dealing with original British colonization efforts). The Council of Policy and Justice made several reforms to the colonies' constitutions in the 1760s and 1770s to increase the planters' voice in the administration of the region.²⁶ By 1788, the recommendations of the committee were consolidated into the Plan of Redress. Under it, the individual councils were merged into a unified Court of Justice, consisting of a Directeur-Generaal, the Commandeur of Essequibo, the Fiscal (WIC chief economic officer) of Essequibo, the Fiscal of Demerara, and two at-large colonists each from Essequibo and Demerara.²⁷ The consolidation of the administration led to an official recognition of unification in 1792, with the colony's name changed to the United Colony of Demerary and Esseequebo [*sic*]. Despite an eventual handing-over of the united colony to the British, two aspects of Dutch colonization were solidified and would carry over

²⁵ Smith, *British Guiana*, 21-23.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

into the following century in a new location. First, the ruling council of Dutch colonies remained effectively under the control of the West India Company and not directly under the crown; the Council of Justice, despite a steady increase in private plantation representatives, retained a majority of servants.²⁸ Second, commercial expansion continued to outweigh nationalism or ethnocentric protectionism. Gravesande's opening of Demerara did allow much more British influence into the colony and, in essence, led to the transition of the entire Guiana colony from Dutch to British control because of these British planters' increased influences. In an ironic way, this very transition proves that the Dutch focus was always on financial gain and commercial activity—a growing, economically stable colony was more important to the Dutch West India Company and its leaders than a nationally homogenous one. The multiethnicity of modern Suriname, which will be considered in a later chapter, is the direct outgrowth of this uniquely Dutch attitude toward colonization.

For the French, the colonization process was quite different. French colonists and explorers had the Dutch to thank for their success in the Guianas. The stronger Spanish Empire did not recognize the legitimacy of French claims in the Caribbean or in South America and rejected even the right of the French to explore the area.²⁹ Spain's antagonistic relationship with the Dutch, who posed more of a threat early on, however, preoccupied the Spanish king and the governor of Venezuela and Trinidad, allowing Dutch Guiana, at this time the closest northern European colony to the Venezuelan border, to act as a buffer, permitting French trade and exploration to continue

²⁸ Smith, *British Guiana*, 21-23.

²⁹ D. A. G. Waddell, *The West Indies and the Guianas* (Edgewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967), 46.

uninhibited.³⁰ The French were gaining experience in North America as landowners, and had become more interested in developing permanent settlements than simple trading stations. As a result, the first attempts at permanent settlement in the Guianas were early—1604—along the Sinnamary River. French settlers attempted to move in permanently before they fully understood the land and environment around them, however, and the first French settlements were dismal failures. The 1604 settlement along the Sinnamary collapsed within a summer, and initial attempts at settlement near modern-day Cayenne, beginning in 1613, were met with severe setbacks.³¹ French priorities—land acquisition and Catholic conversion—were not easily reconciled with the difficulties of initial settlement-building on the Wild Coast.

Even as late as 1635, the king of France granted permission to the whole of Guiana to a joint-stock company of Norman merchants. When these merchants made a settlement near the modern city of Cayenne, failure ensued. Eight years later, a reinforcement contingent led by Poncet de Brétigny found only a few of the colonists left alive and living among the aborigines. Of the original settlers, the reinforcement contingent led by de Brétigny, and a subsequent reinforcement later in the year, only two remained alive long enough to reach the Dutch settlement on the Pomeroon River in 1645, begging for refuge.³² Though some trading outposts that could be considered

³⁰ Waddell, 39.

³¹ Robert Aldrich, *Greater France: A History of French Overseas Expansion* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 14.

³² Jean-Baptiste, *Les Missions Catholiques Françaises au XIX Siècle*, quoted in "Guyane," *New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia*, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07062a.htm> (accessed November 27, 2009).

permanent settlements were founded as early as 1624,³³ French “possession” of the land now known as French Guiana is not recognized as having taken place until 1637.³⁴ Cayenne itself, the first permanent settlement of comparable size to the Dutch colonies, experienced instability until 1643.³⁵ Dutch permanence in the Guianas predated the French by at least two decades, but this is an unfair comparison, remembering that the two empires employed different means to achieve different ends.

Whatever their motivation, the seventeenth century was an abysmal one for French settlers. After achieving some degree of stability in the face of unfriendly indigenous groups, torrid summers, and widespread disease, war broke out in the New World. With French troops primarily concentrated in North America and in the more favorable islands of Martinique and Saint-Domingue, which the French had held since the 1620s, the Dutch captured Cayenne in 1664.³⁶ The Treaty of Breda, which settled wars among the Dutch, English, French, and Danes in both the New World and Europe, temporarily resolved the conflicts among the non-Iberian colonial powers. The colonies of Essequibo and Berbice, briefly occupied by the British toward the end of the war, were returned to the Dutch in exchange for British occupation of New Netherland (now New York) in North America, and the colony of Cayenne was returned to the French.

The French interest in Cayenne and surrounding areas, later termed Guyane, was hardly strong, however. A census taken about twenty years after the Treaty of Breda

³³ Thayer Watkins, “Political and Economic History of French Guiana,” San Jose State University Faculty Research, <http://www.sjsu.edu/faculty/watkins/fguiana.htm> (accessed November 30, 2009).

³⁴ Aldrich, 14.

³⁵ Watkins, “Political and Economic History of French Guiana”.

³⁶ Ibid.

indicated only about 600 French settlers in the Cayenne region.³⁷ Throughout the eighteenth century, the situation did not improve. In 1765, a renewed interest in the colony following French losses in North America from the 1763 Treaty of Paris resulted in an enormous colonization effort. Over 12,000 settlers were sent from France to Guyane; within four years, over 8,000 had died from typhoid or yellow fever.³⁸ The business of empire-building was far easier for the French in the Caribbean than in the inhospitable confines of Guyane. Those few colonists with the fortitude to remain in Guyane did well for themselves financially through the cultivation of sugar. France was less dependent on foreign trade than either the Dutch or the British, so sugar production was not immediately tied to the markets of Paris.³⁹ Subsequently, those few French planters who remained could work in relative independence, selling directly to the Dutch or other Europeans and buying raw materials from the Americans.⁴⁰ By the end of the eighteenth century, the prospects for success in Guyane could have been much higher, and the colonists could have even taken the example of the Americans and pushed for complete independence from the French government. Unfortunately for them, the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789 put them very low on the priority list for the Paris government, and no such agitation was made. The colony of Guyane, first due to failure and then to indifference, became the forgotten possession of the French Empire. After 150 years of shortfalls in the region, the French imperial presence faded from Guiana. The nineteenth century would bring a new French approach based on this

³⁷ Aldrich, 14.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Waddell, 65.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

frustration and disappointment, but for now the Guianas were essentially a two-nation problem.

British interest in the Guianas reached back into the sixteenth century, from Sir Walter Raleigh's accounts of the empire of Manoa. His accounts, widely published in England, stimulated interest among adventurers, explorers, and settlers eager to make a name for themselves or hide from the name they had already inherited. As a result, some English settlers accompanied the first Dutch colonizers to Essequibo, while others, including the Pilgrims, gave Guiana serious consideration as a place to forge a new life.⁴¹ Scattered British colonies in modern-day Suriname were also attempted, including a settlement on the west bank of the Surinam River of sixty individuals under the leadership of Captain J. Marshall.⁴² Like the French, however, the British initially relied on the Dutch both to finance operations and to act as a buffer against the Spanish. Consequently, solely British attempts to colonize the Guianas were at first as unsuccessful as those of the French. Religious pressures at home, beginning with the Short Parliament of 1640 and culminating in the establishment of the Commonwealth in 1649, brought a new kind of group to the Guianas—those interested in the exporting of a culture, rather than those with commercial or territorial interests.

Individuals wishing to export their idea of the optimum English culture (be it Catholic or Protestant, Royalist or Parliamentarian) searched all over the New World for places to plant their values. The types of places British colonizers sought out differed from those of other imperial powers. As a general rule, the British looked for sparsely

⁴¹ Newman, 17.

⁴² Phillippe Fermin, *An Historical and Political View of the Present and Ancient State of the Colony of Surinam in South America* (London: W. Nicoll, 1781), 11.

populated, underdeveloped regions in which to plant colonies, as opposed to the Spanish or Dutch, who hunted for areas with an established population they could either control or trade with, respectively.⁴³ The difference in selection of settlement sites was no accident and, instead, proves motivation. While trade opportunities motivated the Dutch, the desire to transplant their culture to a new place drove many British settlers. With options in the Caribbean dwindling due to war, Central American control by the Spanish nearly assured, and wars breaking out in North America, the Guiana region, with all of its challenges, became increasingly appealing to these individuals.

It was in 1650, during the brief absence of the French following their colonial failures of 1645 that the first British charter in the Guianas would be granted. Francis Lord Willoughby, the Baron of Parham, was a staunch Royalist during the English Civil War. He was granted, for his support of the monarchy, the governorship of Barbados and a charter to settle Suriname by Charles II, the monarch in exile (Willoughby, too, was in exile, ironically living in the Netherlands at the time).⁴⁴ This charter, in direct defiance of the Treaty of Münster (1648), consisted of a land grant to Lord Willoughby of Parham of the area surrounding modern-day Paramaribo, effectively beginning England's bid for the Guianas in earnest. In that year, Willoughby sent three ships of colonists to Surinam after a scout ship secured a treaty with the indigenous groups there.⁴⁵ The colony experienced some success, including the addition of the last 350 French settlers from Cayenne under the command of Braglione and Du Plessis, who sought refuge in the

⁴³ Matthew Lange, James Mahoney, and Matthias vom Hau, "Colonialism and Development: A Comparative Analysis of Spanish and British Colonies," *American Journal of Sociology* 111, no. 5 (March 2006): 1412.

⁴⁴ Michael A. LaCombe, "Francis, Fifth Baron Willoughby of Parham," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (London: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁴⁵ Fermin, 12.

English colony in 1654.⁴⁶ Later that year, Willoughby transferred his rights to the son of the Lord Chancellor, Earl of Clarendon.⁴⁷ If the Dutch were to colonize the portion of Guiana closest to Venezuela, and the French the area nearest Brazil, then the British had every intention of inhabiting the interstice. By 1665, the Suriname colony supported 4,000 inhabitants and nearly fifty sugar plantations along the river, reaching almost thirty miles southward from the river delta.⁴⁸

The support of Dutch claims to the area, despite British settlement, was strong. The Treaty of Münster, signed in 1648, was part of the larger Peace of Westphalia signed by European powers including the British, Dutch, and Spanish. It effectively granted control of all of Guiana to the Dutch, administered through the Dutch West India Company. Incensed at the violation of this treaty by the British, a naval force from the Dutch province of Zeeland attacked and conquered the Paramaribo colony in 1667, at the close of the Third Anglo-Dutch War.⁴⁹ The Treaty of Breda in 1667, which ended the war, upheld the older Treaty of Münster and granted the Duke of York rights to New Netherland in exchange for their formal recognition of Dutch hegemony in the Guianas, including the burgeoning British colony along the Surinam River. These two treaties should have secured the entirety of the Guianas, other than the tiny settlement of Cayenne, and placed them completely within the hands of the Courts of Justice administered by the Dutch West India Company.

⁴⁶ Fermin, 12-13.

⁴⁷ Stedman, v.

⁴⁸ Fermin, 13.

⁴⁹ Stedman, v.

Two factors kept this idea from surviving beyond the paper on which it was written. First, the British, unlike the French, had already begun to emerge from beneath Dutch commercial control. In 1651, the Commonwealth under Oliver Cromwell issued the Navigation Ordinance, the first in a series of laws later known as the Navigation Acts. They prevented British colonies from contracting Dutch shippers and traders to move goods and services between the colony and the mainland. Though these acts provided a catalyst for the aforementioned Anglo-Dutch Wars, they forced British colonists to keep their money in-house, giving them more freedom to operate outside the Dutch sphere of influence.⁵⁰ Second, and perhaps more important, was the opening of Demerara to foreign settlement by Commandeur Gravesande in 1738.⁵¹ As previously suggested, this tolerance of British colonists, and the eventual growth of their influence over the administration of Dutch colonies, was the real beginning of British presence in the Guianas.

The opening of Demerara would hardly have been important had another development not been simultaneously occurring to the north. Throughout the seventeenth century, minor nobility and idealists alike were attempting to create their own version of England in the New World, either supported by or in spite of the religious differences and eventual civil war in Britain. This transplanting of British society required money, so the British landholders in the Caribbean concentrated their efforts on sugar production, a significant source of quick wealth. Barbados served as the early leader in sugar production; and it was the initial destination of these immigrants due to the lack of unfriendly Carib tribes on the island. By the mid-1640s, it contained nearly half the

⁵⁰ McCusker and Menard, 161-163.

⁵¹ Burrowes, 3.

white population of the English and French Caribbean combined, with more royalists on their way.⁵² High prices for sugar in the 1650s spurred intensive cultivation in Barbados. By the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, its soil had degraded so significantly that its sugar output declined by half.⁵³ By the 1720s and 1730s, the sugar industry collapse had left many British landowners and aristocratic investors looking for new places to set up shop, and Gravesande's opening of Demerara in 1738 could not have been timed better.

The British sugar planters, already far more experienced in the industry than the trade-centric Dutch, took advantage of the Demerara situation, becoming wealthy and increasingly influential in the colony. The use of tidal sugar mills by the British in Demerara, rather than older Dutch windmills, increased sugar output and was part of the reason for the demographic shifts to the coast.⁵⁴ British landowners' wealth also increased more quickly due to Gravesande's policy of ten-year exemption from poll taxes for all new immigrants.⁵⁵ The opportunities were not lost on British refugees from Barbados—by 1760, British colonists outnumbered the Dutch in Demerara.⁵⁶ By 1770, sugar, rum, and molasses accounted for over 80 percent of total export revenue for the British Caribbean, including plantations in Demerara.⁵⁷ Wealth and population were both on the side of the British in Guiana by this point, and the opportunity to flex this

⁵² Ralph Davis, *The Rise of the Atlantic Economies* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973), 252.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 253.

⁵⁴ Davis, 258.

⁵⁵ Newman, 18.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Davis, 260.

muscle presented itself in 1777, when the United Provinces joined Russia, Sweden, and Denmark in the Armed Neutrality Agreement during the American Revolution. As a result, Britain again declared war on the Dutch, and in February 1781 Demerara and Essequibo were seized first by privateers and then by Admiral George Brydges Rodney's fleet.⁵⁸ A French squadron under the Comte de Kersaint, operating in alliance with the Dutch, recaptured the territories the following year. The Comte de Kersaint, wishing to leave his own mark on history, issued a proclamation to build a new capital for Essequibo; by the time the French left and the colony was returned to the Dutch in 1784, the town was built and growing.⁵⁹ In honor of the President of the WIC it was named Stabroek; by 1789 it boasted 88 houses.⁶⁰ Politically speaking, the Dutch and French had maintained their hold on Guiana.

Culturally speaking, though, the British were far from absent. The same wealthy British sugar barons who had gained seats in the Court of Justice were still in Demerara, as the Dutch, again more interested in economic stability and trade than nationalism, had not expelled them. After the loss of New York in the American Revolution (which they had, of course, gained from the Dutch a century earlier in exchange for Guiana), the British were looking to recoup some of their original colonial investments outside the United States, and this included a renewed interest in Guiana. Once again, an opportunity presented itself. Two years after the formal combining of Demerara and Essequibo in 1792, the Dutch became entangled in the French Revolution. The Prince of Orange fled to England, leaving those allied with France to run the country. British

⁵⁸ Smith, *British Guiana*, 19.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

planters in Demerara and Essequibo were incensed at the new government (established in 1795 as the Batavian Republic) and its insistence upon alliance with France.⁶¹ Powerful sugar plantation owners exercised their authority and made use of their connections; in 1796 a British expeditionary force was invited in from Barbados to occupy the colonies.⁶² The Dutch government in the colony surrendered, to the joy of the anti-Batavian planters, with the British military remaining as a presence in the colonies but leaving the Dutch administration and the stipulations of the Plan of Redress intact.⁶³ Though officially the Dutch regained full control of their colonies in the 1802 Treaty of Amiens, it was no longer a cultural reality—by 1803 the terms of the treaty had expired, war resumed, and the British occupied again, this time for good.

Eighteenth century differences in political administration among the three nations set the stage for later cultural divergence. The Dutch, for their part, continued on a course of “open-source colonization,” selling plots to the highest bidder and acting merely as economic facilitators of a hybridized culture in Demerara, Essequibo, and Berbice. The cultivation of Dutch culture in the area was therefore stunted. Though all three colonies, due to a lack of white settlers, had imported a significant number of slaves for agricultural production, it was the Dutch plantation owners who developed a reputation for cruelty and selfishness in regards to their slaves and employees.⁶⁴ Though the Dutch had started out as “friends of the natives,” their reputation for economic indifference and willingness to allow individual landowners to act with impunity made

⁶¹ Smith, *British Guiana*, 24.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Boxer, 151.

their culture, particularly their religion, unpalatable to the local indigenous groups, descendents of the pan-Guianese Carib/Arawak complex Raleigh had found.⁶⁵

Exacerbating the problem, slaves routinely escaped into the surrounding jungles, forming bands of maroons that larger indigenous groups sometimes absorbed. Revolts originating from these jungles became quite common, both in the Demerara-Berbice-Essequibo colonies and in the Dutch holdings around Paramaribo. A good example of the revolts and Dutch methods of countering them can be found in John Gabriel Stedman's 1788 work *Narrative of an Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*. Included in the work is a description of the punishment administered by Dutch slave-owners to runaways:

In 1730 a most shocking and barbarous execution of eleven of the unhappy negro captives was resolved upon, in the expectation that it might terrify their companions, and induce them to submit. One man was hanged alive upon a gibbet, by an iron hook stuck through his ribs; two others were chained to stakes, and burnt to death by a slow fire. Six women were broken alive upon the rack, and two girls were decapitated.⁶⁶

The harsh treatment of runaways had the opposite effect from the intentions. Even in 1788, Stedman recognized that this approach was only worsening the slave rebellion problem.⁶⁷ Revolts were common in the entire century, including 1721 in Comowijne, 1749 along the Juca Creek, and 1757 in Tempaty.⁶⁸ The heavy-handed policy was not working—in the words of a Dutch colonist, “the Whites were cutting their noses to spite their faces by mistreating their valuable field-hands that they forced them to seek refuge

⁶⁵ Boxer, 240.

⁶⁶ Stedman, 32-33.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁶⁸ Cohen, 59.

in the forest.”⁶⁹ The Dutch willingness to live in multiethnic, but not completely mixed, colonies allowed for the eventual complete separation of Dutch and maroon settlements.

British and French policies differed, starting the colonies along divergent cultural paths. The French political administration was less open to foreign participation in the colonizing process, and the resulting smaller population of Guyane meant fewer slaves in general, because there were fewer planters to buy them and less capital to entice slave traders to travel to the area. France’s attitude toward Guyane, as an inhospitable place hardly worthy of serious imperial consideration for anything other than raw materials, drove its policies in the eighteenth century. French apathy toward the colony increased after the failures of 1763-1765, and little policy work was done in relation to Guyane in the second half of the century, as the French concentrated on their more hospitable holdings in the Antilles.⁷⁰ The British approached the administration of Guianese colonies the same way they approached the rest of the empire—with a focus on the uniform distribution, adoption, and assimilation of British culture across the board. Colonies existed for the good of Britain, and this was the policy that would continue.⁷¹ The uniform application of British culture had demographic consequences. Though not all colonists were perceived as having equal rights (few, if any, in the eighteenth century would have suggested that slaves had equal rights to plantation owners), they were all seen as “British,” rather than simply as ethnically diverse members of a British-administered colony. The policy towards runaway slaves in the British colonies acts as a perfect illustration of the difference. Runaways were prevented by force from running

⁶⁹ Boxer, 240.

⁷⁰ Aldrich, 13-14.

⁷¹ Waddell, 64-65.

into the interior and forming rival groups—rather than in Dutch colonies, where runaways that could not be easily dealt with were allowed to form maroon villages in the interior, British colonies actively pursued runaways to bring them back into the settlement.⁷² The fear of planters that maroons would assemble in the jungle and start rebellions was well-placed, but it was also indicative of a different attitude. British colonies were British, all of their inhabitants were British, and that was expected to remain so.

The waning years of the eighteenth century saw the Guianese delineation as it exists today. Rivalries between the British and the revolutionary French in the Caribbean escalated into full-scale war in 1793. In this year, the British took Tobago from the French, and in the following year they added Martinique, Saint Lucia, and Guadeloupe with the assistance of French planters loyal to the crown and opposed to the new republican government.⁷³ All of the islands in the Caribbean changed hands several times; complicating the issue, the Dutch had fallen under French rule and were fighting on the French side, as were the Spanish. As a result, the Dutch colonies in the Antilles and in Guiana were captured by the British.⁷⁴ War continued off and on until a final peace was signed in 1815, heavily favoring the British. By this time France had sold off most of its North American territory in the Louisiana Purchase and had lost all but Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Guyane in the Caribbean region. The Dutch lost Berbice, Essequibo, and Demerara; these colonies were consolidated under a central British

⁷² Newman, 22-23.

⁷³ Waddell, 71-72.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

administration and would be known after 1831 as British Guiana.⁷⁵ They were granted, in exchange, some sugar plantations around Lord Willoughby's original grant in present-day Suriname.⁷⁶ What began as a homogenous land, settled by Dutch traders hoping to cut into the Spanish treasury, had become a tripartite canvas upon which the European powers of the nineteenth century could paint their renditions of empire.

⁷⁵ Waddell, 74-76.

⁷⁶ Rogoziński, 213.

CHAPTER FOUR

Shackles

The final division of the Guianas in 1815 created three distinct areas in which imperial groups with three separate foci began to develop. The issue each colonizing group had to address was no longer centered on foreign policy, but rather on the domestic issue of slavery and emancipation. Nothing changed the Guianas more in the nineteenth century than the shift away from slave labor, though each colonial administration would deal with the challenges of emancipation differently. The British, now in control of the largest portion of the Caribbean, had to face this issue head-on.

Slavery was the fuel that powered the British industries in Guiana. Before the nineteenth century, the necessity of slavery's existence to continue the cultivation of sugar and the expansion of settlement was generally accepted. Slavery allowed larger amounts of land to be brought under the plow, seawalls and dykes used in tidal sugarcane cultivation could be constructed more quickly, and irrigation systems could be extended more effectively when a large slave population was present.¹ By the turn of the nineteenth century, the necessary slave labor certainly existed; slaves outnumbered white settlers nearly eight to one.

As an institution, slavery faced a growing moral challenge in nineteenth century England. The ideas presented in the French Revolution of 1789 about human rights and equality had spread. Since the Enlightenment, British thinkers, too, had been considering the possibility that slavery was an immoral establishment. The revolution only gave their

¹ Smith, *British Guiana*, 26.

ideas a louder voice. A significant nineteenth century proponent of abolitionism was William Wilberforce, a wealthy political figure and close companion of Prime Minister William Pitt.² Wilberforce, an evangelical Christian, called upon imagery of the hardships of the Middle Passage while vocalizing his desires for the immediate abolition of slavery, or at least the slave trade. Until 1794, Wilberforce toured the country with abolition lobbyist Thomas Clarkson, exhibiting shackles, branding irons, and thumb screws from the slave trade for the education of the populace.³ The cause slowly gained momentum as Wilberforce and Clarkson annually presented abolition bills to the House of Commons through their lobbying group, the Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade. In 1803, he managed to pass an abolition bill in the House of Commons, but it failed to pass the House of Lords.⁴ Finally, in 1807, political circumstances allowed him to collect the votes necessary in both chambers, and Britain's first anti-slave trade act, the Abolition Act, went into force on January 1, 1808. Because of the money available through black market slave trading, it would be several decades before the practice would be completely eradicated. But Wilberforce had taken the first crucial steps toward awakening the British public to the moral issues of slavery.

In the colonies of British Guiana, the initial efforts toward emancipation had little effect in its first two decades of existence. Slaves still trickled in via the black market, and advertisements for incoming slave shipments were still being printed in the *Essequibo and Demerara Royal Gazette*, the only newspaper of the colony. Rushing to import as many slaves as possible before the Abolition Act achieved fruition, slave

² Rogoziński, 181.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Parry and Sherlock, 180.

traders and owners did a brisk business throughout the year. In January 2, 1807, for example, the paper advertised the arrival of 260 new slaves for sale.⁵ In addition to the continuation of the slave trade, the country's slave population reproduced itself and the abolition of the trade itself did nothing to change the practice of slavery on the plantations. Planters still moved into more fertile territory along the Guianese coastlands until the 1820s, and this increase in productivity and crop yields due to higher soil quality offset the potential economic impact of a stagnant slave trade.⁶ Though the moral views on slavery were changing in the mother country and the agricultural productivity increases rendered the slave trade more obsolete, slavery did, however, continue in Demerara, Berbice, and Essequibo at the behest of the aristocratic sugar planters. Newspapers from 1808 until the 1820s routinely reported on punishment of runaway plantation slaves; a typical entry in August 1808 lists twenty bound for the stocks in Demerara.⁷ Conditions at the local level still had to change significantly to catch up with the emancipation spirit in the houses of Parliament.

Further progress toward complete emancipation would not be made in the British colonies until the planters deemed it in their own best interest; moral warnings from faraway members of parliament were not going to fit the bill. While preaching of morality did not stir those in power to emancipate, demographic pressures did. Significantly outnumbered by their slaves and mindful of events in Haiti earlier in the century, plantation owners in the British colonies of Guiana lived in fear of mutiny and

⁵ *Essequibo and Demerary Royal Gazette*, January 2, 1807, copied in *Colonial Newspapers*, <http://www.vc.id.au/edg/transcripts.html> (accessed October 28, 2009).

⁶ Smith, *British Guiana*, 30. Stagnation of the slave trade would have significantly affected the slavery institution, as slave populations were not sustaining themselves demographically, an issue discussed later in this work.

⁷ *Essequibo and Demerary Royal Gazette*, August 20, 1808.

uprising. Governor Bentinck, part of the Guianese ruling elite, wrote to a colleague in Liverpool:

In a country like this where on an extent of coast of near 150 miles there is a population of only 1,746 white inhabitants and 847 people of colour that could in case of necessity be called on to repel an insurrection of 31,484 male slaves, if such a calamitous event should ever arise, too many precautions cannot be taken to prevent as far as possible the assemblage of negroes in considerable numbers under any pretence whatsoever.⁸

For administrators like Bentinck, the constant fear of mutiny by disgruntled slaves at least provided impetus for considering emancipation or some other concessions. British landowning elites were dependent upon peace and order, as they possessed no military forces that could suppress a full-scale rebellion.

Short of total emancipation, the only way to ensure peace and stability was through cultural, rather than military, control. Again, the successful exportation and dissemination of culture was a talent the British seemed to possess in surplus. An awakening of missionary activity from the Baptists and Methodists in the early decades of the century provided the mortar with which to build cultural cohesion.⁹ At first, plantation owners were skeptical of the benefits the missionaries could provide them; though all three colonies had churches, most planters forbade their slaves from attending services for fear that knowledge of Christian ideas would lead to dissatisfaction of slave status.¹⁰ The church's important role in peacekeeping would not be realized until the 1820s and later. By teaching slaves that English ideals were Christian and highly valued, and getting them used to the idea of servanthood as a good and holy thing, the effective

⁸ Lord William Bentinck, quoted in Parry and Sherlock, 184.

⁹ Rogoziński, 181.

¹⁰ Ibid.

mission church could bring the slaves into closer contact with British culture on positive terms.¹¹ The Demerara Court of Policy finally passed acts allowing the religious instruction of slaves in 1825, allowing exemption from work from sunset on Saturday to sunrise on Monday for church attendance and, among other freedoms, the right to marriage.¹² The religious education movement went a great distance toward pacifying the majority of the population.

Though effective, religious freedoms and church education did not stem the tide of revolt forever. In 1823, two years before the exemption act was passed, a group of slaves at Le Resouvenir had demanded immediate freedom and killed two of their overseers; local authorities imposed martial law and killed over a hundred rebels, including John Smith, a missionary with whom many of the slaves had a very positive relationship.¹³ Smith, who had known the uprising was likely, had nonetheless tried to counsel against it. The search for a scapegoat after the riots, however, fell on Smith, and he was tried and hanged for treason by the governor. His case received a great deal of publicity in London, and many defined his death as a martyrdom, bringing more colonists and mainland British citizens to the side of complete emancipation.¹⁴ It could be said that the emancipation campaign in British Guiana truly began on the day of Smith's execution.

Complete and immediate emancipation was in no way an easy task for the British governors of Essequibo, Berbice, or Demerara. The laws each colonial leader had

¹¹ Smith, *British Guiana*, 31.

¹² *Ibid.*, 37.

¹³ Parry and Sherlock, 185.

¹⁴ Smith, *British Guiana*, 36-37.

inherited were a jumbled patchwork of ordinances and common laws established under older colonial administrations and, often, under other national jurisdictions. For the British governor of the nineteenth century, new social reforms could not even be considered until the existing laws were consolidated and made clear. A British practice through the previous centuries of at least partially adopting the existing law and municipal governments of colonies seized from other countries resulted in a confusing mixture of British, Dutch, French, and even Spanish laws.¹⁵ Making the problem worse, old Dutch laws in Essequibo and Berbice were designed for a trade-centered colony, and were focused on wealth equity and commercial code enforcements, rather than on keeping the peace in a self-sufficient permanent settlement.¹⁶ The process of codifying old local laws and collating the pieces of law code into a single, coherent document was slow, but would bear fruit. To expedite the course of “Anglicizing” the former Dutch colonies, the British government officially joined the three main colonies under a single administrative umbrella in 1831.¹⁷ To be known as the Union of Berbice, Essequibo, and Demerara (later shortened to British Guiana), the colonies could be administered from a single, local administration familiar with the issues of slavery and emancipation.

Action on the issue followed the unification of the colony rapidly. In 1833, Parliament passed the Emancipation Act, which effectively ended all forms of slavery in British colonies.¹⁸ This was hailed as a significant step forward by emancipation advocates, but it did not solve all the problems of British Guianese safety and security.

¹⁵ Parry and Sherlock, 205.

¹⁶ Ibid., 207.

¹⁷ Burrowes, 4.

¹⁸ Parry and Sherlock, 186.

Something had to be done with the thousands of newly-released former slaves; allowing them to melt into the jungles and create potentially dangerous colonies with former runaways was not a palatable option to the British, having seen the tumult such an arrangement had been causing in Dutch Guiana. The British adopted a brilliant solution that possibly saved the colony from complete turmoil. Within five years of the Emancipation Act, the government allowed groups of ex-slaves numbering up to sixty or seventy to combine their resources and purchase, at reduced costs from a government seeking to encourage their positive contribution, plantations abandoned by planters who could no longer work the land without slave labor. These groups then divided the large land area equally amongst themselves.¹⁹ These “Free Negro Villages,” democratically organized and providing abandoned plantations with economic resurgence, allowed free slaves to remain in the British Guianese sphere of influence, rather than moving to the jungle. Though freed slaves were certainly concentrated, they were not a security threat, as they had their own land and interests to care for. The Free Negro Village system remained at its peak until 1852. In this year, the number of ex-slaves working for wages on estates was 19,939, while 44,456 lived and worked in one of the twenty-five communal villages that had been built.²⁰ Though the emancipated slaves did not always appreciate having to purchase land in this way, the Free Negro Villages did improve the safety and tranquility of the area.

With such a significant portion of its former slave population moving into these villages, religion and education within the new villages became increasingly important. On one hand, the church provided a “nucleus of activity” in the villages, while the

¹⁹ Smith, *British Guiana*, 40.

²⁰ Burrowes, 4-5.

schools educated the children not just in writing and reading, but also in British cultural superiority, through the insistence that British literary and artistic traditions represented the pinnacle of civilization.²¹ The cultural assimilation of the former slaves had definitely begun, and British Guiana would increase its “Britishness” in the century to follow. In many ways, the goal of the original British settlers, to build a new and prosperous, “personal” Britain was nearing completion. As previously suggested, the British settlers found a blank slate in British Guiana. The land had, at the turn of the nineteenth century, a population density of 0.1 individuals per square kilometer; by the turn of the following century, the density had increased to 2.9 individuals per square kilometer.²²

Culturally, adaptations were being made, but there were significant economic issues to address, as well. Though many slaves were able to work the land in their collective villages, converting from a slavery-based labor economy to an employment-based model was not an easy transition. Former slaves still had to find work, often with their former masters. The problem of compensation for formerly unpaid workers required solutions, provided by using a system of apprenticeship. Apprenticing was meant to be an intermediate step between slavery and full rights and privileges, and was officially put into law in 1833. The system required former slaves to work for their former owners for three-quarters of the week without pay for a set term (usually six years); they received payment from the remaining fourth, and possessed the option of

²¹ Smith, *British Guiana*, 41.

²² Lange, Mahoney, and vom Hau, 1434.

buying their freedom at any time with these funds.²³ Even under these terms, many Africans and African descendents saw the potential for economic improvement and status. Many believed that, after the end of the apprenticeship period, they would be in a position to demand high wages, since they were the only group of workers available in the market. For this reason, immigration of free Africans from the Caribbean and the United States occurred frequently, starting with the arrival of a group of recently freed Antigua slaves in 1834.²⁴ The apprenticeship system, still far from a fair labor practice, certainly functioned on some useful level for the slaves, though it did much more to ease the transition for the planter elites than for the slaves themselves. Subsequently, dissension arose among newly freed slaves in British Guiana.

The ex-slaves in the country were faced with two realities as they served their mandatory apprenticeship. First, they witnessed the complete freedom of those former slaves that had managed to flee into the jungle and set up cohesive groups there. Second, and perhaps more important still, they saw large tracts of land in all directions with great earning potential.²⁵ Consequently, the apprenticeship system was terminated in 1838 and the aforementioned Free Negro Villages became the norm for Guianese residents. Colonial administrators in British Guiana encouraged the founding of these villages, as they concentrated free and peaceful freed slaves into economically viable collectives, thus making the entire area safer for those whites who remained in the country. To further ensure peace and security, the government established the first regular police

²³ Parry and Sherlock, 191.

²⁴ Odeen Ishmael, "The Guyana Story, Chapter 46," Guyana Organization, <http://www.guyana.org/features/guyanastory/chapter46.html> (accessed December 2, 2008).

²⁵ Parry and Sherlock, 194-195.

force in British Guiana in 1839, made up of an Inspector-General, three inspectors, 286 officers, and a forty-horse mounted section.²⁶ Protection of the British way of life, therefore, was the highest priority of the colonial administrators, even in the face of momentous socioeconomic change.

Former slaves now free to farm their own lands took full advantage of their newfound liberties. Many carried out their freedom to its fullest extent, preferring to live alone on a very small, but personal, plot of land rather than working for one of the larger collectives.²⁷ Though participating in the communal farming of a free village was often more profitable, since the costs could be split among the partners and the yields could be higher, a growing number of ex-slaves were turning to small plot farming as an exercise in freedom. Between the Free Village Movement and the scramble to own small plots, land ownership patterns in British Guiana underwent a dramatic change through the 1830s and 1840s. In Berbice, in 1838, 15,000 of the 20,000 residents were newly emancipated, and none were land owners; by 1842, over 1,000 families owned a total of 7,000 acres along the river.²⁸ Within a decade, British Guiana had developed a landed middle-class composed almost entirely of freed black slaves. Over £1,000,000 worth of property had been purchased by this new middle class by 1852.²⁹ In terms of class structures and levels of freedom for those of African descent, British Guiana was undergoing fast, positive change.

²⁶ Ishmael, Chapter 46.

²⁷ Parry and Sherlock, 200.

²⁸ Ibid., 195.

²⁹ Ibid., 196.

The removal of the slavery component of British Guianese plantation culture did, however, create serious setbacks for the economic growth of the country. Labor shortages appeared all over the colonies. The number of plantations fell dramatically. In 1829 there were about 230 sugar and 174 coffee and cotton plantations, almost all of which were fully cultivated. By 1849, 180 sugar plantations remained, and only sixteen small coffee plantations existed.³⁰ The only way to reverse the decline was through some new form of labor importation. Planters and government officials recognized the success of voluntary African immigration during the apprenticeship period in countering some of the impending labor shortage. On the foundations of this experience, the government officials in British Guiana began to encourage immigration from other parts of the empire. Prime Minister Lord John Russell had informed the British Guianese governor in 1840 that he was unwilling to transfer laborers from other parts of the empire, like India (where there was a surplus of workers), but the governor's office and the Colonial Office, which was responsible for the maintenance of all the Caribbean holdings, lifted the embargo on Indian immigration in 1845.³¹ In spite of the wishes of the London government, those on the ground in British Guiana knew that without an influx of agricultural workers, the colony could not survive in the post-emancipation economy.

From 1845-1850, attempts to encourage immigration yielded little. By 1847 the government had spent £360,655 on immigration incentives, but only obtained about 50,000 immigrants: 12,237 from India, 12,898 from other West Indian islands, 8,645

³⁰ Odeen Ishmael, "The Guyana Story, Chapter 48," Guyana Organization, <http://www.guyana.org/features/guyanastory/chapter48.html> (accessed November 22, 2009).

³¹ Parry and Sherlock, 202.

from Africa, and about 16,000 from Madeira.³² Of these groups, only a small percentage actually worked on former plantations. Many Africans left their paid positions to join the free villages and make money on their own, while laborers from Madeira had difficulty adjusting to the environment and died at alarming rates. Only the Indians did not experience catastrophic losses, though theirs were also considerable. Local commissions recognized that medical attention and food supply had to be improved for these newcomers to adapt adequately to their new surroundings and provide any sort of usable labor. Thus, compulsory provision of improved housing and medical attention was the priority of the day. Better conditions helped—between 1884 and 1914, 239,000 Indians were brought in as indentured servants, and three-quarters of these immigrants remained after their period of indenture.³³ While the first half of the nineteenth century was a period of slavery and emancipation, the second half of the century became the age of immigrant labor.

Table 4.1. Total number of indentured servants immigrating to British Guiana³⁴

<i>Country of Origin</i>	<i>Number of Immigrants</i>	<i>Dates of Main Immigration</i>
India	238,960	1838-1917
Madeira and Azores	31,628	1835-1882
Malta	208	1839
West Indies	42,562	1835-1928
Africa	13,355	1838-1865
China	14,189	1853-1912
United States	70	1840
Total	340,972	

³² Parry and Sherlock, 202.

³³ Ibid., 203.

³⁴ Dwarka Nath, *A History of Indians in British Guiana* (London: Nelson, 1950), 113.

The arrival and successful assimilation of immigrants caused a steady increase in sugar production over the last half-century. From 1830 to 1846, production had dropped from 60,000 tons to 23,000 tons, but after 1848 it steadily increased: 38,000 tons in 1851, 63,000 tons in 1861, and 92,000 tons by 1871.³⁵ Similar successes were recorded in French and Dutch Guiana when the amount of available labor increased. But the way immigrant laborers were incorporated into society was strikingly different between British Guiana and the French and Dutch. Smith notes that, “the surprising thing about British Guiana is not the diversity of the segments of population, but the extent to which common ideals and aspirations have replaced sectional isolation.”³⁶ The unique British approach to empire, which placed the status of British culture unarguably above that of any other participating group, be it indigenous, Chinese, or Indian, created a central, unifying force. Whatever distinctions immigrants brought with them, like the Indian ideas of caste, were quickly subordinated to British culture. Immigrant laborers who wanted to move up the social ladder had to adopt a British lifestyle and manner of speech in order to be accepted in the ruling class.³⁷ Ironically, British ethnocentrism caused British Guianese to coalesce into a single culture, rather than a collection of disparate ethnicities.

In the British colonies, there was no tolerance for being “non-British,” so newcomers had to assimilate and adopt the mother culture or risk economic failure and deportation. The Madeirans, for instance, learned to adapt to British culture by learning English and practicing Anglicanism, like most of the emerging middle class in the

³⁵ Parry and Sherlock, 203.

³⁶ Smith, *British Guiana*, 45.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

colony. As a result, over 60 percent of the 800 retail shops in British Guiana were owned and operated by Portuguese Madeirans by 1851.³⁸ Because immigration to British Guiana was based on indentured labor, rather than the immigration of whole families, there was an overwhelming majority of male immigrants, particularly among the Indian and Chinese groups. These single men sought out companionship after establishing themselves in the country, and the resulting ethnic miscegenation furthered racial harmony.³⁹ Though all were under the yoke of the British Empire, the immigrants could freely move within each others' circles, creating a culture of mixed race individuals who excelled at acting British, in ways that will be discussed in a later chapter centered on cultural studies.

British Guianese governors continued to tweak their policies regarding land ownership throughout the century. Portions of the Crown-owned lands were sold as small lots to peasant farmers of all ethnicities throughout the 1860s, particularly in 1868.⁴⁰ Besides a land of diverse ethnic groups, British Guiana was becoming a nation of small-scale farmers and land holders. Significant numbers of immigrants from India continued to arrive, taking advantage of these cheap land sales. By 1883, 65,000 Indians were counted in the population of a little over 250,000.⁴¹ Proponents of British culture living in the colony at this time were concerned with such an influx, so measures were taken to ensure the proper absorption of these individuals into the broader British society. For the most part, assimilation of the new arrivals, especially the Indians, was not being

³⁸ Newman, 25.

³⁹ Ibid., 26.

⁴⁰ Parry and Sherlock, 238.

⁴¹ Ibid., 237.

done effectively by the church. Though Christian priests were moving into the plantation areas and into the new towns created from the aforementioned social mobility of groups like the Madeirans, they were largely unsuccessful in converting the Hindus and Muslims (about 80 and 20 percent of the population, respectively) who had recently arrived.⁴² The burden of cultural absorption and adaptation would fall on the education system.

In the 1850s, a notable number of primary schools were established in concentrated plantation areas, in both older, more established settlements like New Amsterdam and Georgetown (formerly Stabroek), and new towns like Buxton. The teachers in these schools complained, however, about the irregular attendance of immigrant children, especially those from India. Seeing that full cultural assimilation could not take place without education, the British Guianese government enacted the Compulsory Education Ordinance in 1876, making education compulsory up to the age of twelve for rural children and fourteen for those in the cities and outlawing the employment of children under age nine.⁴³ Though there was initial resistance from the immigrant groups, eventually most children were enrolled under the ordinance. In classrooms across British Guiana, children of Chinese, Indian, West Indian, and Portuguese descent learned English, British history, and British literature, along with English sports like cricket, whose wild popularity in British Guiana continues today. The prevailing opinion among British authorities, as reported in the London *Times*, was that the immigrants “not be received as laborers,” but as “free settlers” who would need the

⁴² Odeen Ishmael, “The Guyana Story, Chapter 60,” Guyana Organization, <http://www.guyana.org/features/guyanastory/chapter60.html> (accessed December 2, 2008).

⁴³ Ibid.

same cultural assimilation opportunities as any new British citizen.⁴⁴ Rather than taking a *laissez-faire* approach to the absorption of new ethnic arrivals, the British governors in the colony, like others across the empire, utilized compulsory education to put a British stamp on the otherwise mixed culture.

British Guiana had survived the impact of emancipation, only to be confronted with a new challenge. As the nineteenth century transitioned to the twentieth, the British would begin to face the challenge of the new century—life after sugar. Competition in the sugar market was growing, particularly from Cuban increases in cane production and eastern European production of beet sugar. The competition was unwelcome, as British Guiana was not in a good position to compete. It was at a geographic disadvantage, with shipping to the European markets costing more and nearby processing centers and domestic markets nearly non-existent. From its beginnings, Guiana had been a monoculture, existing almost exclusively as an export producer of sugar, with the exception of a brief spike in coffee production. For Guiana and other West Indian colonies like Trinidad and Barbados, sugar represented 75 percent of total export earnings by 1896.⁴⁵ Increased competition was not the only problem for the extremely sugar-dependent Guianese. As more export markets were opened, prices for sugar continued to fall. Prices had declined by 25 percent from 1805 to 1825, an additional quarter by 1835, and still another 25 percent by 1850 before steadying, then diving again with the entrance of American-backed Cuban sugar into the world market after 1878.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ “Immigrants in British Guiana,” *The Times* [London], October 21, 1874, p. 11.

⁴⁵ Parry and Sherlock, 242.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 198.

As the economic situation in British Guiana worsened, so did relations between the different ethnic groups, who all sought a scapegoat for the reversal of fortunes.

Relations between those of African descent and the Portuguese Madeirans declined throughout the period, and instability in the cities resulted. The shaky relationship reached its apex in March of 1889, when a young African boy was caught shoplifting a two-cent loaf of bread in a Madeiran market and soundly beaten with a stick by the shopkeeper. Rumors began to circulate after the March 19 apprehension of the boy that the shopkeeper had actually killed him, and this touched off a series of riots in the Stabroek Market section of Georgetown. African men from the poorer neighborhoods of Georgetown ran through the Portuguese section of town, Stabroek Market, destroying houses and shops and beating Portuguese citizens. One man was killed, and over 240 members of the mob were arrested in what came to be known as the Cent Bread Riot.⁴⁷ Though order was restored and relations normalized, the riot became a tangible example of Guianese frustration. Sugar had sweetened everything, allowing towns like Georgetown to grow, providing new opportunities for immigrants worldwide, and funding the British attempts to assimilate them into a larger imperial culture. As the sugar went away, so did the bonds that held the colony together. For British Guiana to survive another fundamental cultural challenge, it would have to learn to diversify and globalize.

Briefly, British Guiana found an outlet for sugar exports in the United States, negotiating with the North Americans during the 1880s and 1890s. By 1900, the United

⁴⁷ Odeen Ishmael, "The Guyana Story, Chapter 66," Guyana Organization, <http://www.guyana.org/features/guyanastory/chapter46.html> (accessed December 2, 2008).

States was purchasing 75 percent of its sugar exports.⁴⁸ The progress was short-lived, though, as the Spanish-American War brought Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Philippines into the American market, destroying the chief market for Guianese sugar within five years. This was compounded by a British shift to the importation of cheaper beet sugar. By 1909, British imports of sugar totaled 1.6 million tons, out of which only 129,000 tons were cane sugar.⁴⁹ The imperial system once again stepped in to save the sugar industry. Canada signed a preferential trade agreement with British Guiana for the purchase of sugar, and this allowed the sugar industry just enough life to continue limping on. It could be argued that the imperial politics which allowed Canada to salvage the British Guianese sugar industry hurt the colony in the long run. While other colonies in the area had to come to grips with a sudden collapse of the sugar industry, British Guiana was not forced to consider immediate diversification. Weaning itself from sugar would be the challenge of the next century, as the character of British Guiana continued to travel in an opposite direction from its sister colonies of French and Dutch Guiana, whose nineteenth century history now must be considered.

⁴⁸ Newman, 29.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 30.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Green Hell

French Guiana has fought a centuries-long battle with obscurity. Peter Redfield's book *Space in the Tropics: from Convicts to Rockets in French Guiana* summarizes many historians' views on the area by stating, "French Guiana remains a remarkably insignificant artifact of the political landscape—rarely noticed by most of France, let alone anyone else—as well as one of the least settled regions of the world."¹ Indeed, the French portion of the Guianas, alternately known as French Guiana and Guyane, lies tucked into the outermost corner of this already isolated and esoteric region, forgotten almost as soon as it was explored. The British and Dutch portions of the Guianas were, for the initial few centuries of their colonization, a mixture of British and Dutch settlers and ideals, not separating fully until 1815. The French portion, however, distinguished itself from the other two even earlier. For this reason, this chapter must look before the 1815 tripartite delineation of the region to tease out the foundational elements of French Guiana. For the French Empire, this tiny backwater would become a blank slate upon which to rehearse the principles of empire.

French Guiana's nineteenth century effectively runs from 1763 to 1895 and can be divided into two distinct phases. During the first half of this long century, the colonial territory surrounding Cayenne experienced a phase of colonial experimentation; the second half of the century can best be described as a period of penalization. To consider

¹ Peter Redfield, *Space in the Tropics: from Convicts to Rockets in French Guiana* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), xiv.

the first phase, the experimentation phase, one must consider the fundamental differences between French Guiana and its British and Dutch neighbors to the west. British and Dutch Guiana enjoyed success as plantation colonies as early as the mid-seventeenth century. As a result, the methods applied to their settlement and control remained, at least until emancipation, relatively static. French Guiana, however, benefited from no such success. The experimentation by the French, alternately attempting to make the area a settled colony and a dumping ground for prisoners, was based on a lack of immediate success or investment return. Because the colony suffered a terrible start, the French government was perplexed regarding how to administer and improve it.

Two primary factors contributed to French Guiana's failure as a settled, plantation-oriented economy. The first was a simple problem of geography. The French settlers succeeded in adequately draining the low-lying, swampy areas around Cayenne. They possessed the option of moving settlement to higher, more easily drained ground, but this area was less fertile. Prioritizing fecundity for their plantations over infrastructural development, the Frenchmen made a poor choice, deciding to remain in the marshy, malaria-infested swampland in the river deltas.² The second factor, more difficult to resolve, was a chronic lack of labor. Even slavery, the traditional quick-fix for labor shortages, failed to provide adequate labor in Cayenne. Whereas nearly three hundred slave traders relocated from Nantes to Martinique between 1715 and 1775, where the slave trade was brisk, only eleven relocated to Cayenne in the same period.³ The chief deterrent of slavers considering Cayenne was geographic—the harbor was substandard and difficult to navigate, the prevailing winds and currents made it easier to

² Redfield, 31.

³ Ibid.

travel to the islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe, and the distance to other French colonies was too great to make any money on side ventures.⁴ Thus, settlers were sparse and slaves were few and expensive, so the French Guiana project did not succeed at the same levels as its western neighbors.

Things were not going well in other parts of the French Empire, either. The Treaty of Paris, signed in 1763, stripped France of an enormous chunk of its North American holdings, and this caused a renewed desperation in the monarchy to establish successful colonies in Guiana. The losses in 1763 had more direct consequences than just a change of French priorities; César Gabriel de Choiseul, who had negotiated the Treaty of Paris, had become the Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1761. He felt keenly the need to recoup the losses of territory, and began a directed attempt at renewed colonization of Cayenne five years later, just after the treaty was signed.⁵ In 1763-1764, Choiseul sent over nine thousand colonists, including recently displaced Acadians and other French Canadians, to the Cayenne area, following with several thousand more to a new colony at Kourou the following year. The combination of disease and mismanagement claimed nearly all the lives at both locations, and within three years the venture had cost over fourteen thousand lives and nearly thirty million livres.⁶ What was supposed to provide redemption of the French experience in the New World had instead become the latest and largest in a series of colonial failures from which the French imperial psyche would not recover.

⁴ Redfield, 32.

⁵ W. J. Eccles, *France in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 218.

⁶ Ibid.

The end product of the failures of 1763-1765 was a confirmation of suspicions that the French were incapable of colonizing Guiana and that its land and climate were deadly to them. Later documents from French parliamentary debates regarding resettlement of Guiana refer to the disasters at Kourou and Cayenne habitually.⁷ A new myth about Guiana had emerged for the French—rather than a land of wealth and riches, the Wild Coast was a tomb. Thus, it would become increasingly difficult to convince French settlers to undertake the journey to Cayenne. History was not on the side of those who proponed settlement, nor was demographic feasibility. There simply were not enough workers there already to ease the burden of new settlers, and, though sugar was growing in areas where there were already enough workers to run the plantations, the taste of slavery was souring on the European palate.

The outbreak of the French Revolution initialized the slow death of the French Guianese plantations. Spurred on by ideas of equality and the rights of man, the leaders of the French Republic decided to abolish slavery in 1793. Like the emancipation of slaves in the British colonies, the practice of informal slavery continued despite the law in the more remote regions, and this included French Guiana.⁸ Despite the declaration of complete abolition by the democratic faction that had come to power in the revolution, French Guianese slavers had little time to worry about the changes. Napoleon, recognizing a continued need for cheap (or, better yet, free) labor, reinstated slavery in the colonies in 1802.⁹ The sudden forced return to slavery for newly freed slaves might have caused upheaval within the colony; however, though Cayenne experienced some

⁷ Redfield, 33.

⁸ Parry and Sherlock, 186.

⁹ Waddell, 77.

minor insurrections following the 1802 announcement, nothing approaching the size of the slave rebellions in Guadeloupe or the future Haiti occurred. Rather, French Guiana's isolated and sparsely-populated character made it a convenient site for deportation of rebel leaders and enemies of the state.¹⁰ Death rates among these exiles were similar to those of the Cayenne and Kourou settlement expeditions, further confirming the colony's negative reputation as a deathtrap for French settlers.¹¹ From its inception, the colony had experienced a parade of setbacks. First the revolutionary government and then Napoleon sought to turn the region into a profitable one.

Ironically, Britain had developed the foundations for the future French solution. Throughout the previous century, the British government had been dealing with the rapid rise in the population of petty criminals and political rebels by transferring them to Georgia and the islands of the Caribbean. Though the scale was modest, averaging approximately seven hundred convicts per year, its success caused interest among French government officials.¹² The success of Australia, in particular, opened the minds of other governments to the possibilities of using unsuccessful territorial possessions as penal colonies. Many heeded the words of Jeremy Bentham, who said, "Australia is the penal colony that we can cite as a model, by reason of its choice of locale, the efforts which prepared its colonization and the success that crowns it each day."¹³ Thus, while a new revolutionary government was taking control and wrestling with questions of human

¹⁰ Redfield, 33.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 54.

¹³ Jeremy Bentham, quoted in Redfield, 56.

rights and proper punishment, references to the successes of the British in the Pacific were occurring frequently.

In 1791, while Bentham was still praising the successes of the Australian experiment, doctor and naturalist Jean-Baptiste Leblond was returning to Paris from Cayenne, having completed a search for quinine in the Guianese jungle. Upon his return, Leblond gave glowing accounts of French Guiana's potential in an attempt to counter the negative images that had accumulated since the initial colonization attempts. He planned to revitalize the colony and to clean up urban areas at home by shipping mainland French indigents to work the land.¹⁴ Another recent returnee, Daniel Lescallier, supplemented Leblond's campaigns by authoring *Exposé des Moyens de Mettre en Valeur la Guyane Française*, a treatise on French Guiana's agricultural potential and how to develop it.¹⁵ The French Assembly gained enough interest by 1792 to designate the area as an official deportation destination for priests who refused to accept state supremacy. Three years later, political exiles also began to be transported to Cayenne.¹⁶ By the 1790s, the area had already come to be known as the Dry Guillotine (in works discussed later); these events would set into motion French Guiana's penalization period—its development as a penal colony in the second half of the century. Though it was not the agricultural utopia and refuge for indigents envisioned by Leblond and Lescallier, French Guiana finally began to show promise as a useful possession.

¹⁴ Redfield, 57.

¹⁵ Daniel Lescallier, *Exposé des Moyens de Mettre en Valeur et d'Administrer la Guiane*. (Paris: Du Pont, 1798), 188-202.

¹⁶ Redfield, 58.

By the beginnings of the nineteenth century, however, the French Guianese penal colony was showing no more signs of success than its predecessors. In 1809 the Portuguese, with British assistance, seized the territory, holding it for five years until its return to the French under a new Treaty of Paris.¹⁷ After the exile of Napoleon, France entered into the period of the Bourbon Restoration (1815-1848), which was marked by a period of restored and strengthened monarchical control. The self-sufficiency and home rule of outlying colonies reverted to pre-1763 levels, with all French Caribbean colonies losing their power of self-determination and even representation within the French Assembly.¹⁸ The Bourbons interpreted the French Caribbean as existing solely for the benefit of the mainland and would strictly control it from Paris, adapting their administrative approach to the colony to meet whatever needs were most pressing at home. As a result, shifts between a settler colony and a penal colony focus occurred throughout the Bourbon Restoration period. For example, after initial attempts at expanding the penal colony failed due to an outbreak of yellow fever, the Bourbon monarchy initiated a new colonization effort in 1819. Pierre Marie Sébastien Catineau-Laroche, a traveling land speculator and author of *De la Guyane Française: de Son État Physique, de son Agriculture, de son Régime Intérieur, et du Projet de la Peupler avec des Laboureurs Européens*, requested permission to take three hundred peasant farming families into the interior, give them chartered lands, food, and clothing, and start a farming settlement.¹⁹ The plan was sharply discouraged by the governor of Cayenne,

¹⁷ Redfield, 33.

¹⁸ Parry and Sherlock, 218.

¹⁹ Herbert Ingram Priestley, *France Overseas: a Study of Modern Imperialism* (New York: Octagon Books, 1966), 10. The published request for colonists and adventurers is located in Pierre Marie

who found it too dangerous, so instead a private company's plan to bring in 100,000 French cultivators over a ten year period was adopted, with the continued involvement of the land broker. Catineau-Laroche surveyed land along the Mana River in 1821 under this assignment, issuing a report the following year praising the potential of the land and suggesting a plan to combine the cultivators with army conscripts.²⁰ New, conflicting reports surfaced concerning what conditions there would really be like, so he only managed to install a small company of military workers and fifty apprenticed orphans that summer. Within two years, over a million francs had been spent and only three families had been permanently installed.²¹ By 1825, both the penal and the agricultural experiment were struggling to survive.

Efforts at acculturation were suffering, too. In that year, Mère Anne-Marie Jahouvey, a superior of the Saint Joseph of Cluny Convent, took over administration of Catineau-Laroche's settlement and added thirty-six nuns and forty farmers; they, too, would abandon the area by 1827.²² Jahouvey did, however, manage to establish in French Guiana a center for acculturation for the indigenous population. This mission served multiple purposes: spreading French culture, encouraging trade between settlers and the indigenous population, and providing for religious activity.²³ This outreach to the Indians illustrates a more fundamental concept regarding Franco-indigenous relations

Sébastien Catineau-Laroche, *De la Guyane Française: de Son État Physique, de son Agriculture, de son Régime Intérieur, et du Projet de la Peupler avec des Laboureurs Européens* (Paris: C. J. Trouvé, 1822).

²⁰ Priestley, 11.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 10-12.

²³ Dorothy Shipley White, *Black Africa and de Gaulle: From the French Empire to Independence* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1979), 21.

in South America. Rather than in North America, where French fur traders and missionaries alike negotiated with and lived among Indians, establishing a hybridized culture, relations with Indians in French Guiana were conducted exclusively by the church.²⁴ Prior to their expulsion from the colony in 1762, the Jesuits led efforts to build relationships with the Indians.²⁵ After their expulsion, it was left to smaller enclaves like the convent led by Jahouvey to build on these relationships. A lack of settlement success and subsequent abandonment of French Guiana as a viable colony caused the government in France to retain little interest in developing a shared culture with these Indians. Jahouvey's mission, then, was rather unique as the first real attempt at indigenous relations since the departure of the Jesuits. The lack of government interest in developing these relationships reflected a larger truth—until French Guiana could show more profit potential, either as an agricultural plantation economy or as a penal colony, the French government would invest little in its development or in the assimilation of its native people.

The fact that an increase in available labor could rescue French Guiana was not lost on its local officials. The governor of the colony, for instance, noted in 1828 a lack of legal means to increase slave numbers. In a letter to the Paris government he wondered “if the employment of a certain number of white convicts would be suitable to the cultivation of our land, without clashing too obviously with our colonial system.”²⁶

Lack of interest in the colony meant the necessary infrastructure linking the penal

²⁴ A full discussion of the French policy toward cultural hybridization can be found in Richard White, *The Middle Ground* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

²⁵ Redfield, 31.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 61.

installation and the plantations was never developed, and the replacement of slave labor with convict labor never fully materialized. To address the lack of colonists and, subsequently, laborers, the Bourbon monarchy did grant French Guiana a five-member oversight committee in 1823, designed to advertise the colony and serve as stewards of its resources. Illustrative of French Guiana's second-class status, however, Martinique and Guadeloupe were each granted nine-member committees with broader powers.²⁷ By 1825, the islands had received a full charter with a governor and general ruling council, whereas French Guiana remained administered by a Paris-appointed governor and an almost entirely Parisian absentee council.²⁸ French Guiana would be doomed in an inescapable colonial paradox—it was sparsely populated because of its lack of production, and its lack of production would continue to stem from its sparse population.

The granting of localized ruling councils to the more profitable colonies of Martinique and Guadeloupe further highlighted French Guiana's lack of independence or appeal in Paris. The French government continued to administer the colony directly, as a territorial possession rather than a self-sufficient colony. This policy of centralized government control, with all decisions made in Paris, by Parisians, and not by any Guianese constituency, would continue to be the Bourbon approach for the entirety of the restoration period.²⁹ As long as this period—characterized by frustration with the lack of production and accompanied by strict, centralized control from Paris—continued, the growth of the colony and its self-sufficiency would be stunted.

²⁷ Priestley, 11.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Parry and Sherlock, 218.

Despite its lack of true localized government, French Guiana did experience a moment of relative prosperity after the July Revolution of 1830. The upheaval of the revolution relaxed central control over the colony, allowing local governors to act with more latitude. This included a brief spike in the importation of slaves, primarily through the Dutch trade. In the years following 1830, the slave population in French Guiana expanded to 19,000, and production of spices, cotton, sugar, and indigo all increased, giving French Guiana the first real economic successes since its inception.³⁰ Had these circumstances remained static, the colony might have enjoyed enough success to be considered a viable colonial and cultural investment similar to the British model; however, once again the colony fell victim to political upheaval in the mother country. Britain's period of relatively stable government and regime continuity allowed its colonies to make gradual, long-lasting adjustments to changes like emancipation and the collapse of the sugar industry. For the French colonies, though, the political climate was never placid enough in the nineteenth century to secure the foundations for successful cultural exportation. Instead, French Guiana continued to exist somewhere in the background, its potential never fully realized, and its significance never really accepted; it was simply disregarded as a significant partner in empire, and thus did not receive any cultural investment, or any other kind, from the French.

By the time the July Revolution of 1830 had subsided, centralized Parisian control returned to French Guiana in favor of more democratic governance. In 1833, a new colonial charter applicable to Guadeloupe, Martinique, Ile de Bourbon, and French Guiana was passed. The charter allowed for local assemblies to be formed similar to those that had existed before the Bourbon Restoration, in the aftermath of the first great

³⁰ Redfield, 33.

revolution.³¹ The post-July Revolution French idea of localized control was far stricter than the interpretation of the British or French revolutionaries, however. The French Guianese selected delegates to represent them, but the representation was done in Paris, not at home. The colonial council could not legislate concerning commerce either, so the real interests of the Guianese planters were hardly represented. Planters were still scolded for doing anything outside the French regime (for example, authorities in Martinique were called to Paris for reprimands over purchases of farming tools from the United States).³² Though revolution brought with it a brief period of relative increase in localized control, political influence of the planter class, and production through the growth of slavery, the revolution quickly faded away in favor of a restoration of centralized bureaucracy.

Slavery was dying in French Guiana, just as in British. The British Emancipation Act of 1833 had significant influence on French attitudes, and by August of that year the monarchy had ordered a complete slave census.³³ Guianese Planters correctly feared that this was a buildup to total emancipation. The *Société pour l'Abolition de l'Esclavage* was formed by 1834 in Paris.³⁴ Projects suggested by Alexis de Tocqueville in 1839 and Victor de Broglie in 1843 each recommended emancipation over a six year period, with indemnities paid to the planters. Smaller bills followed, including the emancipation of slaves on public lands and a credit fund for the introduction of European indentured

³¹ Priestley, 49.

³² Ibid., 49-50.

³³ Ibid., 50.

³⁴ Parry and Sherlock, 187.

laborers. By 1844, the Mackau Laws established the policy of gradual abolition.³⁵ In 1848, four years after the policy's adoption, and in the midst of another revolution, abolitionist Victor Schoelcher proposed the final abolition bill, which authorized compensation to slave owners in return for complete emancipation.³⁶ Though it took several truncated steps due to the lack of consistent government in Paris, slavery in the French West Indies and French Guiana had finally come to an end.

Just as in British Guiana, French planters had to navigate a the treacherous economic reality of a slavery-free agricultural export economy. The effects of emancipation in French Guiana were just as immediate; former slaves left the plantations for good in order to practice subsistence agriculture on small plots known as *abattis*.³⁷ A tangible shift toward small-scale farming for personal gain and away from organized plantation agriculture by the area's largest labor source caused all hopes for the agricultural development of the colony to be dashed. Unlike most other parts of the Caribbean, French Guiana's small population could not reorganize and adjust economically. Additionally, the sparse population of slaves (the largest labor force, but still a small number when compared to British Guiana) left a vast amount of land to be available for the founding of the small-scale *abattis*. So, unlike British Guiana, the plantation system completely disintegrated and left little economic or agricultural infrastructure behind, preventing the emergence of a "*nouveau* peasant class". The few remaining planters, along with colonial officials still looking to turn French Guiana into a profitable venture, tried encouraging the immigration of contract laborers, just as had

³⁵ Priestley, 50.

³⁶ Parry and Sherlock, 187.

³⁷ Redfield, 34.

been accomplished in British Guiana.³⁸ Africans, Indians, Chinese, and Madeirans were all recruited, but France's attempts fell short of Britain's, because there was simply not enough incentive in place to entice new workers.³⁹ French Guiana was left looking for other ways than immigration to solve its labor woes.

The final decision on slavery by the 1848 revolutionaries and their selected Under-Secretary for Colonies, Victor Schoelcher, was based on the revolutionary ideal of universal manhood suffrage and full abolition in all the colonies. Schoelcher, for his part, believed strongly in these ideals; but the *coup d'état* of Louis Napoleon and the establishment of the Second Empire recentralized government control in the monarchy, stifling the chances of French Guianese self-rule or self-restructure, as they had been under the Bourbon Restoration and the House of Orleans.⁴⁰ The destruction of slavery as an institution under the revolutionaries and the recentralization of government in Paris that followed under the Second Empire ironically worked together to deny the French Guianese any autonomy or hegemony over their local affairs.⁴¹ The republic-kingdom cycle was once again complete, and France again had to decide how to justify its tenuous hold on its only South American colony. Without slavery or a viable plantation economy, a shift in focus was crucial.

The establishment of the Second Empire demanded profitable colonies that were not only French by association, but also economically in its best interest. Rather than “fully assimilated, equal partners in the French Republic,” as they would have been

³⁸ Redfield, 34.

³⁹ Waddell, 87.

⁴⁰ Margaret Majumdar, *Postcoloniality: the French Dimension* (New York, Berghahn Books, 2007), 5.

⁴¹ Parry and Sherlock, 219.

during the revolutionary years, areas like French Guiana were expected to take up the yoke of empire again and turn a profit for their royal investors.⁴² French Guiana's success was increasingly important due to failures in other parts of the empire, just as in 1763. Elsewhere in the Americas, French interests had suffered severe setbacks. Besides a colossal failure in Mexico in 1838-1839, the French had tried and failed to overthrow the *caudillo* Juan Manuel de Rosas in Argentina. Seeing Rosas was unlikely to go anywhere, the French signed a treaty in 1840 relinquishing colonization designs in Uruguay in return for Rosas' cooperation and discontinuation of forced conscription of French settlers in Buenos Aires.⁴³ Rosas and the Argentines nonetheless continued to be a thorn in the side of the French, and in 1853 an additional treaty was signed among Argentina, Britain, France, and the United States, in which France conceded free navigation of the Rio de la Plata. These South American setbacks left French Guiana the only French holding on the continent, and increased pressures on it to become useful and profitable.

There were those in France who still perceived strong potential in the use of the colony as a penal detention facility, even after interest in the concept had waned during subsequent revolutions. The political upheavals of the 1848 Revolution, though, marked a turning point in the penal colony debate. The crushing of the June Days uprising and establishment of the Second Empire had produced over twelve thousand political prisoners.⁴⁴ These prisoners, deemed dangerous to the current regime, needed to be removed from continental France and placed in a "fortified enclosure," or at least in a

⁴² Majumdar, 6.

⁴³ Priestley, 58-59.

⁴⁴ Redfield, 62.

remote location in which they could not start trouble.⁴⁵ French Guiana's perfect fit for these deportees and its experience in handling political prisoners was immediately called to mind.

In 1851, in response to the increased need for detention space, Devil's Island Penitentiary was founded just off the coast of French Guiana, near the settlement of Kourou. It gained notoriety almost instantly as a "Green Hell" in which political prisoners often carried out life sentences (usually a "life" sentence in this inhospitable environment was much shorter than the prisoner had hoped).⁴⁶ A series of laws were passed through the French parliament, codifying the penal experiment and establishing French Guiana as the detainment facility of choice for the French Empire. A law establishing standard conditions of penal transportation was ratified on May 30, 1854, and continental French *bagnes*, or prison colonies, closed: Rochefort shuttered in 1852, Brest closed in 1858, and Toulon abandoned by 1873.⁴⁷ Instead, the government moved the inhabitants of these prisons, along with the thousands of other dissidents yet to be assigned, across the ocean to Devil's Island. Steam engines powered the ships that made transatlantic relocation more feasible, as well as reducing the need for criminal labor to power galleys.⁴⁸ This combination of circumstances allowed the largest French penal experiment—the first public success of French Guiana—to unfold.

It is important to remember here, in the mid-nineteenth century, that French Guiana was not populated *entirely* by prisoners. Small-scale farmers, freed slaves, and

⁴⁵ Redfield, 62.

⁴⁶ Aldrich, 22.

⁴⁷ Redfield, 63.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

petty local officials exiled from upward mobility and sentenced to administer the otherwise insignificant colony still hoped for ways to make the settlement prosper without turning it into another Botany Bay. Hope blossomed in 1855, with the discovery of gold in the Sinnamary River, beginning a miniature gold rush of locals and foreign adventurers seeking to make a fortune in the inhospitable interior of the country.⁴⁹ The discovery of gold and the economic boost such a discovery provided furnished local residents with some sense of self-determination, and, for the first time, French Guianese agitated with the Parisian government for increased control over their own affairs, particularly in reference to the growing penal establishment on Devil's Island. This petition was reported on and supported by the writers of *The Times* in London, who faulted "erroneous administration" for its continued transport of prisoners without proper consent and representation of the other colonists.⁵⁰ How the French government responded to this newfound desire for hegemony, among its far-flung colonists (and supported by their British counterparts) further separated the cultures and ideologies of French Guiana and its neighbors.

Seeking a louder voice in the administration of their settlements, residents of the town of Kourou petitioned Louis Napoleon in 1856, protesting their selection as a penal detention facility. They reassured the Parisian monarchy they were not against the idea of the penal system, or the "principle of transportation," but they expressed concern about their settlement's future: "We only protest today, Sire, against the arbitrary processes by which we are obliged to either take our risks and live in peril amid the prison population,

⁴⁹ Aldrich, 22.

⁵⁰ "French Guiana Can Tolerate the Nuisance of Convicts No Longer," *The Times* [London], December 29, 1856, p. 6.

or to abandon our lands without any remuneration.”⁵¹ The residents of Kourou would, however, quickly learn the negative aspects of pursuing self-rule. Though their petition might have been considered by the equal-rights-minded rulers of the Second or Third French Republics, the aristocratic rulers of the Bonaparte regime were less than moved. French Guianese representation had been suspended from Parliament a few years earlier, in order to quell anti-Devil’s Island rhetoric, and the new petition was met with an extension of the suspension, which eventually lasted from 1854 to 1871.⁵² Though the gold rush benefited the local economy (and still does), the Second Empire had selected the penal colony as French Guiana’s purpose, and the colony would be made to support Parisian interests, not their own.

Devil’s Island continued to grow over the following decade. By 1866, the penal colony had registered 17,017 convicts, including 594 colonials, 329 high-risk political prisoners, and 212 women.⁵³ It was brutally effective. Of the 17,017 total, 6,809 would die from disease, 809 would disappear or escape (most presumed dead in the jungles or the sea), 1,770 would be allowed to return to France, and only 166 would choose to remain in French Guiana at the completion of their sentences.⁵⁴ The territory’s potential as an agrarian settlement and bastion of the mother culture, as British Guiana was, was traded for a penal colony. French Guiana, now without self-government privileges after the rejection of the Kourou petition, hosted an increasing number of prisoners each year of the following decade. Curiously, documents referring to French Guiana before 1870

⁵¹ Citizens of Kourou, French Guiana, “Kourou Petition,” September 10, 1856, from the Archives d’Outre-Mer, Bagne 14, also cited in Redfield, 70.

⁵² Parry and Sherlock, 218.

⁵³ Redfield, 70.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

always referred to it as a “colony.” After 1870, marking the end of a decade of petition rejections and increase in prisoner transportation, many government documents regarding French Guiana began referring to it as a “possession” of France.⁵⁵ This change of a simple word marked a profound, final shift in the attitude of France toward the Guiana territory. Though Britain administered its Guianese possession as a cultural outpost and full-fledged “Little England,” France henceforth treated its holding as a territorial asset only, meant to be governed from the center of France’s unitary government system.

This unitary idea meant that French policy was made in France, specifically in Paris. French economic policies, particularly regarding the sugar trade, flowed through the French Parliament, and colonial assemblies were an insignificant force in colonial administration.⁵⁶ Due to this fundamental difference in colonial policy with the British, French Guiana never experienced long-term, steady growth in political and economic power. A series of revolutions and reassessments of just how strong the central government’s power should be created myriad policy changes and regular removals of self-determination from French Guianese settlers. Each government, upon its installation (usually by force), had to prove its power before the French public, and struggle with regaining imperial control and recentralizing the government to prevent leaching of power to the periphery.⁵⁷ The reassessment, not surprisingly, began anew in 1871 with the transition to the Third Republic. The ideals of the Third Republic encapsulated by Prime Minister Jules Ferry, who in 1885 defined French imperialism with three motives:

⁵⁵ Priestley, 120.

⁵⁶ Parry and Sherlock, 250.

⁵⁷ Peter Padfield, *Maritime Power and the Struggle for Freedom* (New York: Overlook Press, 2005), 384-385.

industrial growth, a mission to “civilize,” and competition with other imperial powers.⁵⁸ Though the “burden of civilizing” the indigenous people is reminiscent of British imperialist thought *à la* Kipling, it clearly was secondary to the industrial growth and competition motives which played out on a much higher frequency. French governments did not create schools for cultural assimilation, nor did they even support attempts to do so by missionaries like Mère Jahouvey. They did, however, pour money into recruitment of plantation laborers and transportation of prisoners. French Guiana had never been, nor would it be under the new Third Republic, a French cultural outpost.

Any arguments suggesting the French government considered Guiana anything but an imperial storage facility must consider the debates over prisoner transport from the 1860s into the 1880s. The South Pacific island of New Caledonia was, like French Guiana, a penal institution held by the French Empire. It had received white prisoners since 1864, and was the preferred place for whites because of its reputation as more amenable to colonization and more comparable to Australia.⁵⁹ For the next thirty years, debates over whether or not New Caledonia should remain a penal colony continued in Paris. By the 1880s, the government had spoken and determined that New Caledonia was simply too promising as a French colony to be wasted as a haven for convicts.⁶⁰ Exclusive transportation of white prisoners to New Caledonia ceased permanently in 1887, and French Guiana became the destination for all races of prisoners. Under new legislation by the Third Republic government, all French imperial citizens between the

⁵⁸ Aldrich, 97-99.

⁵⁹ Isabelle Merle, “Drawing Settlers to New Caledonia: French Colonial Propaganda in the Late Nineteenth Century,” in Tony Chafer and Amanda Sackur, eds., *Promoting the Colonial Idea: Propaganda and Visions of Empire in France* (London: Palgrave Publishers, 2002), 40.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

ages of twenty-one and sixty, regardless of race, who were convicted of more than seven offenses or sentenced more than twice for periods longer than three months, could be classified as recidivists and sentenced to French Guiana for life.⁶¹ French Guiana's own death sentence was therefore carried out—it would be the only “possession” deemed insignificant enough to house all of France's least desirable citizens.

The French imperial view of Guiana as its closet, back yard, or storage facility, built on a foundation of settlement failure, desire to justify investment, and political upheaval at home, fundamentally altered the way this portion of Guiana was administered and developed.⁶² Disagreement over how to structure the future of the colony, define its purpose, and craft its administration prevented a central focus from forming in regard to French Guiana, and it essentially fell into a kind of Green Hell of its own. Peter Redfield, whose work began this chapter, and has been the most comprehensive to date in his analysis of the French possession, explains the challenge of the colony best: “As time passed and my research continued, I began to realize that an obsession with ‘development’—or rather its persistent absence—ran deeply through the soil of French Guiana, inseparable from the history of the colony beneath the department.”⁶³ Though the concept of “civilizing” the area was indeed strong, a French government in flux and its quest to prove competence through imperial success overruled the more assimilation-minded aspects of settlement. Most French territories, with Senegal being an exception, were ruled in cooperation with local rulers with very little interest in replacing aspects of

⁶¹ Redfield, 78.

⁶² Aldrich, 91-93.

⁶³ Redfield, 29.

indigenous cultures with French ones.⁶⁴ Anthropological historian Dana Hale suggests that this lack of cultural interest would have been especially true in French Guiana, because the failures of the past and the dim forecast for future successes would have made assimilation seem like more effort than it was worth.⁶⁵ Unlike in other areas of the French Empire, any resources spent in French Guiana seemed to show little promise of return.

Just where in the hierarchy of French imperial priorities French Guiana sat can be determined by a review of France's appraisals of its other possessions. First of all, a firm distinction was maintained between continental French citizens and those who were in the colonies, either as settlers or natives. Those in the colonies were seen as "subject to the power of the French state," and this power was fully external to them; as non-Frenchmen, they neither participated in its exercise nor its negotiation.⁶⁶ Thus, those in France and those in the rest of the empire were separated in regard to class and power. But within the colonies, too, there was a "hierarchy of races" based on past French experiences with different indigenous groups and how interested they were in assimilating each group into French culture. Hale argues that the native Guianese would rank below even sub-Saharan Africans because of their small population and the French dislike of the region built on its past failures.⁶⁷ When the desire for productivity and the low placement of Guiana on the imperial hierarchy are considered together, the French disdain for its South American possession becomes clearer. Though it could certainly not

⁶⁴ Dana S. Hale, *Races on Display: French Representations of Colonized Peoples 1886-1940* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 9-10.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Majumdar, 10.

⁶⁷ Hale, 12-13.

abandon the possession completely, and thus admit defeat to its rivals in South America, France had no desire to continue investing money in what had become simply a rug under which French imperial problems were swept.

The hierarchy persisted through the end of the nineteenth century, as France shifted its attention fully to its African investment. French territorial holdings in Africa grew from 1 million to 9.5 million square kilometers from 1880 to 1895, and the inhabitants under French rule increased from five to fifty million.⁶⁸ The implications of the new African focus, which was emulated by the British, were not the same for all the Guianas. Britain had established a long-term, viable settlement in British Guiana, begun the process of assimilating the native cultures, and allowed the colony to govern itself to a large extent. This allowed British Guiana to continue functioning in the face of crashing sugar prices and a shift of the homeland's attention to the potentiality of Africa. French Guiana, though, had been administered entirely from Paris, had hardly been settled permanently by any group of size, and had no stable, hybridized culture established. It was, for all intents and purposes, a storage facility for the rest of the French Empire. When French interest shifted out of the Caribbean and into Africa, then, French Guianese prospects dimmed.

In the spring of 1895, a prison transport ship, the *St. Nazaire*, arrived on Devil's Island with its routine load of political prisoners and convicts. Among the boat's compliment of prisoners was an inmate of unusual stature and circumstance. Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a Jew and a decorated French military officer, would begin his sentence to languish in Devil's Island after a show trial and a quick verdict. Though his initial steps onto the Wild Coast would not be heard much past the breaking waves of the

⁶⁸ White, *Black Africa and de Gaulle*, 28.

Atlantic on the Guianese shore, his punishment, suffering, and eventual redemption would spark outrage, sympathy, and support across the ocean. If it had not been made clear before, it would soon become obvious—the Green Hell was no place for rehabilitation, nor was the surrounding colony a place for development. The story of Dreyfus and, consequently, other Devil’s Island convicts, would bring France’s quiet failure in the tropics to the global stage. Just as the sugar collapse would remake British Guiana in the coming century, the Dreyfus Affair and the collapse of faith in the penal colony system would alter French Guiana’s image and its place in the world. While the British Guianese faced a change in economy, French Guiana faced a new century with a complete loss of identity.

CHAPTER SIX

A Dutch Emulsion

As the nineteenth century dawned, Dutch Guiana found itself an ingredient in a stew of Guianas. The Dutch colonial experiment had simmered along with its neighboring colonies, one embracing its mother culture (British Guiana) and another feeling abandoned by it (French Guiana). This mottled mixture of European colonies was not only geographical but also cultural and political. The Dutch applied the British model of total assimilation to the *economic* aspects of the colony, but a French-style *laissez-faire* when it came to cultural differences among its people. The willingness of the Dutch to open their colony to any ethnic group, as long as it was profitable, created a collection of cultural flavors that was difficult to balance. However, their appetite for profit resulted in a willful ignorance of any other issues and kept the Dutch from becoming too involved with the day-to-day drudgeries of maintaining a dish of disparate ingredients. But to this Dutch mixture was added, like in the other colonies, the issue of emancipation—a hard element to digest for those wishing only to make a profit. Dutch Guiana’s composition was different from its British and French counterparts; the Dutch administered Dutch Guiana for economic profit alone, and the way they would handle emancipation would further separate Dutch Guiana’s culture from that of the others.

Though the Dutch empire maintained through the West India Company had always been economically centered, Dutch focus on pure financial development narrowed further during the nineteenth century. After the realization that the fabled El

Dorado would not likely be found in Dutch Guiana, the government of the Netherlands first took a dismissive approach similar to the French. When mentioning the colony's boundaries in descriptions and documents they spoke only of the coastal boundaries. The government found the inland boundaries inconsequential, as they were settled by a small number of insignificant farmers. The Dutch possessed no desire to spend money on survey teams to demarcate such irrelevant territory.¹ The farmers who occupied Dutch Guiana rarely owned the land but instead worked for absentee landlords. Over eighty percent of the plantations established by 1813 were owned by individuals not living in Dutch Guiana.² The Dutch were investors, not colonizers.

As investors, strict economic control of the colony was paramount to the Netherlands government, which did not allow Dutch Guianese to trade with any nations other than the Netherlands until 1848.³ Though the Dutch would permit anyone *into* the colony, even British settlers, their control over the economic activities of the colonial residents *in* the colony was total. As part of its strict economic policy, and in addition to its strict import control, the Dutch government augmented its profit margins by investing minimally in the development of the colony. Even when situations on the ground suggested more direct investment was needed, the government was hesitant. For example, when overall cultivated acreage declined due to crop failure later in the century (50,000 cultivated acres in 1848 fell to 40,000 by 1862), allocations for infrastructure to improve output never increased. Global allocations for *all* Dutch colonies never, at any

¹ Engel Sluiter, "Dutch Guiana: A Problem in Boundaries," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 13, no. 1 (February 1933): 5.

² Knight, 139.

³ Rosemarijn Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery: a Social History of British Indian and Javanese Laborers in Suriname* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), 11.

time during the century, rose above 0.1% of the total budget. Remembering that this was the total for all Dutch colonies combined, and that Dutch Guiana was one of the least funded colonies of this group, the 0.1% number becomes even more paltry.⁴ The colony received no investment until it first showed revenue potential. Such was the policy for the strictly profit-minded Dutch imperialists.

Money talked in Dutch Guiana, possession of it determined who was allowed to speak in the government. Because Dutch Guiana was a full-fledged agricultural export colony until 1866, it was administered by the largest plantation owners united in a court of authority known as the *Hof van Politie*. As long as the plantation owners continued sending profits back to the home country, they were allowed complete hegemony over the colony through the *Hof van Politie*; however, as the agricultural sector declined (which will be discussed in greater detail later), the *Hof* was replaced by the *Koloniale Staten*. The *Koloniale Staten* took over permanently in 1866; plantation owners ceased to dominate the body, and by 1901 membership had been expanded to all taxpayers with an annual income of over 1,400 guilders.⁵ Though the occupations of government leaders changed over the century, their financial requirement did not. Contributors to financial well-being were given positions of authority, and all others were not.

The *Koloniale Staten* was created by the Dutch as a constitutional, quasi-representative government designed to leave most governing in the hands of local, wealthy legislators without the expense of creating a full parliament. The colony was given the right to submit and approve its own budget, but even this version of home rule

⁴ Edward Dew, *The Difficult Flowering of Surinam: Ethnicity and Politics in a Plural Society* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978), 24.

⁵ Gerald Newton, *The Netherlands: a Historical and Cultural Survey, 1795-1977* (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1978), 176.

came with economic stipulations. As long as the Dutch controlled the books and received acceptable levels of profit, they were willing to leave the colonists to their own devices. However, in the agreement setting up the new *Koloniale Staten*, the colony could lose the privilege of budget creation in any given year if one of three issues was present: if a Dutch subsidy was needed to supplement the colony's funds (which was nearly constantly true), if the Dutch ruler withheld approval because of poor economic performance of the colony, or if the colony failed to meet the imposed budget deadline.⁶ Clearly, Dutch Guiana's level of independence was not based on its ability to stand on its own culturally, or on its inhabitants' self-sufficiency, but rather on its revenue contributions alone.

The Dutch level of interest in Guiana did not go much beyond these budgetary restrictions. Isolated and unimpressive from a fiscal standpoint, Dutch Guiana was of little concern to the Netherlands government. Slavery kept it running at a profit, no additional investment was needed to keep it "in the black," and significantly increasing its output would require more time and money than the government was willing to invest. Until something changed the *status quo*, there was no need for additional action on the part of the home government. In fact, the budget for Dutch Guiana was traditionally one of the very last items discussed before the Christmas recess marking the end of the year's parliamentary sessions. Important issues for the colony were often "automatically" passed rather than debated. Most representatives to the body could not have debated effectively about the colony even if they had wanted to, since reports took so long to trickle in from South America that they usually did not arrive in the offices of the States-

⁶ Henk E. Chin and Hans Buddingh, *Surinam: Politics, Economics, and Society* (London: Frances Pinter Publishers, 1987), 9-10.

General (the Dutch parliament) until the budget had already been passed.⁷ As long as the slaves worked and the money arrived in the coffers regularly, Dutch involvement in the day-to-day activities and cultural development of the colony was nil.

Dutch involvement in their *assets*, though, was considerable, and no asset was more closely monitored or brutally exploited than its slaves. Because slaves were treated as capital, rather than humanity, Dutch slave owners developed a reputation for brutality. The resulting high mortality rates of the African slave population, a by-product of this brutality and the inhospitable climate conditions, had many results that shaped the formation of Dutch Guiana. Because the ratio of Africans to Europeans was higher in Dutch Guiana than anywhere else, and because the high mortality rate meant most slaves on a given plantation were recently “African” and not acculturated, violent resistance and maroonage occurred at much higher rates in the colony than anywhere else with the possible exception of Haiti.⁸ The high frequency of runaways and armed rebellion would suggest the question of whether the Dutch treatment of slaves was that much harsher, or if they simply pulled slaves from tribes with a stronger tradition of armed resistance.

This question of harshness is answered in the quantitative data from Dutch Guianese plantations. Between 1668 and 1823, between 300,000 and 325,000 African slaves were imported into the Dutch plantations; in 1823, the total population of African descent in the colony hovered around 50,000.⁹ Conversely, the British and French colonies in North America imported a comparable number of slaves over the same

⁷ Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 25.

⁸ Kenneth Bilby, “Roots Explosion: Indigenization and Cosmopolitanism in Contemporary Surinamese Popular Music,” *Ethnomusicology* 43, no. 2 (Spring-Summer 1999): 256-257.

⁹ Richard Price, *The Guiana Maroons: a Historical and Bibliographical Introduction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 9.

period, numbering around 427,000; but by 1825, the United States alone had a black population of over two million.¹⁰ Though these are absolute numbers, they still represent an interesting comparison of mortality. Despite a century and a half of reproduction and growth, Dutch Guianese slaves decreased in number by 85 percent, while those in the United States had quadrupled in the same period—Dutch slaves were dying before producing offspring, meaning if mortality did not occur more often, it at least happened more quickly. The discrepancy was not limited to a North American phenomenon, either. Jamaica and Saint-Domingue, which had comparable notoriety for slave brutality and similar environmental conditions, experienced less mortality than Dutch Guiana. Jamaican slaves decreased by around 50 percent over the same period, while the slave population of Saint-Domingue declined by around 45 percent.¹¹ Estimates from other sources support the grim picture of Dutch Guianese slave mortality. Another source suggests the average number of slaves imported annually from 1650-1826 was between 1,500 and 2,000, a slightly lower total of about 250,000 slaves. The 1943 census of Dutch Guiana reflected only 70,415 individuals of African descent.¹² Even factoring in the less-than-perfect census methods of counting maroon villages, this 72 percent decline in population is astounding when considering there had been over a century of reproduction and growth by the 1943 count. Neither French nor British Guiana matched these figures, either; in fact, slaves did no worse than free settlers in French Guiana, where the mortality rates of the two were nearly identical through the heart of the

¹⁰ Price, 9.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Philip Hanson Hiss, *Netherlands America: the Dutch Territories in the West* (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1943), 108.

nineteenth century.¹³ By all accounts, the slave trade in Dutch Guiana was disproportionately fatal. This pattern had been established for over a century in the colony, as the Dutch slave traders spent more time replenishing declining slave populations in the Guianese plantations than any other sector, as seen in Table 6.1. Though the Dutch were not the sole providers of slaves to all colonies in the New World, the pervasiveness of the Dutch slave trade makes it a good reflector of overall trends and allows comparison of the numbers to be feasible. The fact that more slaves were going to Dutch Guiana than all of Spanish America, an exponentially larger area, is striking.

Table 6.1. Total Number of Slaves Delivered by the Dutch Slave Trade, 17th-19th C. ¹⁴

Destination	Brazil	Dutch Guiana	British Guiana	Dutch Antilles	Spanish America	Misc.
Total Sold	26,500	190,000	42,000	17,000	141,500	40,000
Percentage of Total	6%	41%	9%	4%	31%	9%

These numbers reflected a critical demand for new slaves in the colony. Further, the data from the nineteenth century only included slaves traded up to 1814, when the slave trade was officially abolished by the Dutch. An estimated 300,000 additional slaves (not found in the numbers above) were smuggled into Dutch Guiana after abolition and before emancipation.¹⁵ The colony's prosperity was clearly built on the backs of slaves, and the Dutch desire for profitable colonies kept the demand for them high.

¹³ Redfield, 200-201.

¹⁴ Adapted from Johannes Menne Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade 1600-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 300.

¹⁵ Chin and Buddingh, 6.

This economic priority and desire for free labor made the idea of abolition and emancipation difficult to accept for planters in the Dutch colonies, especially Dutch Guiana. The Netherlands, particularly in regard to the West Indies, possessed an absence of any noteworthy abolitionist movement. The British had developed abolitionist traditions and movements over a century earlier, as had the French.¹⁶ For the Dutch, the idea of complete abolition with no economic offset seemed financially irresponsible; instead, Dutch planters and most representatives in the *Hof van Politie* preferred the practice of manumission in the years leading up to emancipation in 1863.

Because slavery was seen as an economic rather than a social issue among the Dutch planters, an economic solution was preferred. This came in the form of manumission, or voluntary abolition by the slave owner under certain restricted conditions. To increase production, Dutch plantation owners offered the possibility of manumission after a period of increased productivity or hard work. They also utilized manumission to keep housing or food costs down in lean years. Not all maroons in Dutch Guiana, therefore, were escaped slaves, as was the case in British Guiana; instead, some had simply been cut loose and sent away to save a plantation money. This process was not without government regulation, either, since money could also be made from the manumission itself. Until official emancipation in 1863, Dutch Guiana's colonial court required slave owners to petition for permission to manumit a slave legally. These petition letters, called *requesten*, were then approved or denied by the court, with the costs of filing usually deferred to the slave owner but occasionally on the slave, if he or

¹⁶ Gert Oostindie and Bert Paasman, "Dutch Attitudes towards Colonial Empires, Indigenous Cultures, and Slaves," Americas edition, *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 31, no. 3 (Spring 1998): 353.

she had gathered enough funds from side ventures to fund his or her own manumission.¹⁷ Of all the Guianas, manumission on a large scale was unique to Dutch Guiana, the colony that placed economic feasibility above all other issues when dealing with colonial administration.

This is not to say that manumission was without benefit to the slaves, as well. For many slaves, staying near family or close to friends made running away and joining maroon communities in the jungle less attractive; manumission allowed them to stay close and remain on the right side of the law. Basically, the courts defined manumission as, legally speaking, a transfer of property; in this case, the slave was allowed to purchase himself or herself. Despite the challenges of manumission and the obstacles a newly freed slave faced, the process became a noteworthy cultural phenomenon throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. While only five percent of all Dutch Guianese were free citizens in 1738, the proportion rose to fifteen percent by 1830 principally through manumission, and continued to increase until emancipation.¹⁸ For the Dutch investors, the process was simple—import slaves at a rate necessary to overcome their mortality, increase production by providing them incentives to work through the promise of manumission, and leave them to their own cultural devices before and after manumission, as long as they continued to produce. Pro-abolition legislation passed in the neighboring Guianas, however, forced the Dutch to reconsider the role slavery played in their economic system. Their economic success, however, would cause that issue to wait.

¹⁷ Rosemary Brana-Shute, “Negotiating Freedom in Urban Suriname,” in Mary Turner, ed., *From Chattel Slaves to Wage Slaves: the Dynamics of Labour Bargaining in the Americas* (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Press, 1995), 149.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 148-149.

Like its British counterpart, Dutch Guiana developed a strong plantation economy during the first half of the nineteenth century. Sugar plantations had skyrocketed in number during the previous century, while cotton and coffee both experienced a surge at the turn of the nineteenth century. Seemingly incongruous at first, the number of sugar estates experienced a steady decline through the nineteenth century; this, however, was not completely due to a declining economy but rather an increase in efficiency. In 1862, for instance, only half the number of sugar plantations existed as had in 1714. The 1862 total sugar production for the colony, though, was twice that of 1714.¹⁹ Thus, Dutch Guiana's economic growth, riding on the backs of sugar and slaves, mirrored that of British Guiana. But, rather than amplifying assimilation policies and acculturation programs as the British had done, the Dutch viewed the subsistent colony as not in need of fixing. Slaves were left to develop their own cultures independently. Because so many were recent arrivals (due to their heavy workload and high mortality), Dutch slave communities retained a much stronger African cultural element than their British counterparts. These isolated, africanized slave populations also felt more independent because of the Dutch *laissez-faire* approach to cultural assimilation. Meanwhile, as production increased on the larger, more efficient plantations, small-scale plantation farmers were edged out of the agricultural business. The smaller farmers needed to release slaves to reduce costs, and the larger farms no longer needed as many unskilled laborers. More slaves than ever found themselves in the position to lobby for manumission.

Dutch authorities noted the change in labor patterns. In 1828, in response to these developments and as part of a campaign to simplify administration, King Willem I

¹⁹ Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 11-12.

appointed a personal representative, Johannes van den Bosch, to investigate the labor situation in Dutch Guiana. Van den Bosch concluded that slavery had become no real asset to the colony, and that once British Guiana abolished it for good, it would become increasingly difficult to maintain the existing slave population.²⁰ Van den Bosch's conclusions garnered support over the next decade, as more Dutch officials determined that slavery was outliving its usefulness. Planters began a focus on continued mechanization and intensification, rather than land acquisition and increasing the number of workers.²¹ This policy saved them the costs of housing and feeding large slave populations, not to mention the hassle of seeking out slaves themselves. Slaves had become exponentially harder to procure due to the changes in French and British slave policies.

In fact, slavery might have died out by the middle of the 1840s in Dutch Guiana, were it not for a curious political development. Van den Bosch had suggested merging the Dutch Antilles and Dutch Guiana into a single colony, administered from Paramaribo, as a way to reduce administrative costs and streamline the government. The king accepted this suggestion and merged the colonies, placing the capital in Paramaribo, but, by 1845, the unified Dutch colonies had not yet realized an increase in agricultural profits or a decrease in subsidy requests. Due to the failure of economic performance, the Netherlands government returned Dutch Guiana to its own administrative district.²² Though on the surface this seemed like a classically economic decision that only affected

²⁰ Cornelis Goslinga, *A Short History of the Netherlands Antilles and Surinam* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), 154.

²¹ Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 12.

²² Goslinga, *A Short History of the Netherlands Antilles and Surinam*, 155.

the way the colony was administered, there were deeper implications. The reversal of Van den Bosch's suggestion opened the door for critics of emancipation to attack his credibility. Their attacks were, at least, successful enough to help prolong the process of emancipation another eighteen years.

Nor did subsequent administrations help matters. The next governor-general, Reinier Frederik baron van Raders, who took over the new Paramaribo government in 1845, supported emancipation, but his costly proposals for improving river transportation and providing better care for slaves cost him support within the thrifty Dutch government at home. Overall, his tenure failed to achieve anything other than the opening of the colony to free trade.²³ Though this was an important accomplishment in its own right, it did nothing to change the labor situation in the colony.

The cause for emancipation continued to ignite and then stall over the course of the next decade. The *Hof van Politie* wished to eliminate slavery in order to reduce administrative costs but could not do so without compensating the planters, who still maintained a strong hold over the colony's economy and, thus, its government. The cost of this compensation would be massive. Census data reflected 33,000 slaves remaining on plantations in 1853, and the Dutch government could scarcely afford the compensation the planters in the *Hof* were seeking.²⁴ Without proper reimbursement, planters were hesitant to emancipate, but without emancipation, many incurred the high costs of maintaining slaves they no longer needed. Consequently, over the course of the 1850s, the Dutch debate over abolition paralleled the economic market's peaks and

²³ Goslinga, *A Short History of the Netherlands Antilles and Surinam*, 155.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

valleys.²⁵ Eventually, though, the Dutch were forced to accept the economic necessity of abolition. It had never been an ideological debate.

The social change of emancipation inevitably arrived, however, providing new challenges to the Dutch governors. The first bill for the full abolition of slavery throughout the empire reached the States-General on July 17, 1856, though it did not pass and enter into force until May 7, 1859.²⁶ The bill abolished slavery beginning in 1860 for the East Indies, and beginning in 1863 for Dutch Guiana and the West, with owners allowed 300 guilders for each slave they released. Fear among the white minority that freed slaves from British Guiana would make their way into Dutch Guiana and cause an insurrection before emancipation kept the reins tighter on the Guianese slaves for the additional three years.²⁷ The interests of the planters were never in jeopardy.

Compensation for the Dutch Guianese plantation owners (300 guilders per slave) was 100 guilders higher than compensation per slave in the Antilles, a reflection of the Dutch Guianese “plantocracy” and its power to negotiate, as long as it continued turning a profit.²⁸ The States-General in the Netherlands authorized the compensation, almost ten million guilders total, to come from surpluses extracted from the colony on Java.²⁹ But the compensation did not solve all the planters’ problems; though they needed *fewer* slaves, the plantation owners certainly could not do without *all* the slaves. Another

²⁵ Knight, 169.

²⁶ Newton, 174.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 174.

²⁸ Hiss, 107.

²⁹ Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 14.

economic decision would need to be made if production were to continue at its current levels.

The solution to the economic woes caused by emancipation was *Staatstoezicht*. Under this program, newly freed slaves were required to work as a contract employee for a plantation owner of the freedman's own choice, under supervision of the state, for a ten year period. The *Hof van Politie* believed this would provide three advantages: a peaceful transition from slavery to free labor, training of former slaves for the new "responsibilities of free citizenship," and the guarantee of an adequate supply of labor for plantation owners during the transition out of slavery.³⁰ Like manumission, the solution of state supervision acted as an economic response to an economic problem and had little to do with social or cultural issues, short of making plantations more secure and less prone to slave rebellion. In short, the Dutch government wanted to turn its slaves into wage workers who would work harder and buy the trappings of freedom rather than assisting them financially in the transition to free citizenry.³¹ Additionally, this allowed the process of manumission to continue in a new way—slaves could purchase an early release from their contract from a plantation owner with their earnings. Slaves were no longer slaves, but as free citizens they were still required to *purchase* the complete freedom to work where they pleased.

Despite the policy's thinly veiled parallels to slavery before emancipation, the idea of *Staatstoezicht* worked better for many slaves than it did for plantation owners. Many former slaves in fact purchased their freedom much earlier than the expiration of their ten-year contract period, and then achieved the acquisition of their own small

³⁰ Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 14.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

subsistence farms, as they had in British Guiana.³² For plantation owners, *Staatstoezicht* did not provide the decade-long cushion they had hoped to use to replenish the labor supply. The abolition of slave labor was exacerbated by a quickly dwindling paid labor market (since many former slaves valued personal independence more than a wage, which they had never had before, anyway). Smaller farmers who could not afford to mechanize and increase efficiency instead took their compensation money from the Dutch government and left Dutch Guiana. A resulting lack of investment capital, coupled with the labor shortage and increased competition with other sugar producers, including Cuba and colonies in the East (with the opening of the Suez Canal), squeezed out many of the remaining mid-range sugar growing operations.³³ This left an odd dichotomy in Dutch Guiana—agriculture was performed either by very small plot farms or giant, centralized conglomerates, which needed more capital to grow. The dichotomy resulted in an exodus of middle class farmers, a segregation of free black subsistence farmers, and a petition by the prominent planters to Willem III in 1870 for immediate financial aid to prop up the failing plantation economy.³⁴ Willem III granted the request but was, at this point, funding only half of a colony. Prominent white planters, an even smaller segment of the population than ever before, were tied to the purse strings of the Netherlands, while independent former slaves built communities and networks of small plot farms deeper in the interior with little interest in cooperating with their former overseers to build a unified polity.

³² Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 12-13.

³³ *Ibid.*, 15.

³⁴ Goslinga, *A Short History of the Netherlands Antilles and Surinam*, 158.

The Dutch problems of administration developed into a unique issue. At this time, Britain was trying to unify its colony, assimilate its colonists under one cultural rubric, and stamp out maroon rebellion. France was changing its vision for Guiana from a cultural outpost and viable self-ruling colony to a storehouse and penal institution administered directly from Paris. The Dutch, because of their financial policies and lack of investment in the inclusion of free blacks into Dutch Guianese colonial society, found themselves negotiating two colonies. One colony was a white European urban settlement along the coast, with an infusion of former slaves who were willing to live shoulder-to-shoulder with their former overseers and attempt a life in the city. The second was a strongly independent maroon network of communities in the interior. Before considering the new urban Dutch Guiana, we must first consider the fate of this interior population.

Richard Price, whose work on the Guiana maroons has been among the most extensive studies of the group to date, sums up the differences between Dutch Guiana's maroons and the maroon communities of the remainder of the Guianas:

For some 300 years, the Guianas have been the classic setting for maroon communities. Though local maroons in French and British Guiana were wiped out by the end of the eighteenth century, the maroons of Suriname, known as 'Bush Negroes,' have long been the Hemisphere's largest maroon population. With the possible exception of Haiti, these have been the most highly developed independent societies and cultures in the history of Afro-America.³⁵

The way the Dutch managed both slavery and emancipation directly caused this independence. The seeds of this independent maroon society had been planted much earlier than at the moment of emancipation. Sociologist and cultural anthropologist Humphrey E. Lamur, from the University of Amsterdam, explores the roots of Dutch maroon society in an article for the *Journal of Black Studies*, in which he uses data and

³⁵ Price, 2.

anecdotal evidence from Vossenburg, a typical pre-emancipation plantation in Dutch Guiana. At Vossenburg, like most other plantations, slaves lived for over two centuries as harshly oppressed people who first had to learn how to survive in their hostile environment. As the group developed and negotiated ways to continue their survival and improve their quality of life, the slave societies on Vossenburg created a strongly unified culture, a family system, and a networking system based on reciprocity and collective responsibility.³⁶ Because of the severe level of oppression and the harshness of life in Dutch Guiana, the bonds built among the slaves of the Dutch colony emerged comparatively sturdy.

More evidence of this strong bond among the slave communities and the maroon societies that grew out of them, is found in the ways that white plantation owners chose to address them. Rather than taking an assimilative approach as the British had, the Dutch planters applied a sort of *apartheid* in Guiana to protect themselves. Social policies discouraged assimilation particularly across racial lines. Slave owners prevented slaves from developing skills that could later harm them by strictly limiting their workers to the performance of certain types of labor only.³⁷ Additionally, slaves were required to wear different colored clothes from their masters and were forced to play different music.³⁸ Though these restrictions existed to some degree in other slave holding societies in the New World, the Dutch approach took *apartheid* further, even placing

³⁶ Humphrey E. Lamur, "The Slave Family in Colonial Nineteenth Century Suriname," *Journal of Black Studies* 23, no. 3 (March 1993): 379-381.

³⁷ Allison Blakely, "Historical Ties among Suriname, the Netherlands Antilles, Aruba, and the Netherlands," special issue, *Callaloo* 21, no. 3 (Summer 1998): 474.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

obstacles in the way of slaves' conversion to Christianity.³⁹ Other colonies (see French Guiana, for instance) had used Christianity as an acculturation and assimilation tool.

The cultural *apartheid* policy had the reverse effect from what was intended. Maroon communities increased as oppressed slaves ran away to the interior and joined the growing communities. Though living outside the parameters of the colony provided these runaways no political power, maroons routinely exercised their collective strength during the pre-emancipation nineteenth century. For instance, after poor health conditions and malnourishment killed over fifteen thousand slaves in the 1819 smallpox epidemic, riots and insurrections by maroons incensed at the poor treatment of their compatriots (and often family members) became commonplace.⁴⁰ In 1821, rioting maroons made their way into Paramaribo and set fire to over four hundred houses. Additional arsons occurred in 1832.⁴¹ The maroon arsons illustrated a clear symptom of the stresses within a society wrestling with the marginalization of such a significant portion of its population.

The presence and resilience of the maroon culture in Dutch Guiana continued to strengthen because the Dutch did little to assimilate them. Moreover, since the brutality of the institution meant a greater percentage of new arrivals from Africa (as replacements), the slaves were less "Europeanized" than those in other colonies. But, as mentioned earlier, they also "Creolized" faster, meaning they combined their existing traditions into a single village or community network, establishing a new Afro-American, "Creole" culture along the way, rather than simply remaining divided along old African

³⁹ Blakely, 474.

⁴⁰ Goslinga, *A Short History of the Netherlands Antilles and Surinam*, 153.

⁴¹ Ibid.

tribal or linguistic lines.⁴² The rapid Creolization can not be traced to slave origins either—slaves in British and French Guiana generally originated from the same areas, the same African tribes, and through the same traders. The groups of slaves arriving in the Guianas were relatively similar across the board.⁴³ Yet, the Dutch slaves created more successful and more hybridized long-term societies.

The methods Dutch slave owners used contributed heavily to the forming of these societies. First, the Dutch plantation owners purposefully bought slaves from different regions who spoke different languages, in order to decrease the chance of rebellion. This worked in the short term, but also created a situation in which slaves were forced to develop a mixed language intelligible to all in order to effectively communicate. What first kept them apart linguistically spurred their Creolization later. Second, the Dutch practiced the unique method of keeping families together, particularly mothers and children. Not surprisingly, this was an economic decision—slaves tended to work harder when family units shared the labor, and their resale value was higher when in a pre-made work unit.⁴⁴ The practice created the unusual combination of strong families and ethnically, linguistically, and tribally mixed communities. Family traditions had been strong to start, but multi-tribal slave communities formed out of necessity; fathers and mothers could only protect their children by forming a collective village to raise and help protect the child. The village had to hybridize, share its strength, and work collectively on the basis of reciprocity, or put families' children in jeopardy. The decision to create a unified, multicultural slave (and later maroon) community reflected in the way children

⁴² Price, 20-21.

⁴³ Ibid., 12-13.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 19.

viewed their elders—children in these slave and maroon communities often called many different men “father.”⁴⁵ This simple cultural phenomenon represented a significant sociological event—the slaves learned to unite and work together sooner than their overseers. While not necessarily successful in staving off mortality rates, this method was a great success in cementing maroon culture together.

Other evidence of this successful hybridization of culture exists. Linguistic evidence abounds; three new languages were created by the slaves of Dutch Guiana—Sranan, Ndjuka, and Saramaccan. Speakers of one could usually understand the other, though this is slightly less true of Saramaccan, being widespread enough to stand on its own. The three languages formed as successful hybrids of approximately 20 percent English, 20 percent Portuguese/Spanish, 10 percent Dutch, and 50 percent mixed African tribal languages.⁴⁶ The languages, spoken by nearly all of the maroon communities, still exist today—a testament to the success of the marginalized African population in retaining their cultural foundations and building upon them.

The communities also thrived because of a hybridization of crops. The mixture of slaves of differing origins made possible the introduction of new food groups, including improved varieties of yam, ackee (an African fruit), and breadfruit, in the communities. These slaves took what they learned from the globally savvy Dutch farmers and added it to a community corpus of knowledge about cultivation of native African foodstuffs. This created a varied and nutritious dietary foundation for maroons living in the jungles, both

⁴⁵ Melville and Frances Herskovits, *Rebel Destiny: Among the Bush Negroes of Dutch Guiana* (New York: Whittlesey House, 1934), 126.

⁴⁶ Price, 36.

before emancipation as runaways and afterwards as free farmers.⁴⁷ For the remainder of the nineteenth century (and a great deal of the twentieth), *apartheid* allowed the maroons to develop a fully viable culture parallel to the Dutch under a single Guianese umbrella. Dutch Guiana had become a collection of mini-Guianas.

The marginalization of slaves in the Europeanized portion of the colony may have resulted in additional freedom of the maroon communities, but it restricted the economic freedom of Dutch planters, now supported by neither slave *nor* wage labor. The first attempts after the abolition of the slave trade to increase available labor were domestic. The government of the Netherlands suggested—and attempted—the importation of Dutch farmers, *Hollandsche Boeren*, to work on understaffed or deserted plantations. In 1845, the first group settled in Voorsburg and Groningen, but had been given inadequate provisions. Of the first 384, 189 died of typhus, 56 returned to the Netherlands, and only about a hundred survived long enough to move up the Suriname River, settling a few years later for good near Paramaribo.⁴⁸ The plan succeeded only marginally; though a small enclave of *Boeren* descendants still exists in modern Suriname, they never arrived in large enough numbers to check the decline in labor force availability.⁴⁹ An 1858 expedition, another marginal attempt, brought five hundred Chinese farmers from Macao. After hardships similar to the *Boeren*, these few Chinese farmers did become quite successful, a precursor to the eventual long-term solution to labor shortages.⁵⁰ Though these attempts represented a good start, it had become clear that a concerted effort from

⁴⁷ Parry and Sherlock, 195.

⁴⁸ Hiss, 110-111.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Goslinga, *A Short History of the Netherlands Antilles and Surinam*, 156.

the Dutch government was necessary to counter the severity of the labor shortage. The *Koloniale Staten*, successor of the *Hof van Politie*, took up the issue.

In February 1868, the *Koloniale Staten* issued a letter to King Willem III requesting that the government consider the possibility of funding and supporting a mass immigration project. The letter was introduced to the States-General as a bill, “to promote the importation of free laborers to the colony of Suriname.”⁵¹ The bill was divisive, particularly when a fund to economically support the immigration project was proposed. After two years of strident debate, a diplomatic agreement on another front presented a lower-cost alternative to financing immigration. A treaty between the Dutch and British designed to consolidate territory under each empire’s control entered the negotiation phase by early 1870. Dutch minister of foreign affairs Theodorus Roest van Limburg and British minister plenipotentiary to the king of the Netherlands, Edward Harris, had forged an agreement giving the British control of present-day Ghana, while the Dutch received from Britain full control over the Indonesian island of Sumatra.⁵² The British had already been moving some imperial subjects from Sumatra and from India to their colonies in the west, including British Guiana, with some success. With the mechanisms for recruitment and transportation already in place in British India, van Limburg suggested saving valuable funds by using the existing British system to obtain slaves for Dutch Guiana.

The States-General agreed, and in 1870, before the final signing of the treaty (now known as the Cession Treaty), an additional agreement was added to it, allowing the Dutch government to recruit freely any laborers interested in leaving India for Dutch

⁵¹ Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 25-26.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 30-31.

Guiana. In return, the Dutch promised that these Indians would remain subjects of the British Empire during their tenure as wage workers in the Dutch plantations.⁵³ This was the ultimate illustration of Dutch economic priority. The Dutch government was willing to concede its own sovereignty by relinquishing authority over settlers living in its own colony in return for the chance to recruit new workers and increase agricultural production. If it had not been clear before 1870, it was patently so after the signing of the treaty with Britain—the Netherlands put no priority ahead of economic success, while the British valued retention of sovereignty over its subjects above all else. This was the fundamental difference between the imperial ideals of British and Dutch Guianese administrators.

The Cession Treaty marked a new phase in Dutch colonial development centered upon the encouragement of immigration. By June 5, 1873, the *Lalla Rookh* arrived in Fort Nieuw Amsterdam, having left Calcutta with 399 new Indian immigrants. Though the British had been importing Indian wage laborers for thirty-five years already, for the Dutch it was a new process, as emancipation had officially occurred only a decade before, and the *Staatstoezicht* plan was still in effect for another month. Nonetheless, the Dutch planters wanted no interruption in the supply of labor, so these immigrants had been offered, with permission of the British crown, a five year sight-unseen contract to work on the plantations.⁵⁴ The indentured laborer immigration project achieved the most success in augmenting the labor force to date. Between 1873 and 1916, over 34,000

⁵³ Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 30-31.

⁵⁴ Rosemarijn Hoefte, "A Passage to Suriname? The Migration of Modes of Resistance by Asian Contract Laborers," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 54 (Fall 1998): 19.

Indian indentured laborers arrived.⁵⁵ For many Dutch planters, choosing to utilize this new, cheap labor source meant severing the connection with former slaves completely, causing a deeper rift between the two cultures now developing parallel to one another in Dutch Guiana.

The experiment, though, was by no means a perfect system. The first Indian workers had been conscripted from the homeless and indigent in Calcutta and had no knowledge of agriculture, no experience working for Dutchmen, and often substandard health and fitness to start.⁵⁶ Because the program was under-funded, the recruiters had a smaller, cheaper pool from which to draw labor. Though these initial groups succeeded enough to justify continuation of the plan, they did not thrive enough to stay once their indentured period was over, reflected by repatriation rates of 2 percent for British Guiana and 30 percent for Dutch Guiana.⁵⁷ Nonetheless, once the States-General opened the gates of Indian immigration, the process never reversed; from 1873 on, Dutch Guiana would be a pluralist society, made up of independent maroons, financially motivated Dutch planters, and a working class of Indians.

Table 6.2. Provincial Origins of Indentured Servants Departing Calcutta, 1877-1889⁵⁸

Area of Origin	Total	Percentage
United Provinces	4,577	43%
Bengal & Bihar	5,067	48%
Oudh	419	4%
Punjab	296	3%
Central India	199	2%

⁵⁵ Prakash C. Jain, "Indians Abroad: A Current Population Estimate," *Economic and Political Weekly* 17, no. 8 (February 20, 1982): 300.

⁵⁶ Hiss, 113.

⁵⁷ Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 56.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

With under-funding causing concerns about the quality of workers being found in Calcutta, debates began in the States-General over who should bear the burden of funding the immigration project. How much government involvement there should be in the granting of immigration funds also developed into a hotly contested issue. Meanwhile, the planters, still centralizing and mechanizing their operations, formed stronger collective groups. But their success still lagged behind the business operations in the Dutch East Indies—businessmen in this portion of the empire soon supplanted the local Dutch Guianese plantocracy's influence over government decisions.

The largest corporation of the Dutch East Indies, the *Nederlandsche Handel-Maatschappij* (or NHM), began in 1824 by the royal decree of Willem I in order to manage and grow trade between the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies. Through the 1870s, NHM purchased land and sugar processing facilities in Dutch Guiana as part of an expansion of imperial operations. NHM officials believed keeping the facilities staffed with workers to be paramount, so they used their financial influence to broker a deal establishing a government-supported immigration fund to cover portions of transportation and repatriation costs, as well as the salaries of emigration agents and recruiters, which passed by two votes on November 11, 1879.⁵⁹ The quality of workers recruited for the NHM plantations and the private ones alike improved, and the program of immigration continued to be the solution of choice to keep workers supplied to Dutch Guiana.

Nonetheless, the Indian immigrants had remained colonial British citizens and subjects of the British crown. Doubts about the dependence on a foreign power for a labor supply grew by means of a renewed nationalism movement in the Netherlands. These ideological challenges, and the concomitant rise of an anti-emigration movement

⁵⁹ Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 33.

in India, reduced the number of immigrants from India by 1889. Once again, Dutch Guiana faced a crisis of labor shortages. The NHM, based in the Dutch East Indies for over fifty years, believed the solution could be found on the islands of Java and Madura. In 1873 and 1883, the company attempted to supplement Indian immigration with imported laborers from the islands but met with resistance from the Dutch government. The States-General disagreed with the idea of migrating people from an already profitable possession when it could just as easily recruit them from elsewhere.⁶⁰ But changes in ideology both at home and abroad caused the Javanese immigration movement to gain popularity through the 1880s. NHM was finally provided a license in 1889 to import about a hundred Javanese workers on an experimental basis. Preparations began, and 94 Javanese arrived in Dutch Guiana in 1890. They succeeded to the degree that overseers requested about six hundred more in 1893.⁶¹ Even though their production did not entirely live up to the expectations created by the NHM lobbyists, the Colonial Ministry continued sanctioning Javanese migration until the 1940s; by the time the program ended in 1945, nearly 33,000 Javanese had come to Dutch Guiana.⁶² Another ingredient had been added to the ethnic stew of South America.

The real reason for encouraging Javanese immigration rested, of course, on economic issues. Javanese laborers developed a reputation for willingly accepting lower wages. Intimately familiar with this fact, NHM began lobbying for increased Javanese labor in Dutch Guiana to lower its own administrative costs. New governor T.A.J. van Asch van Wijk convinced more private plantations to sign onto the idea and hire Javanese

⁶⁰ Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 44.

⁶¹ Dew, 28.

⁶² Hoefte, "A Passage to Suriname?" 19.

workers on a trial basis in 1891.⁶³ These workers in no way revolutionized production, but were sufficient for the purposes of plantation work and continued to be imported. Their lack of desire to remain in Dutch Guiana was similar to the Indians who had entered the country, however; repatriation rates for both groups were too high for the tastes of the Dutch government.

Table 6.3. Immigration to Dutch Guiana, 1873-1932⁶⁴

Years	British Indians	Javanese	Total Immigrants
1873-1877	4,281	0	4,281
1878-1882	2,384	0	2,384
1883-1887	3,928	0	3,928
1888-1892	4,870	94	4,964
1893-1897	5,112	1,480	6,592
1898-1902	2,562	3,546	6,108
1903-1907	3,386	3,014	6,400
1908-1912	4,966	2,550	7,516
1913-1917	2,815	1,738	4,553
1918-1922	0	8,835	8,835
1923-1927	0	6,578	6,578
1928-1932	0	4,137	4,137

In 1895, the Dutch Guianese *Koloniale Staten* sought to reduce repatriation rates by offering land and a small cash payment to those wishing to stay after their indentured servitude expired. This was accomplished in two ways. The government possessed pre-owned land for habitation and agriculture, often located on deserted plantations. The colonial administration divided these lands, called *gouvernements-vestigingsplaatsen*, or “government settlements,” into small plots and leased them, with the smallholders not allowed to purchase the land outright or have permanent rights to it.⁶⁵ For the first six

⁶³ Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 49.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁶⁵ Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 56.

years, however, rent was free, and after that period, the lease conditions remained quite reasonable. The other category of land grant, more difficult to control, was unowned but available land the colonists had to develop themselves, mostly in the western districts of Coronie and Nickerie. The prospect of free and clear titles to up to ten hectares of land and the ability to work it for personal profit did keep many indentured servants from leaving, but it had another effect—it caused fewer indentured servants to renew their period of indenture.⁶⁶ Thus, the institution of indentured labor declined, just as slavery had.

Table 6.4. Repatriation Rates from Dutch Guiana, 1878-1932⁶⁷

Years	British Indians	Javanese	Total Repatriation
1878-1882	809	0	809
1883-1887	1,640	0	1,640
1888-1892	1,758	0	1,758
1893-1897	818	18	836
1898-1902	1,186	36	1,222
1903-1907	1,551	924	2,475
1908-1912	501	1,675	2,176
1913-1917	1,063	0	1,063
1918-1922	1,860	338	2,198
1923-1927	118	205	323
1928-1932	111	2,383	2,494

Despite the decline of indentured servitude, the institution brought a significant number of Javanese and Indian settlers into the colony. Unlike government policies toward indentured servants in British Guiana, however, the Dutch made no real

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 64.

centralized attempts to educate or acculturate the new immigrants, primarily because the Dutch governors did not know whether to consider the Indians and Javanese as temporary or permanent residents. The *Koloniale Staten* relied on reports from the agent-general, the officer put in charge of supervising the immigrants and seeing to their needs. This officer worked in partnership with the British consul in Dutch Guiana, who also had jurisdiction as per the original treaty of 1870. The first agent-general, J.F.A. Cateau, worked closely with the British consulate to set up improved medical care and living conditions for incoming Indian workers, largely utilizing the immigration funds provided to him by the States-General beginning in 1878.⁶⁸ This close relationship was not always the case, though, and often acted as one of the obstacles to a consolidated policy in regard to the immigrant laborers.

The agent-general's chief instrument of assimilation and integration on the local level was the district commissioner. The agent-general's office assigned each of these nine officers to a district and gave them the task of routine supervision of working conditions, education, and plantation productivity. But because their task focused more on the economics of productivity, which required endless gathering of taxes, compilation of statistics, and census taking, the district commissioners had little time for any cultural assimilation work. Indentured servant communities, like the slave communities that preceded them, were thus largely ignored.⁶⁹ The primary way the British Guianese government acculturated immigrants was through a centralized education system; but because the Dutch saw the indentured laborers as temporary employees rather than potential new colonists, their education did not receive priority. Educational

⁶⁸ Dew, 26.

⁶⁹ Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 87.

opportunities did have to be provided, but the corporation generally administered the schools, rather than the government's direct supervision. Therefore, the corporations often selected school staff members from the immigrant community rather than from the colony.

Under these parameters, the first “coolie school” opened at Mariënborg plantation in 1890. The school's first teacher, predictably, was an Indian immigrant—the corporation found Indian teachers both more readily available and less expensive than bilingual Dutch teachers. The teacher, Ahmed Hosen, was fluent in Hindi and Urdu, and taught the children of Mariënborg's workers all courses exclusively in these native languages.⁷⁰ Dutch Guiana's inspector of education, H.D. Benjamins, did not support education in the native languages, preferring the assimilative technique of teaching in Dutch, but economic interests of the colony prevailed, and bilingual Dutch teachers were not hired.⁷¹ Because of this disparity in teaching methods, Dutch Guianese immigrant children received a quite different education from their counterparts in British Guiana. There was precedence for this; British instructors had taught English in British Guianese slave schools since the British took the colony in 1815; slave children in Dutch Guiana never received Dutch instruction, though maroon children between the ages of seven and twelve did receive some introduction to the language (but not until 1876).⁷² Teaching the language to the children of temporary employees simply did not seem important to most Dutch administrators.

⁷⁰ Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 174.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Newton, 174.

Compulsory education for Indian and Javanese children never ranked high on the agenda. In 1891, only about 20 percent of Indian children between the ages of seven and twelve attended school, and these children did not integrate into the national education system until 1907.⁷³ The “coolie schools” were completely separate and not held to the same standards as the colonial white schools, and little to no effort was made to integrate any faster. In fact, even after the school system integrated Indian children into the same schools as other children, they remained in separate classes taught in Hindi for several decades more.⁷⁴ The lack of assimilative education did not stop with language, either.

In British schools, the “superiority of English civilization” received special emphasis, but no such curriculum existed in the Dutch coolie schools.⁷⁵ Children learned little of Dutch culture outside the plantation, and the parallel development (rather than the hybridization) of cultures continued. Adults also possessed little knowledge of Dutch culture. Further evidence of the Netherlands’ economic focus, plantations like Mariënborg forced workers to do business only with their employers, and not in the towns. Unlike their British or French counterparts, Dutch planters received permission, even encouragement, to run stores directly from their plantations. Some areas even passed laws that *required* plantation workers to shop exclusively at the plantation store, which naturally developed inflated prices.⁷⁶ For the Dutch, *apartheid* was the cultural order of the day, and economic monopolization was their method of controlling immigrant subjects.

⁷³ Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 174-175.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 163.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 115.

The Dutch priority of economic development over cultural hegemony stands in stark contrast to the British model. The original treaty for dealing with the immigrant population from India provided the quintessential example of the divergence of ideologies. Until 1927, the Hindustani of India existed as legal British subjects, answering both to the Dutch agent-general and the British consul in Paramaribo. The consul had the right to communicate with the indentured servants before and after their distribution into Dutch Guiana, freely and without restriction.⁷⁷ The Dutch Guianese government did not like this arrangement, but the position of the Netherlands States-General remained clear—workers were more important than jurisdiction. This theory drove the *apartheid* policies, and its lack of cohesive assimilation strategies resulted in a concurrent strengthening of immigrant cultures and disappearance of cultural hybridization.

Dutch Guiana became unique among the Guianas as a collection of disparate, independent groups with little to no real cultural exchange with one another. The Dutch enjoyed much more economic success than the French, so their attitude toward the other cultures within the colony (and the colony itself) was not simply indifferent, but their imperial methodology focused so heavily on profitability and economics that they did not share any of the British desire for cultural homogeneity or hegemony. As long as profits came in, different ethnic communities would remain separated and left to their own devices.

The “mixing but not melting” emulsion of cultures in Dutch Guiana most clearly presented itself in Paramaribo. Members of all the cultures moved into the city but maintained the traditions that prevented their successful mixing in other areas.

⁷⁷ Hoefte, “A Passage to Suriname?” 21.

Paramaribo, as the capital of a rapidly mechanizing agricultural colony, became a haven for former agricultural workers displaced by technology, freed by emancipation, or by manumission. When the colony consisted entirely of middling plantations, this was not the case. For example, Paramaribo accounted for less than 10,000 of the 49,000 residents of Dutch Guiana.⁷⁸ The population consisted of mainly whites, but even this demographic segment was hardly homogenous—Sephardic Jews from Brazil and the Netherlands accounted for almost a third of the 3,360 whites in the colony, while French Huguenots, Englishmen, and German settlers counted nearly as numerous as the Dutch, who constituted a minority even within the European population.⁷⁹ This lack of demographic majority even in Paramaribo explains much of the Dutch position in the coming decades—they were too few in number to be in a strong position in regard to government policy or cultural dominance. The will of the Dutch settlers simply could not be enforced.

Paramaribo's growth as a multiethnic city really began with Van den Bosch's suggestion of merging Dutch Guiana and the Dutch Antilles into a single political unit. Though the unification did not last, its tenure as the metropolitan center of the western Dutch empire, cultivated by its first governor-general, Paulus Roelof Cantz'laar, endured.⁸⁰ As plantations slowly declined in size and power, Paramaribo emerged as a center of Dutch Guianese activity. By 1830, about 27 percent of the population resided there, more than double the percentage just seventy years before.⁸¹ Slaves in the city had

⁷⁸ Chin and Buddingh, 5.

⁷⁹ Oostindie and Paasman, 353.

⁸⁰ Goslinga, *A Short History of the Netherlands Antilles and Surinam*, 154.

⁸¹ Turner, 150.

more opportunities to make money through side business ventures and more contact with whites overall; and while the two groups did not combine or hybridize, whites' views on manumission and emancipation in Paramaribo did differ significantly from those in the rural areas. Because of this friendlier atmosphere, and as Paramaribo's influence increased, more free blacks moved to or remained in the city.⁸² The influx of former slaves meant a strange marriage of *apartheid* and urbanization—distinct, isolated cultures learned how to live cheek-to-cheek with one another without fully integrating or becoming subservient to one dominant culture.

The resulting mosaic of Paramaribo represented a harbinger of things to come for modern Dutch Guiana. Neighborhoods did not segregate along racial or class lines; Europeans, Jews, free blacks, and even those with some indigenous ancestry (known as “free coloureds”) lived next to each other, though housing varied in quality. Whites and wealthier free blacks and free coloureds occupied the houses on the street, while lower class slaves (and later freemen) lived in the enclosed yards behind them. Slave populations were constantly rotated between Paramaribo and surrounding plantations, and white populations changed continuously with the frequent arrival and departure of sailors, soldiers, would-be plantation administrators, and bureaucrats.⁸³ The only real mixing that took place was in the music of Paramaribo, which Creolized parts of European, African, Caribbean, and even later Indian and Indonesian music into one of the most eclectic and pluralist modalities in the world.⁸⁴ With the musical hybridization

⁸² Turner, 150.

⁸³ Ibid., 151.

⁸⁴ Peter Maunel, “The Construction of a Diasporic Tradition: Indo-Caribbean ‘Local Classic Music’,” *Ethnomusicology* 44, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 98.

leading the way, much of the twentieth century culture of Dutch Guiana emerged from Paramaribo's mosaic. One of the first accredited Hindustani teachers, for instance, moved to Paramaribo after teaching on the plantation schools. This influential Hindu Brahman, J.P. Kaulesar Sukul, became an influential political leader, and the mentor of Jagernath Lachmon, who later led the first and most dominant Hindustani political party in Dutch Guiana.⁸⁵ The Paramaribo emulsion, a microcosm of the larger Dutch Guiana emulsion, would be the training ground for leaders of the ethnically based, separate-but-equal political parties of the next century.

Despite the growth and cosmopolitan success of Paramaribo, the nineteenth century passed as an endless parade of crises and transitions for Dutch Guiana. The colony experienced enormous changes in its purpose, moving from a successful plantation economy to a pluralist society built on the margins of sugar producing mega-corporations. In 1832, plantation estates numbered 431; in 1846, there were 383. Following a fatal epidemic of yellow fever in 1851, marking the low point in Dutch Guiana's economic development, estates declined even more precipitously. In 1853 there were 263; ten years later, there were just 217 estates with 41,000 cultivated acres and 32,000 employees. By 1873, the estates had dropped to 123, the acreage to 25,000 acres, and the workforce to 13,000 laborers.⁸⁶ Though, as mentioned before, this reflected an increase in efficiency and not a decrease in production, it required more immigration to keep the balance. So much demographic shifting took place that the recruitment of laborers from other continents continued to be a necessity. Changes had become so

⁸⁵ Dew, 31.

⁸⁶ J. Warren Nystrom, *Surinam: a Geographic Study* no. 6 (New York: Netherlands Information Bureau, 1941, 24.

severe that in 1863, the total population of Dutch Guiana was actually less than it had been in 1830.⁸⁷ Consolidation of land, reduction in the workforce, and movements of people (blacks to the interior and the city, whites back to the Netherlands, and Asians into Dutch Guiana) created upheaval on an unprecedented scale.

Table 6.5. Total Coffee and Sugar Plantations in Dutch Guiana, 1830-1890⁸⁸

Year	Coffee Estates	Sugar Estates
1830	170	108
1850	76	92
1860	44	87
1890	0	14

Consolidation and modernization became necessary due to the global crisis of sugar prices. In 1864, a kilogram of sugar sold for 0.26 guilders; the average price by 1939 was 0.04 guilders.⁸⁹ As the plantation economy contracted in response to the new market restrictions, more unskilled agricultural workers and former slaves lost employment and immigrated to Paramaribo to find non-agricultural work. NHM purchased Mariënborg plantation in 1880 and promptly outfitted it with electric lights, a railway, and the new vacuum pan system (which increased sugar cleaning and processing efficiency). The corporation renovated all its buildings with iron fittings, and the processing capacity increased to 300,000 kilograms of sugar cane a day, making it the second largest mill in the world.⁹⁰ This marked a significant transition in Dutch Guiana—sugar became big business, and it was run by large corporations with fewer workers, usually imported from other areas of the world where the corporation (in this

⁸⁷ Knight, 139.

⁸⁸ Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 16.

⁸⁹ Hoefte, "A Passage to Suriname?" 21.

⁹⁰ Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 15.

case, NHM) had connections. Paramaribo and other urban areas became the destination of displaced workers. The creation of an emulsion of different, distinct cultures along the urban shore commenced. A lack of interest in combining these cultures under a central Dutch umbrella—through assimilative education or non-*apartheid* practices—meant the emulsion remained and the future leaders of Dutch Guiana would have to negotiate the extreme plurality of the resulting society.

In effect, the changes to Dutch Guiana's plantation economy changed the entire country's fate. The colony itself was becoming a mosaic: a cosmopolitan city surrounded by a collection of mega-plantations, with a vast network of maroon farms in the outlying areas. But even the vast mechanization and downsizing of mid-size plantations could not keep up with global changes in trade. Until 1883, Dutch Guiana's exports were all sugar-based—sugar, molasses, and rum were the three largest exports; however, from 1883 on, growers in Jamaica, Java, and even sugar beet growers in Europe were flooding the market and undercutting prices. Sugar had provided 80 percent of the export economy in 1873, but only 3 percent by 1920.⁹¹ Attempts to diversify failed—cacao crops failed in 1895 due to witch-broom disease, and the coffee industry could not compete with Brazil's. Attempts to grow bananas failed in 1907, a casualty of the spreading Panama leaf disease. Disadvantageous freight rates, slower shipping times, higher wages, and a series of these disastrous plant diseases placed Dutch Guiana firmly behind the other Dutch colonies in the east, and many others in the west, in agricultural and economic growth.⁹² Colonists and administrators realized that Dutch Guiana, even after the

⁹¹ Price, 174.

⁹² International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, *Surinam: Recommendations for a Ten Year Development Program* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, for the International Bank for

modernization and consolidation efforts of NHM, would not be able to thrive, or possibly even exist, as a purely agricultural economy.

Hopes for diversification echoed those in British Guiana when explorers discovered gold along the Surinam River in 1875. The *Koloniale Staten* granted the first gold mining contracts by the end of the year, in hopes that this would provide a new source of income. By 1882, about six thousand square kilometers worth of concessions had been granted, yielding around five hundred kilograms of gold total.⁹³ In 1905, a railroad was built from Paramaribo to open the fields.⁹⁴ The gold rush, though, proved too small to diversify the economy, though it would bring even more individuals of varied ethnic descent into the country in search of personal fortunes. Without significant gold production, and in the face of ever-declining agricultural export dollars, the fiscally-focused Dutch began referring to Dutch Guiana as a “burden”.⁹⁵ The government would have to find a new way to keep its collection of divergent cultures viable, or develop a way to rid itself of the responsibility.

As Dutch Guiana entered into the twentieth century, it joined the other Guianas in a time of uncertainty. British Guiana struggled with a collapse in sugar prices and a restructuring of its agricultural system under the steady hand of the British government. French Guiana faced a decline in the popularity of the penal colony system and the potential loss of the only profitable venture in its history, along with an utter loss of

Reconstruction and Development, at the request of the governments of the Netherlands and Surinam, 1952), 15.

⁹³ Maarten Kuitenbrouwer, *The Netherlands and the Rise of Modern Imperialism: Colonies and Foreign Policy 1870-1902* (New York: Berg Publishers Limited, 1991), 150.

⁹⁴ Hiss, 117.

⁹⁵ Price, 174.

French interest in developing the area. Those in Dutch Guiana endured all of these problems—the Dutch wanted nothing to do with an unprofitable colony, and the hodgepodge of cultures would have to find a way to work together to diversify and survive.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Experiment Neglected

One morning in 1928, upon returning to his laboratory in London, Alexander Fleming made a startling discovery. After working with several Petri dishes of *staphylococcus* bacteria and failing to clean his experiments properly, he left for the day. The dishes sat unsupervised overnight, in the darkness of the laboratory. Upon his return the following day, Fleming found that his experiment had been fundamentally altered—encroaching upon the bacteria was a colony of blue-green penicillin mold. The experiment, due to his neglect, looked nothing like it had at inception. This accidental discovery occurred during an era in which a similar kind of sloppy experimentation and abandonment was taking place. As the British, French, and Dutch averted their gaze from the New World and returned it to old European conflicts and new African challenges, the Guiana experiments lay fallow. By the time social and political turmoil thrust the little colonies back into their respective imperial spotlights, the experiment had been eternally changed. The foundations each suzerain had laid over the previous centuries would profoundly affect the future development of the runaway dominions.

In British Guiana, rapid social changes brought about by a growing immigrant community, followed by economic changes stemming from a collapse in sugar prices, had produced a volatile climate. British bureaucratic talent was heading for Africa, and the powerful plantocracy was losing ground to an emerging lower middle class of non-European teachers and storekeepers. Labor and ethnic representation issues continued to

grow through the opening decades of the twentieth century; by 1915, non-Europeans constituted the majority in the British Guianese colonial legislature.¹ Despite a declining bureaucratic participation and the growing power of its subjects, though, Britain remained in control of British Guiana. The British government retained power over the colonial constitution and elections, having appointed a powerful governor to oversee a bureaucracy of transplanted Londoners.² It is important to remember that the European population of British Guiana, unlike that of its Dutch counterpart, was overwhelmingly British; British citizens dominated the demography and the government, so their interests never seemed at risk.³ Nonetheless, with less backing from the crown, now more interested in its African holdings, British planters and local government officials experienced growing unrest as the population of immigrants, former slaves, small-plot farmers, and factory workers sought increased agency.

Riots in several sugar factories and large plantations in 1905 and 1906 interrupted production on an unprecedented scale. These riots often originated in the protests of fledgling unions and workers' organizations, made necessary by the mechanization in the sugar and mining industries. Indian workers in British Guiana had diversified their employment across multiple industries; 70 percent of Indians lived on plantations in 1890, but by 1911 less than half did.⁴ By the time World War I had taken its toll on European production and demand for colonial crops rebounded, these Indians and their fellow workers found themselves in the position to lobby for better labor conditions and

¹ Percy C. Hintzen and Ralph R. Premdas, "Guyana: Coercion and Control in Political Change," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 24, no. 3 (August 1982): 340-341.

² Ibid., 340.

³ Smith, *British Guiana*, 100.

⁴ Newman, 31.

higher wages through the union system. Lower middle class European factory workers unionized, too—Hubert Critchlow formed the British Guiana Labor Union in 1919 for this group, and other workers unionized along ethnic lines.⁵ Within three decades, British Guiana possessed fifteen unique trade unions, most established by ethnic groups.⁶ Ethnicity drove both union membership and social organization membership—as early as 1916, the Chinese Association and the British East Indian Association, both ethnic social groups, formed in the colony. The Portuguese Benevolent Society followed a year later.⁷ The early stages of unionism and ethnic division, entwined uniquely in British Guiana, had appeared.

Britain still held more interest in cultural hegemony than the economic kind, though the war temporarily required a tightening of economic control. The British Empire had been engaged in free trade up until the war, and only during the conflict did dominions like British Guiana receive tariff preferences to help them compete with suppliers outside the empire. Almost immediately after the war, the British largely rescinded these preferential tariffs, even as other imperial powers remained isolationist and protective of domestic agriculture and industry.⁸ Only World War I (and, later, the Great Depression) caused the British government to attempt imperial economic

⁵ Colin Baber and Henry B. Jeffrey, *Guyana: Politics, Economics, and Society* (London: Frances Pinter, 1986), 18.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Steve Garner, *Ethnicity, Class, and Gender: Guyana 1838-1985* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2008), 74.

⁸ Vincent A. Mahler, “Britain, the European Community, and the Developing Commonwealth: Dependence, Interdependence, and the Political Economy of Sugar,” *International Organization* 35, no. 3 (Summer 1981): 475.

consolidation and protectionism of its colonies. Thus, it was not economic compliance the empire sought from Guiana, but cultural loyalty.

In an attempt to reestablish cultural hegemony after the inattention of World War I, the British revoked local majority control in the colonial legislature in 1928, giving power back to British administrators and plantation owners.⁹ They also amended the colonial constitution to replace the old Court of Policy (the original colonial administrative body) with a new Legislative Council. This council consisted of the powerful, London-appointed governor, the British colonial secretary, the appointed attorney general, eight nominated officials, five nominated planters, and fourteen members elected from the colony.¹⁰ The government designed these constitutional changes specifically to give the British tighter command over the ethnically unstable colony.

The Crown Colony system did preserve British hegemony, but it was poorly timed and resulted in local resentment. The constitutional changes had been part of an overhaul of the imperial system, in which the British exercised more oversight of nominations and the appointing of governors. But the onset of a global depression in 1929-1930 made the British rulers, now in complete control, seem economically unreliable to the insular colony of British Guiana. Accordingly, an increase in strikes and riots began in 1934.¹¹ The British government, seeing the possibility of a full-scale revolt, introduced reforms suggested by an investigative committee, the Moyne

⁹ Hintzen and Premdas, 340.

¹⁰ Smith, *British Guiana*, 55.

¹¹ Robert H. Manley, *Guyana Emergent: the Post-Independence Struggle for Nondependent Development* (Boston: G.K. Hall and Company, 1979), 2-3.

Commission, in 1938. These included an expansion of democracy by reducing property and income qualifications for those wishing to run for election to the Legislative Council.¹² These reforms quieted the protests for a while, but only by giving local leaders and parties more power. When Britain again ignored colonial issues to deal with problems closer to home, at the onset of World War II, the imperial administrators had unwittingly given the colonists, through these reforms, even more tools for growing their power and influence.

For the duration of World War II, the British colonies suffered privation especially. Not only were locals being called to the front lines to serve as troops (the Guianese served with the British West Indies Regiments), but also standards of living at home declined. The average working class family in Georgetown earned an average of \$7.41 per week, but spent \$8.23 on high-priced food and necessities.¹³ The situation became dire for Guianese families, who now looked to their unions and ethnic organizations to seek political change at home. Local leaders emerged from the disgruntled masses to address these issues. Chief among them was Cheddi Jagan, a United-States educated son of an East Indian sugar estate foreman. At the age of 29, Jagan rode the wave of discontented middle class voters and won election to the Legislative Council from the East Demerara district in 1947.¹⁴ This marked a transition for British Guiana—though Britain’s cultural influence continued, its political grip

¹² Manley, 2-3.

¹³ Cheddi Jagan, *The West on Trial: My Fight for Guyana’s Freedom* (New York: International Publishers, 1966), 78.

¹⁴ Baber and Jeffrey, 21.

weakened. The colony's multiple ethnic parties began negotiating this resulting power vacuum.

As the first individual to unite the ethnic factions with any degree of success, Jagan would become an important figure in British Guiana. While serving in the Legislative Council, he developed a political relationship with African barrister Forbes Burnham. Together, they formed the People's Progressive Party (PPP) in 1950. The British, returning from the war to find their control of Guiana in jeopardy again, attempted to appease the colonists by granting universal adult suffrage in 1952. Though protests and anti-British rhetoric diminished, the maneuver removed too much British influence from the government and gave more power to the emerging middle class.¹⁵ The PPP included small farmers, sugar factory workers, bauxite miners, local shopkeepers, domestic laborers and longshoremen, some local businessmen, the unemployed, and many independence-minded youth.¹⁶ Britain's colony was now, politically speaking, completely out of its control.

Under pressure to preserve some supremacy, the Crown offered a new constitution in 1953. The compromise document, drawn up under the recommendations of a three man commission under the chairmanship of Sir E. J. Waddington, established universal suffrage, a bicameral legislature (an elected house—the House of Assembly, and an appointed body—the State Council), and an Executive Council.¹⁷ The new cooperative government hoped to please both the ethnic parties and the business interests

¹⁵ Roy Arthur Glasgow, *Guyana: Race and Politics among Africans and East Indians* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970), 99.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 103.

¹⁷ Brian Irving, ed., *Guyana: a Composite Monograph* (Hato Rey, Puerto Rico: Inter-American University Press, 1972), 10.

of British investors. It failed to do either, as the fractured ethnic parties began finding a common voice. Fearing a complete loss of authority, Parliament responded by forcing the new legislature and executive council into an advisory-only role and giving the British-appointed governor full control of the state.¹⁸ The PPP swept elections in 1953, as it moved in a more Marxist, anti-British direction. The party split in 1955 along primarily ethnic lines; Jagan's pure Marxism and his political partner Forbes Burnham's softer socialist ideals could no longer work under the same umbrella. East Indian support remained in the PPP, while Burnham's fellow African descendents followed him in forming the PNC, or People's National Congress.¹⁹ A smaller party, the United Force (UF), formed later in 1960, comprised of Portuguese, Chinese, and mixed race businessmen.²⁰ Jagan's PPP and Burnham's PNC both won a significant number of elections through the remainder of the 1950s and the early 1960s.

Tensions, however, increased dramatically, and questions emerged about whether British Guiana would be controlled by the British, a political party based on ethnicity, or by an ideological party like Jagan's Marxists. Further rioting and labor strikes in 1962-1965 led the British Colonial Office to offer a conference on independence, in order to distance itself from the growing strife. Britain granted its colony independence on May 26, 1966; the nation dropped the "British" moniker and changed its name to the indigenous spelling—Guyana.²¹ An unstable political cacophony of ethnically and ideologically-based parties, the first independent Guiana was born. Nonetheless, forced

¹⁸ Hintzen and Premdas, 341.

¹⁹ Manley, 8-9.

²⁰ Glasgow, 104.

²¹ Manley, 9-10.

to sink or swim, the Guyanese learned to cooperate across ethnic and ideological lines to form a constitutional cooperative republic. With Guyana's independence secured, this thesis on colonialism can now leave the realm of political history. Guyana's modern cultural makeup, consciously and unknowingly formed by British policies and practices, will be considered in the final chapters.

On the other end of the Guiana Shield, on its modest cape thrust into the equatorial Atlantic, French Guiana had grown far distant from its British equivalent. Guyane, as it would come to be called more frequently, experienced equal suffering, but less upheaval, sparse ethnic division, and few attempts at reinvention or reformation. French Guiana was a different kind of experiment—a settlement with no settlers, anchored by sleepy Cayenne. Its appearance in the early twentieth century was best described by exiled prisoner René Belbenoit in his memoir *Dry Guillotine*. He describes Cayenne thus:

Although it is the main city of one of the oldest possessions under the French flag, it is the capital of a colony without colonists. For who would establish himself in a region where, at every moment, he comes face to face with none but convicts?²²

The colony—and its capital—now existed for only one reason. France had abandoned its colonization experiment completely, and intended to use it instead to store the products of other failures of society, tucking them away to protect the French self-image of purity behind a vast wall of ocean.

The French Guianese culture existed as a culture of exile. Other than the few farmers and miners eking out subsistence in the inhospitable clime, only four types of recognized citizenry existed, all *bagnards* (residents of the *bagne*, or prison settlement).

²² René Belbenoit, *Dry Guillotine: Fifteen Years among the Living Dead* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1938), 219.

Those convicted under common law and exiled (*transportés*), those convicted of political crimes (*déportés*), and recidivist criminals under life sentence (*relégués*) shared the land with *libérés* who had served out their sentence and remained exiled but unconfined.²³ Whether incarcerated or not, all had been sentenced to share French Guiana, and all arrived the same way. After a waiting period on the Ile de Ré in northern France, they were locked into eight cages of sixty to eighty prisoners each. Threatened with jets of steam from the boiler by the watchful guards, they spent fifteen to twenty days on ships similar to the old slave trading vessels, bound for a truly terminal destination.²⁴ No colony-building opportunity, no economic investment, and no rehabilitation awaited them.

In the words of Belbenoit, “The policy of the Administration is to kill, not to better or reclaim. To the Administration, the men who arrive on the convict ship are things to be disposed of.”²⁵ Prisoners were rarely even issued clothing during their entire stay in Guyane.²⁶ Those lucky enough to have less than a life sentence eventually earned release from the confines of the prison or one of the maximum security islands (including Devil’s Island, made famous by several famous memoirs to be discussed later). These *libérés* remained under a sort of parole (*doublage*) that required them to stay in Guyane either for a length of time equal to their original sentence or for life.²⁷ During the *doublage*, they remained under constant threat of new sentences for any rule infraction;

²³ Redfield, 78.

²⁴ Ibid., 78-79.

²⁵ Belbenoit, 60.

²⁶ Ibid., 83.

²⁷ Redfield, 81.

many found freedom just as difficult as confinement. It proved nearly impossible to find employment, because the few employers in the colony preferred convict labor (it was free, after all) over paid labor. Local laws also forbade ex-prisoners from working in restaurants, selling drinks, or opening their own businesses, while simultaneously requiring that they be employed as a condition of their parole. This *doublage* persisted in full until 1925, when some reform was introduced, though most former convicts fared barely better after its passage.²⁸ Everywhere, the colony and its “colonists” received reminders of Guyane’s second-class status. Belbenoit reflects the obsequiousness of the penal colony:

The convict is everywhere; he overruns the town. At the far end of the town, near the sea with its back to the great rainforest, is the penitentiary. There are no walls around it—for what use would these be, when a convict wanders alone. . .²⁹

The condition of French Guiana did not go unnoticed by its neighbors, either.

The British saw the penal institution as a “plague on the face of civilization,” and often refused to hand over fugitives to the French consul.³⁰ For French citizens in Europe, the penalization of Guyane also emerged as a subject of discussion. A great deal of negative publicity resulted from the embarrassing Dreyfus Affair, in which Alfred Dreyfus spent four and a half years in exile on Devil’s Island. Though many insisted upon his innocence and publicly railed against the charges of espionage that had been brought against him, the French government refused to budge. He was returned to France for a retrial in 1899, but it would be 1906 before the Jewish captain was fully exonerated.³¹

²⁸ Redfield, 81.

²⁹ Belbenoit, 225.

³⁰ An anecdote related to this practice can be found in Belbenoit, 9.

³¹ Redfield, 87.

Discussions of Dreyfus' innocence invariably accompanied news of the atrocities associated with internment in French Guiana, and his cause became intertwined with a more general cause of rejecting the penal colony as an institution.

Writings about the French Guianese state of affairs gained in popularity throughout the years between Dreyfus' arrival and the end of World War II. Emile Zola initiated the criticism of the French justice system in his open letter to the French president. The letter, entitled "J'Accuse. . ." appeared in the Paris newspaper *L'Aurore* in 1898 and accused the French government of anti-Semitism and of barbarism for its continued maintenance of the colony.³² After Dreyfus' exoneration, memoirs like Belbenoit's *Dry Guillotine*,³³ a true account, and Henri Charrière's *Papillon*,³⁴ mostly fictional, captured the imaginations of North American and European readers, continuing to erode the reputation of the penal colony system and of France itself. W. Somerset Maugham's short story, "An Official Position," perhaps most damning of the institution, tells the story of a convict-turned-executioner in order to attack the humanity of France's penal colony system.³⁵ From the writing of "J'Accuse" in 1898 until the publication of "An Official Position" in 1940, the French imperial system as exercised in the Guianas came under unprecedented negative scrutiny.

Why, then, did the French not abandon French Guiana as they had come so close to doing so many times before? Had the colony not become more trouble than it was

³² Emile Zola, "J'Accuse," *L'Aurore*, January 13, 1898.

³³ Rene Belbenoit, *Dry Guillotine: Fifteen Years among the Living Dead* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1938).

³⁴ Henri Charrière, *Papillon*, 5th ed. (New York: Harper Collins, 1999).

³⁵ W. Somerset Maugham, "An Official Position," in *W. Somerset Maugham: Collected Short Stories, Volume Four*, Penguin ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 221-238.

worth? Curiously, while interests in New World colonies waned on the part of the British and Dutch, French focus increased. Granted, French Guiana existed as an afterthought; economically and militarily the colony had been abandoned in favor of Africa and Asia just like its counterparts. But French Guiana remained a part of the overall French imperial scope because France's desire to maintain territory originated in neither economic profit (as with the Dutch), nor a need to spread a self-proclaimed "superior" culture (as with the British). Rather, the French used imperialism in the twentieth century to fend off the threat of obscurity and wipe away the specter of defeat. While literature highlighted France's failure, it also spurred its imperialism. Albert Sarraut's *Mise en Valeur des Colonies Françaises* (1923), among other works published between the world wars, suggested a kind of human solidarity in French imperialism and offered reassurance. France had fallen behind Germany in military might, area, population, and industrial output, and already suffered from a "sense of national fatigue, uneasiness, doubt. . ." about its place in the world when compared to Britain, Russia, and the United States.³⁶ This book and its equivalents suggested to France that glory could still be found in its empire, even after the losses at home from World War I. The French imperial experiment was designed not to create new bastions of culture, but to resurrect the old one.

For this reason, France developed a renewed interest in the colonization aspects of Guyane, and attempted to diversify the agricultural and mining economy by adding rum production, rosewood timber, and balata gum to its exports. Though these additions met with minor success for entrepreneurial individuals like Jean Galmot, one of Cayenne's

³⁶ Raymond Betts, *Tricouleur: The French Overseas Empire* (London: Gordon and Cremonesi, 1978), 38-40.

richest citizens, the overall top-to-bottom economic growth the French government sought was not achieved.³⁷ The lack of economic success frustrated the French, and in 1930 French Guiana was divided in two. The northern region, administered by a governor-general appointed from Paris, held the European population and the penal colonies. The southern interior, known as Inini, was controlled by the governor and a separate council. Though this operation intended to allow the government to administer the “productive” coastal regions differently from the unexplored interior, it resulted simply in a further separation of the indigenous and maroon populations of Inini from the French colony.³⁸ French Guianese experienced the same ethnic separations as those in British Guiana, with two major differences. First, the French recognized only two ethnic groups: Frenchmen, and everyone in Inini. Second, because those from Inini had been dismissed and no assimilation had taken place, the coastal colony had become a completely European “mini-France” while Inini had become virgin jungle as culturally distant from Cayenne as from Paris itself.

The separation and subsequent administrative intensification in the coastal regions could not prevent the economic depression of the 1930s from affecting Guyane. With the global depression reducing demand for luxury items, tropical commodities from the colony fell in price. Colonial businesses went bankrupt while indebted investors lost properties and savings.³⁹ Just as in British Guiana, disgruntled middle class workers sought more radical change. The economic crisis had the same effect in France itself—a debilitation of centrist political parties and the rise of leftist (the SFIO and PCF) and

³⁷ Redfield, 35.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Aldrich, 118.

reactionary right political parties. In 1936, one of these leftist alliances, a coalition of socialists, radicals, and quasi-communists known as the Popular Front, won a parliamentary majority in France under the leadership of Léon Blum.⁴⁰ Blum's government would briefly reform the interpretation and administration of French Guiana.

Blum and his Colonial Minister, Marius Moutet, introduced a series of labor reform and indigenous rights legislation to the French Assembly and managed to get most of it passed into law. The worker-friendly reforms reduced strikes and rioting, while the indigenous reform kept the residents of Inini from rebelling against their inclusion in French Guiana. Additionally, Moutet began the process that abolished transportation of prisoners to the penal colonies in 1938.⁴¹ Though the Popular Front government would not last beyond 1937, and the upheaval of German invasion a few years later would put further reforms on hold, the Front gained a great deal of popular support throughout France and the colonies.

The Popular Front's policies should not, however, be confused—reform did not mean retreat, and even Moutet and Blum seemed to agree that France should remain an empire and renovate its image through successful mastery of its colonies. Moutet had spoken toward the end of his term of a “colonial rule” that acted as “fraternal solidarity.” It is important to note, here, that even Moutet had no intentions of abandoning the empire, but simply hoped for a “more humane type of colonization.”⁴² The people of France seemed to be in agreement. In early 1939, an opinion poll taken among the residents of France included the question, “Do you think it would be just as painful to

⁴⁰ Aldrich, 118.

⁴¹ Ibid., 119.

⁴² Chafer and Sackur, 243.

cede a piece of the colonial empire as a piece of French territory?” The pollsters reported a surprising set of answers. 53 percent agreed wholeheartedly with the statement, with only 43 percent in opposition.⁴³ A newfound desire to maintain empire had been discovered in the wake of defeat and the gloomy outlook for other threats to come. The French empire, after all, provided some sense of compensation and reassurance to French citizens about their present and future, and its necessity spurred French imperialism forward while the Anglo-Dutch version receded. Through the troubles of World War II, the French citizens would need to hold onto this vision of strength more than ever.

In the war years of 1940-1945, the French empire descended into severe disarray. The population was split between Free French and Vichy governments, and these authorities struggled politically with one another in a near-civil-war. American and British troops occupied most of the colonies, including French Guiana, to protect them from invasion in the absence of their French defense. American occupation especially brought with it an anti-colonial ideology and further highlighted the weaknesses of France, both to its own colonies and those abroad.⁴⁴ Newspapers in the United States reported regularly on shortages of food and supplies in the colony, reading them as symptoms of a failing empire.⁴⁵ The situation seemed to be worse because of France’s position as master over the colony; ironically, French Guiana itself could probably have survived independently were it not for France’s own needs. Until 1943, the colony had mined over 280,000 pounds of gold; but the two world wars had caused the more modern

⁴³ Aldrich, 120.

⁴⁴ Betts, 136.

⁴⁵ For examples, see “Shortage of Food in Guiana, Report,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, September 9, 1940, and “Shortage of Food Reported in Guiana,” *Palm Beach Post*, September 9, 1940.

machinery that would have otherwise been available to the mines to be used elsewhere by the French government. As a colony, Guyane could not utilize its gold profits to *buy* better machinery from elsewhere, so the vast gold reserves, easily twice as large as what had already been extracted, proved unavailable to the colony. What profits it could make from the smaller scale mining operations helped neither France nor the colony, as much of the gold was intercepted by the British in Trinidadian ports to prevent it from reaching the Germans.⁴⁶ The gold rush could have emancipated French Guiana in the 1940s, but it was timed poorly, and the war prevented its success. As for France, for the second time in the century, it was showing its weakness at home and in the colonial periphery.

Though France survived the war as a polity, the French collective ego and morale emerged badly bruised. General Charles de Gaulle suggested in his *Mémoires* that France's postwar role would be dependent upon the full recovery and restitution of the empire.⁴⁷ His influence in French postwar politics persisted throughout the postwar years, so when constitutional conferences began and discussions of how to build the new Fourth Republic commenced, his suggestion met with approval.⁴⁸ During the talks, often led by provisional president de Gaulle, the concept of a "French Union" was formed. More powerful than simply a continental France with colonial appendages, the French Union would be a single, unitary polity. The union would consist of continental France, colonial departments, and colonial territories. This would be administered through a single High Council and an Assembly, to which colonies would send elected

⁴⁶ Nicol Smith, *Black Martinique, Red Guiana* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company Publishers, 1942), 212-213.

⁴⁷ Charles de Gaulle, *War Memoirs*, English ed. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955).

⁴⁸ Betts, 136.

representatives. Colonial representatives made up one half of the assembly, while French representatives would constitute the remaining half. These two legislative bodies would act only as an advisory body to the supreme central authority, the new National Assembly in Paris.⁴⁹ This would be the first step in a policy that would change the empire from a traditional collection of colonies to a geographic extension of the central state.

A series of laws designed to protect the empire from dissolution and center power in Paris followed, as the new National Assembly wove them into the new constitution. The Houphouët-Boisny Law ended forced labor in all colonies on April 11, 1946, the Lamine Guèye Law made all French subjects in the empire full citizens of the French Union on May 7, and the “old colonies” (Martinique, Guadeloupe, French Guiana, and Réunion) were made into *départements*.⁵⁰ These *départements* were no longer colonies, but provinces—on paper, the difference between Normandy, Burgundy, and French Guiana disappeared. Capital flowed into the colonies through the new *Fonds d’Investissement et de Développement Économique et Social* (FIDES), based in Paris and administered by French, not colonial, officials.⁵¹ By October, 1946, the French Union, the result of these constitutional changes, became official.

France completed the transformation of its old penal colony into a fully-incorporated *département* in 1952, when Devil’s Island and its associated institutions were closed for good. The French had responded in a wholly different way to the problems of their wayward colonies. Rather than giving them independence and hoping for a continued informal, cultural association, the French turned empire to state, and

⁴⁹ Betts, 138-139.

⁵⁰ Aldrich, 281.

⁵¹ Ibid.

colony to province. “French Guiana” was now Guyane, *département d’outre-mer*; its government institutions, legal codes, currency, and even postage were all identical to Paris, and Guyane would possess no more autonomy than Alsace, Brittany, or Midi-Pyrénées.⁵² French Guiana was now, unalterably, a part of France itself.

The Dutch would deal with the same economic and ideological challenges in neighboring Dutch Guiana, but their experiment developed in a fundamentally different direction. Dutch Guiana had been built as an agricultural export colony for purely financial reasons. The Dutch had no interest in exporting culture, nor in saving political face (a threat to the Dutch legacy did not exist in the same degree as the perceived threat to French hegemony during the wars). Their concern held more immediacy—Dutch Guiana persisted as a collection of divergent ethnicities attempting, and failing, to grow *any* crop at a profit.

The collapse of the sugar industry in Dutch Guiana did not stand as its only agricultural failure. The Dutch attempted, like the French and British, to diversify the economy, but a considerable run of failures put the colony’s future into question. Attempts to replace sugar with cacao met with some initial success; by 1895, cacao had become the colony’s most valuable crop. The entire industry was destroyed, however, by witch-broom disease; Dutch government funds to fight the spread of the disease lagged, and by 1905 the crop had been reduced by sixty percent (by 1940, drought and the disease combined to reduce it further—almost 98 percent).⁵³ An attempt to supplement the economy with the cultivation of bananas met a similar fate. Agreements between the government and the United Fruit Company brought banana plantations to Dutch Guiana

⁵² Aldrich, 308.

⁵³ Hiss, 141.

by 1906; but disappointing returns, the realization that banana cultivation took more labor than in Central America, and another disease (Panama Leaf Disease) broke the contract in 1911.⁵⁴ Diseases and the onset of economic depression suppressed the market for other items, too, such as coffee and cotton. Only rice succeeded over the twentieth century (primarily *after* the world wars), due in large part to the expertise of Indian and Javanese immigrants in its cultivation.

Failures in large scale plantation agriculture resulted in a general shift, starting around 1900, from plantations to small-scale cultivation on small strips of land. In Dutch Guiana, a tenant or individual owning family farmed each strip of land. While in 1900, plantations grew 90 percent of crops and small farms produced just 10 percent, the number had reversed totally within fifty years.⁵⁵ Local, small-scale crop production led to a more clannish, isolated population. The Dutch government retreated from power as its interest in Guiana waned and its interest in Southeast Asia increased. Ethnic divisions increased, too, as families began farming their own land and worked with other ethnic groups on the large plantations less.

Ethnic disharmony increased as the Dutch invested elsewhere and local power vacuums appeared. Colonial governments reported unrest among indentured Indians and Javanese in 1884, 1891, 1902, and 1908, each outbreak successively worse.⁵⁶ Throughout the first decades of the century, this ethnic strife came to the fore. In addition to the aforementioned general riots, Javanese workers attacked Dutch managers at Mariënborg in 1905 and 1924, and armed revolts of Indians on the plantation appear in

⁵⁴ Hiss, 141-142.

⁵⁵ International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 15-16.

⁵⁶ Hoefte *In Place of Slavery*, 190-191.

records in 1929 and 1935.⁵⁷ Until the economic situation of immigrants (and the colony, on the whole) improved, the Dutch had to contend with social upheaval.

Dutch Guianese development projects designed to improve the agricultural and industrial sector lacked backing from the States-General, and the economic setbacks of World War I and the Great Depression retarded progress further. Colonial governors appointed two commissions in 1911 and 1916 to study economic issues in the colony and make suggestions for their alleviation, but these reports (like the budgets) were ignored by the States-General or arrived too late to be considered.⁵⁸ Furthermore, with economic issues to deal with in the Netherlands, the legislature concerned itself only with a balanced budget, not floating the economies of struggling colonies. The government in The Hague was “haunted by the fear that the colony would cost more and more,” and therefore expressed an unwillingness to increase its subsidies or offer any further economic assistance.⁵⁹ This *versoberingspolitiek*, or restrictive policy, eliminated both expansion and constructive planning through the end of World War II.

Colonial administrations within Dutch Guiana tried to resolve the problem of funding outside of the States-General. Governor Arnold Baron van Heemstra, who served from 1921-1928, appealed to Dutch private investors in hopes of getting an influx of capital but met with little success. His successor, Abraham Rutgers (1928-1933), pushed The Hague to underwrite mechanization projects within the rice industry; the government remained, as always, reluctant to invest.⁶⁰ The Great Depression brought

⁵⁷ Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery*, 190-191.

⁵⁸ Goslinga, *A Short History of the Netherlands Antilles and Surinam*, 164.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 165.

increasing hardships to the colony, while the mother government was showing little concern for its problems. This combination of hard times and the feeling that the Netherlands did not care paralleled situations in British Guiana, and similar political developments followed.

Though ethnically based political parties certainly formed, the ideological working-class political parties experienced the first spikes in popularity in Dutch Guiana. In response to a disinterested government, a socialistic Committee of Action presented the governor with an extensive “Plan of Labor” in 1931. It met with apathy and dismissal, leading to public criticism of the government by an even more aggressive and extremist party, the *Surinaamsche Volksbond*. This party urged citizens to riot and violently resist the Dutch, making regular police and military intervention necessary in the colony during the early 1930s.⁶¹ Ethnic and racial uprisings accompanied the disharmony. Riots in Paramaribo broke out in 1931 and 1933, and an attempted communist *coup d’etat* in late 1933, known as the De Kom Affair, signaled the colony’s unsteady political situation to the world.⁶² Struggles between the people of the colony (represented by the *Koloniale Staten*) and the Dutch interests (represented by the governor) intensified throughout the Great Depression.

In order to quell social unrest and forcefully suppress the bitterness of the already emasculated *Koloniale Staten*, The Hague bequeathed absolute power to the colonial governor in 1936.⁶³ The States-General believed a stronger hand was needed to keep the colony profitable and in line. Nevertheless, conflicts between The Hague and Paramaribo

⁶¹ Goslinga, *A Short History of the Netherlands Antilles and Surinam*, 165.

⁶² Newton, 176.

⁶³ Chin and Buddingh, 13.

continued to intensify, not only due to this rescinding of autonomy but also to annual increases in Dutch Guiana's subsidy requirements. Budgets submitted by the *Koloniale Staten* were generally ignored, since the colony needed more and more subsidies to stay afloat, and the States-General would often make unilateral cutbacks on funding for the colony's projects without notifying Paramaribo at all.⁶⁴ By 1941, in the midst of World War II, these struggles reached an apex. Bos Verschuur, a member of the *Koloniale Staten*, began regularly opposing legislation requested by Governor-General J.C. Kielstra, and sought an audience with Queen Wilhelmina in her temporary London office to voice his displeasure at the colony's direction. Kielstra jailed him for disobeying the established chain of command. In protest, several other *Staten* members resigned.⁶⁵ In elections the following year, Verschuur and the resigned members won reelection with higher voting majorities. This marked a severe setback to Dutch hegemony in the colony.

The Netherlands could not count on its colonists to "buy into" the Dutch imperial model, because they had, up until this point, treated the Indians and Javanese as temporary citizens and the indigenes and maroons as inconsequential. Consequently, the Dutch had not entered into any assimilative education program for preparing their colonists to be "good citizens." In the 1930s and 1940s, the education of the population had not really changed; one third of Guianese children attended Catholic private schools, another third attended public government schools (often, as mentioned, in their own language), and another third attended Protestant private schools.⁶⁶ Children did not learn Dutch, nor were they being socialized into Dutch culture or belief in the Dutch

⁶⁴ Chin and Buddingh, 11.

⁶⁵ Newton, 176.

⁶⁶ Hiss, 161.

government system in any organized way; the Dutch government did not even require indigenous and maroon children to attend school at all.

Since none of these disparate ethnic groups grew to hold the Dutch system in high regard, political mobilization along ethnic lines strengthened during the Depression and through the early postwar years. Queen Wilhelmina had promised, at the close of World War II, an increase in Guianese home rule, and had suggested the possibility of universal adult suffrage. The possibility of this complete suffrage in the colony touched off a political struggle; the Creole elite fundamentally opposed universal suffrage, as it would limit the Europeanized Creoles' power in the colonial government. But retaining limited suffrage would virtually guarantee the continued political exclusion of Indian, Javanese, and African Creole workers.⁶⁷ Ethnic political parties, like those in British Guiana, mobilized in response to the suffrage debate.

The growing power of the immigrant groups could not be ignored. Indians, for one, had increased in the urban areas, and their influence spread to other groups seeking more voice in government. In fact, by 1937, Indians made up over half of the population in most districts, but only six percent of eligible voters.⁶⁸ These disenfranchised Indians joined Javanese workers in creating the United Hindu Party (VHP) in 1949. This party joined the generally Catholic, lower-class Surinam Progressive People's Party (PSV) and the Indonesian Joint Peasants' Party (KTPI) in united opposition to the suffrage *status*

⁶⁷ Chin and Buddingh, 14.

⁶⁸ Garner, 66.

quo.⁶⁹ Against this coalition, the *Nationale Partij Suriname* (NPS), the dominant Creole political party, formed the basis of opposition to suffrage.

The campaign for change began during the difficult times of the Depression, but the power of the parties did not increase until their funding increased with the success of the bauxite industry. Dutch Guiana experienced better wartime and postwar years than their French neighbors, due to the success of its only stable venture through this period—bauxite mining. The bauxite industry had begun not with Dutch, but rather foreign, investment. The Aluminum Company of America (ALCOA) purchased rights to land in Dutch Guiana and maintained mines beginning in 1915 through its subsidiary, *Surinaamsche Bauxiet Maatschappij*.⁷⁰ ALCOA opened several mines over the next decade. First shipments of bauxite from Moengo, the colony's largest deposit, arrived in 1922; by 1925, the company had added a washing and drying plant designed to improve the quality of ore for export.⁷¹ Luckily for Dutch Guiana and ALCOA, World War II aircraft production brought high demand for bauxite, and those associated with the industry in Dutch Guiana made considerable profits during the 1940s.

These fortunes, along with a better economy and higher wages for many of the ethnic groups working in the mining industry, supported the new opposition parties. They stood for the increasingly vocal ethnic groups of the colony in opposition to the old European Creole regime. Dutch government officials had grown woefully out of touch with the issues of these different constituencies. Civil servants working in Dutch Guiana had no real knowledge of the customs or concerns of those they served; whereas those

⁶⁹ Chin and Buddingh, 15.

⁷⁰ Hiss, 133.

⁷¹ Ibid., 135.

servants assigned to Java were trained for several years in the language, religions, and customs of the country, no such training existed for those destined for Guiana. In fact, most civil servants in Dutch Guiana had actually been trained for Java instead.⁷² As a result, all the political parties of Dutch Guiana except for the NPS shared a disdain for Dutch government policy.

These parties shared objectives—increased autonomy within the kingdom framework, decentralization, economic support, educational equality, and so forth. But the ethnic lines remained firm, so the parties remained firmly in opposition to one another only because of their ethnic differences.⁷³ Between 1945 and 1952, other minority political parties formed, most tied to a specific ethnic group, including the Progressive Surinam Popular Party, the National Surinam Party, the Hinudstani-Javanese Party, the Negro Political Party, and the Christian Socialist Party.⁷⁴ The States-General now faced a dizzying array of groups lobbying for greater autonomy and for their own ethnic concerns. The fears of the legislature thus manifested fully. Though Dutch Guiana was starting to make money again as a bauxite producing colony, the headaches associated with squelching multiple rebellions and paying for the needs of a myriad of constituent groups had overmatched the benefits.

The Dutch tried one last fix during the turbulent years of the late 1940s and early 1950s. In September of 1948, the States-General passed a new revision to the Dutch constitution. Similar to France's plan, the Dutch monarchy would be a "tripartite kingdom" consisting of the Netherlands, the Antilles, and Dutch Guiana, effective by

⁷² Hiss, 162.

⁷³ Chin and Buddingh, 18.

⁷⁴ Goslinga, *A Short History of the Netherlands Antilles and Surinam*, 169.

1950. This kingdom would be represented by a Council of Ministers from all three areas, and supervised by the monarchy. It was the first time Dutch Guiana had been formally represented in The Hague.⁷⁵ New representation did not solve the deepened rifts among the ethnic groups, though. There was no unifying culture, no “Dutch umbrella” under which to unite the bickering factions.

Into the 1950s, Dutch Guiana’s economic situation improved due to bauxite production and modest successes in rice production; but its social situation had not, and the Netherlands grew weary of maintaining such an expensive and difficult dependent. Seeing the improving economy in the colony as a chance to extract itself slowly from the perpetual economic support of its colony, the Netherlands offered public capital investment in these industries through the Prosperity Fund and technical support from employees recently leaving Indonesia upon its independence.⁷⁶ The Dutch moved to remove themselves slowly from the financial burden of the colony. In 1947, the government set up a welfare fund which promised an annual deposit of eight million guilders for five years, a ten-year plan to prepare land for rice cultivation, construction of a hydro-electric plant on the Surinam River at Brokopondo, timber clearing, mineral and farming research, road building, aerial mapping, and, of course, financial planning. The entire plan cost the Netherlands 260 million guilders, one-third of which became a gift and the rest a loan.⁷⁷ Though an expensive venture, the Dutch believed it would cost them less to wean the colony off of support this way than to continue investing in it as if it were a Dutch state.

⁷⁵ Goslinga, *A Short History of the Netherlands Antilles and Surinam*, 171-173.

⁷⁶ International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 17.

⁷⁷ Newton, 175.

It would be nearly three more decades before Dutch Guiana could be weaned. The final severing of the umbilical cord occurred abruptly in 1975, when Paramaribo and The Hague reached an agreement regarding full independence. The Dutch would agree to ten years of severance pay to the Guianese government, known as the “Golden Handshake,” and in return the colony would take on its own affairs, including defense and foreign policy, and restrict immigration so there was not a mass exodus to the Netherlands if things got rough. Dutch Guiana adopted the name “Suriname” officially in 1975, upon its independence.

The Guiana colonial experiment performed by the three Western European imperial powers had changed during the darkness of two world wars and a Depression. With the supervisors of the experiment absent, all experienced incursions and immutable change. All three of the Guianas felt the same external pressures through the turbulent first six or seven decades of the twentieth century. Economic setbacks and aversion of attention by their respective imperial administrations led to social unrest. This unrest resulted in political mobilization and ethnic divisions, culminating in an explosion of political parties and destabilization in British and Dutch Guiana. Conversely, political destabilization, the loss of imperial reputation due to negative publicity, and economic stagnation in French Guiana led to a tightening of French control and a reinstatement of empire. Two Guianas emerged independent, while one retreated from autonomy.

This work can now turn away from the consideration of policy and administration. A key argument can now be responsibly addressed—that three tiny colonies, once homogenous and isolated, have developed into three unique and distinct entities completely due to their administration over three centuries of colonialism. The

imperial decisions of the British, the French, and the Dutch made over these centuries acted as the sole agent in the development of three separate demographics, political structures, foreign policies, and cultures. These four aspects of Guyana, French Guiana, and Suriname can now be considered.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Cricket and McCartney

Since 1966, Guyana has found itself ensnared in a political interstice; neither South American nor Caribbean, and neither capitalist nor communist, the Guyanese have negotiated their way through four turbulent decades of independence. Despite the changing circumstances, Guyana's demography, internal political structure, foreign policy, and culture are all the colonial heritage of British Guianese administrative decisions during its time as a colony.

The first and most obvious colonial legacy in Guyana is the country's diverse demography. The opening of British Guiana to settlers from across the British Empire, including the influx of Indian wage laborers to combat the labor shortage, led to one of the most ethnically balanced and diverse populations in the world. In the 1980 census, the descendents of Indian immigrants constituted about half the total population.¹ African descendents of former slaves comprised an additional third, while a "mixed ancestry" category, which in this case meant mixed European and African ancestry, added an additional 12 percent. Indigenous groups, which British settlers had, for the most part, pushed toward Brazil or Dutch Guiana, made up only 4 percent by 1980.² The largest ethnic group in the 2002 census remained the East Indian population, still comprising almost 44 percent of the total population, with African groups at 30 percent

¹ Tim Merrill, ed. *Guyana: a Country Study*. Washington: Government Printing Office for the Library of Congress, 1992, <http://countrystudies.us/guyana/33.htm> (accessed February 14, 2010), Section 33.

² Ibid.

and mixed ancestry groups increasing to nearly 17 percent.³ A balance between Afro-Guyanese and Indo-Guyanese ethnic groups continues to be the demographic legacy of the administration of Guyana.

It should be noted that the European total population of Guyana has remained relatively unchanged since the country's colonial status. In 2002, only 476 individuals (0.06 percent) were counted as having purely "White" ancestry, making this the smallest group in the census.⁴ The European percentage of the population has been decreasing, in fact, since the close of World War II.⁵ Further, the ethnic majority of East Indians in Guyana ironically reflects the recent growth of Indian immigration in the United Kingdom. Now, in both Georgetown and London, curry is the most common dish. In Guyana, however, the ethnic divisions are less obvious than in the recently-arrived communities within London. Country studies of Guyana point out that in many ways, the descendents of the country's various groups have come to resemble one another more than those of their countries of origin.⁶ The demography of Guyana has returned to its colonial origins—a population moving toward homogeneity under the cultural dominance of a European minority, which will be discussed later.

Thus, from a domestic policy perspective, the divergent ethnic groups submerged under minority dominance were a volatile combination in the early years of Guyanese independence. As expected, Guyana underwent a series of violent political changes in the decades following 1966; but on the other side of these changes, the legacy of British

³ Sonkarley Tiatun Bealie and M. Phil, *The Cooperative Republic of Guyana Population and Housing Census: National Census Report* (Georgetown: Guyana Bureau of Statistics, 2007), 27.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Merrill, *Guyana: A Country Study*, Section 33.

⁶ Ibid.

colonial rule can still be easily discerned in modern Guyana. Actually, the struggles of the divergent parties to gain power had been created as much by British methods of control in the previous centuries as in spite of them. Guyanese citizens had become accustomed to life under a powerful, assimilation-minded central government in the decades of British Guiana's existence. As a result, once the British left Guyana in 1966, the various parties sought solitary control, like their British predecessors, rather than consensus.⁷ It would be several decades before the Guyanese political system would cease existing as a collection of fragmented political parties in search of centralized hegemony.

Each of these parties sought the same domination the British had exercised over the colony in the previous centuries. One historian describes this as a "machinery of domination" resting on "a tripod of political hegemony, economic control, and exclusive access to strategic extranational resources."⁸ With most colonies in the British Empire, the tripod was not left vacant upon British administrative departure. In the years leading up to each colony's independence, the Crown and Parliament would institute a series of reforms designed to transfer power slowly to the populace. These reforms usually included the expansion of local government and the state apparatus (transferring more powers from the Colonial Office to the governor's offices), a general expansion of suffrage and electoral reform, and efforts to improve infrastructure and human development. Before Guyana's independence, this served as the general procedure in other colonies across the empire.

⁷ Hintzen and Premdas, 337-338.

⁸ Ibid., 338.

The timing of Guyanese independence, however, prevented this pattern of transfer from playing out. Due to the radical Marxism of Jagan's PPP and the ties to Communist governments that both Jagan and Forbes Burnham cultivated, Cold War Britain felt it could not leave an independent Guyana in the hands of the elected party. As a result, the British government suspended the constitution in 1953, tolerated and even encouraged ethnic and political riots and general agitation in order to destabilize the PPP's power, and even manipulated various elections to seek pro-capitalist outcomes.⁹ A September 1953 report by the governor of British Guiana, Sir Alfred Savage, illustrated the British opinion about Guianese elections. In reference to the political situation, Savage stated, "There is no real political opposition to the party in power. There are too many parties and independents and again no apparent leadership. Attempts are now being made to correct this in relation to the forthcoming bye election."¹⁰ Thus, even the political party structure remaining in Guyana since its independence is the offspring of British involvement and planning.

The priorities of the post-independence governments bore striking similarities to their British predecessors, as well. Influenced by the success of the British emphasis on assimilatory education, each of the political parties in power, beginning with Jagan's PPP, placed a strong emphasis on education. The parties argued that education served as the best instrument to develop a skilled labor force and to provide economic equity; while this was certainly true, critics also pointed out the tendency of the PPP and Burnham's

⁹ Matthew Lange, *Lineages of Despotism and Development: British Colonialism and State Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 124.

¹⁰ Sir Alfred Savage, "Report on British Guiana," September, 1953, http://www.guyana.org/govt/declassified_british_documents_1953.html (accessed February 20, 2010).

PNC to use education systems as a way to disseminate political propaganda.¹¹

Nonetheless, the Guyana government placed prominence on the education system, appointing district officers to inspect local schools and creating the Ministry of Higher Education to oversee Guyanese universities in 1980. By 1988, nearly seven percent of the budget went to education expenditures. Throughout the 1980s and up to the present, most government leaders have been teachers (including presidents Burnham and Hoyte), or children of teachers.¹² Politically, Guyana's emphasis on education can be added to the list of British colonial legacies remaining.

Other political culture is uniquely British, as well. One of the more telling examples of British influence remaining in the country is Guyana's liberal interpretation of "morality law." As of 2006, the country was one of only three in "Latin" America (which generally includes Central and South America and the Spanish portions of the Caribbean) in which abortion was completely legal.¹³ The other two, Cuba and Puerto Rico, can be explained based on their Communist approach toward abortion and their inclusion in the United States' legal framework, respectively. Guyana's abortion law, though, mirrors that of the United Kingdom, despite a separation of over four decades. In Guyana's political structure, its political values, and its very system, the remnants of British colonial rule can still be easily observed.

Political legacies not only can be found in domestic policies, but also in the country's foreign policy programs. With the exception of a brief, communist-friendly

¹¹ Merrill, *Guyana: A Country Study*, Section 33.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ José Miguel Guzman, et al., "The Demography of Latin America and the Caribbean since 1950," *Population (English Edition)* 61, no. 5/6 (September-December 2006), 540.

shift under Forbes Burnham, Guyana's international relations have been funneled through the United Kingdom, through membership in the Commonwealth of Nations, and through the Caribbean by membership in the Caribbean Community, also known as Caricom. Except for the countries of Venezuela and Brazil, which border Guyana, Latin America is mostly ignored except for occasional participation in the Organization of American States. Above all else, Guyana remains a Commonwealth nation, despite its distance of over four thousand miles from London. Given Britain's less than impressive economic condition in the 1970s as compared to the much larger economies of the United States and the Soviet Union, Guyana's choice of the Commonwealth as its vehicle for international diplomacy is testament to its strongly English cultural inheritance.

Guyana's other international affiliation during the initial stages of its independence was with the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), but comparison between the NAM and the Commonwealth further proves Guyana's pro-Anglo tendencies. Which group received higher priority could be discerned from attendance figures at each of its annual conferences. Guyanese government leaders attended 56 percent of all NAM annual conferences during the first two decades of independence, but over 70 percent of the Commonwealth meetings.¹⁴ The preference of Guyana for Commonwealth participation began with British influences as a colonial administrator, but continued as both the British Foreign Service and the Commonwealth itself adapted to retain relevance abroad. This was done through a series of reforms of government and Commonwealth structure.

¹⁴ James H. Polhemus, "The Important Commonwealth: a Behavioral Indicator," *International Studies Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (September 1981): 481.

The first British action toward retention of foreign policy control occurred in the same year as Guyanese independence; in late 1966, the Colonial Office was merged with the Commonwealth Relations Office to form the Commonwealth Office.¹⁵ This would provide a more centralized, unified approach in dealing with British overseas territories, holdings, and former colonies, placing all the bureaucratic talent in the same office. Further consolidation took place two years later, when in 1968 the Foreign Office and the new Commonwealth Office merged to form the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, or FCO. One of the crucial aspects of the FCO for former colonies like Guyana rested in its oversight of the BBC World Service, which became an active way to disseminate British music, news, and interests abroad, including in Guyana.¹⁶ It was through the BBC World Service, administered by the FCO, that foreign relations and cultural legacies merged in Guyana.

The British Broadcasting Corporation had carried “popular imperialism” to all corners of the empire since the close of World War I. By providing coverage of patriotic events, playing national music, and selecting symbolic, nationalist, and royalist programming, the BBC and the later BBC World Service were the premier vehicle for maintaining British cultural interests abroad.¹⁷ The BBC’s provision of a forum for British popular music secured British culture in areas that may have otherwise rejected it; the concept of popular music smoothing the relations between suzerain and colony will

¹⁵ National Archives of the United Kingdom, “Administrative/Biographical Breakdown,” The National Archives, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/catalogue/DisplayCatalogueDetails.asp?CATID=57&CATLN=1&FullDetails=True> (accessed February 20, 2010).

¹⁶ Foreign and Commonwealth Office, “What We Do,” Foreign and Commonwealth Office Official Website, <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/about-us/what-we-do/> (accessed February 10, 2010).

¹⁷ John MacKenzie, *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 187.

be considered later. In Guyana, the infrastructure for these cultural inroads grew. By 1978, Guyana had two high-powered radio stations—the Guyana Broadcasting Service (a state-run radio service nationalized from a British-run station under the Burnham administration) and Radio Demerara, which still was owned by a British company and under contract to carry twenty-one hours of BBC programming per week.¹⁸ This laid the foundation for future radio programming as Guyanese broadcasting began to diversify.

The continuity of British influence over Guyanese radio continued. On July 1, 1980, the Guyana Broadcasting Corporation reorganized, emerging with a slogan of “One Station, Two Channels.” Channel One, the more traditionally British channel, operated on the frequencies formerly used by Radio Demerara, while Channel Two, a regional channel, took a smaller transmitter and a more local, native approach to programming. Channel One eventually became Radio Roraima, while Channel Two became the Voice of Guyana. In 2004, both channels of the GBC merged with Guyana Television Broadcasting Company Limited (GTV) to form the National Communication Network, Incorporated.¹⁹ Despite earlier nationalization under Burnham, the GBC and GTV joined the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association (CBA) in order to increase available technical support and program funding. The CBA, as a specialized organ of the Commonwealth, has partnered with the BBC to provide programming and workshops to CBA member stations like those of the GBC, resulting in a BBC and Anglo-friendly programming policy reminiscent of the 1960s and 1970s, when the stations were under

¹⁸ Ron Sanders, *Broadcasting in Guyana* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, Limited, 1978), 13.

¹⁹ Evadne Duff et al, “Radio Broadcasting in Guyana,” Silvertorch, http://www.silvertorch.com/g_radio_bcast.htm (accessed February 22, 2010).

direct British control.²⁰ Radio broadcasting is one of the most culturally pervasive avenues the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth use to maintain their interests in the old empire.

The “informal empire” created through education curricula, broadcast programming, and other cultural, rather than politico-military, sources remains the strongest form of British influence, and has allowed the Commonwealth itself to remain a small, inexpensive, but effective organization. Cultural similarities shared through popular music and a common media system make it much easier to hold vastly different states like Guyana in the Commonwealth system. Unlike the budgets and bureaucracies of many other international agencies, the Commonwealth’s secretariat has remained relatively small, with an operating budget of only ten million U.S. dollars and a staff of just over four hundred at the beginning of the 1990s.²¹ By avoiding charges of extravagance and waste, the organization has kept from being overly politicized and instead serves as an informal unifying body for like-minded members of Britain’s informal empire, and as a low-pressure outlet for Guyanese participation in world affairs.

Guyana’s other preferred foreign policy vehicle developed during its independence movement, when the country entered into CARIFTA, the first Caribbean Community trade agreement. Signed in 1965 by Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Guyana, and Trinidad and Tobago, the Caribbean Free Trade Agreement (CARIFTA) aimed to balance trade in the Anglophone Caribbean and provide countries like Guyana

²⁰ The home page and information on current CBA workshops can be found at http://www.cba.org.uk/training_and_bursaries/courses.php (accessed February 22, 2010).

²¹ Margaret Doxey, “Evolution and Adaptation in the Modern Commonwealth,” *International Journal* 45, no. 4 (Autumn 1990): 909-910.

an outlet for goods outside of the United Kingdom.²² Ironically, CARIFTA and its successor, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), are vestiges of British colonial administration in their own right. CARIFTA was not a pan-Caribbean effort to achieve unity and equality, but rather a reaction to Britain's entry into the European Economic Community. Guyana joined CARIFTA because it was still economically tied to Britain, and its leadership recognized that British interest now focused on its European neighbors, and not on the political or economic strengthening of its former territories.²³ Furthermore, during its initial years in CARIFTA, Guyana participated only sporadically, mostly to garner support from its neighbors in border disputes with non-CARIFTA Venezuela.²⁴ Thus, Guyana's ties with its Caribbean neighbors were not cultural, as with the Commonwealth, but economic (and only after Britain shunned trade with the country in favor of closer European relationships).

A period of socialism in the 1970s and early 1980s under Forbes Burnham provides an aberration against which the most recent decades contrast. The administration of Burnham, PNC leader and successor to Cheddi Jagan as prime minister, then president, was marked by a post-independence search for legitimacy. Culturally speaking, Guyana was maintaining its British roots and cultivating them with tools like the BBC; but politically, Burnham sought to prove Guyana could stand alone. During his administration, this pursuit of recognition and legitimacy on the world stage dominated

²² Caribbean Community Secretariat, "The Caribbean Free Trade Agreement," Caribbean Community Online, <http://www.caricom.org/jsp/community/carifta.jsp?menu=community> (accessed February 22, 2010).

²³ W. Andrew Axline, "Integration and Development in the Commonwealth Caribbean: the Politics of Regional Negotiations," *International Organization* 32, no. 4 (Autumn 1978): 959-961.

²⁴ Georges A. Fauriol, *Foreign Policy Behavior of Caribbean States: Guyana, Haiti, and Jamaica* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Press, 1988), 141.

policy, resulting in an unusual foreign-domestic relationship—foreign policy determined national interest, rather than the other way around.²⁵ Most notably, Burnham sought ties with the Soviet Union and Cuba throughout his administration, causing concern in both the United States and the United Kingdom that communism would gain a foothold in South America. These concerns never came to pass, as Guyana’s overtures to the Warsaw Pact stayed tenuous at best and rarely amounted to more than saber-rattling for the purposes of getting Britain’s attention. In a way, even the pro-Communist foreign policy of Guyana under Burnham formed indirectly as the result of British neglect.

After Desmond Hoyte ousted Burnham in the 1985 election, Guyana’s foreign policy took a more conservative, Commonwealth-friendly approach that endured into the new century. The Hoyte government turned its attention to more pressing domestic/economic issues, leaving foreign policy headaches to the Commonwealth, in which Guyana remained an active participant.²⁶ Thus, despite the anti-British rhetoric of Forbes Burnham’s administration, Guyana has since attempted to maintain positive relations with the United Kingdom through the Commonwealth. Border disputes with Venezuela have kept Guyana looking to its mother country for protection, even after over forty years of independence.²⁷ The country’s preference for Britain over its neighbors in South America revealed itself most clearly during the Argentina-United Kingdom dispute over the Falkland Islands in 1982—Guyana was the only South American nation to express full support for the United Kingdom. Recent Guyanese foreign policy rests on

²⁵ Festus Brotherson, Jr., “The Foreign Policy of Guyana, 1970-1985: Forbes Burnham’s Search for Legitimacy,” special issue, *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 31, no. 3 (Autumn 1989): 10.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

²⁷ Merrill, Section 33.

membership in the Commonwealth and CARICOM; Guyana's choice to join the Caribbean Community proves its cultural separation from Latin America (CARICOM's headquarters is now in Georgetown), while its well-maintained membership in the Commonwealth proves the continued British influence over foreign policy and culture.

Rooted in assimilative education in the nineteenth century and manifesting in Guyana's pro-United Kingdom foreign policy, British cultural influences overshadow even Guyana's strong demographic and political legacies. The most ubiquitous cultural inheritance, the English language, keeps Guyana tied closely to its former overseer. English is the official language of the country and has become the primary language of nearly all Guyanese residents, with the exception of some elderly Indians and Amerindians. English is pervasive in Guyana and dominates the lexicon of its Creole dialects.²⁸ The speaking of English as the official government and business language keeps Guyana as linguistically linked to Britain as it had been during its period of assimilative schooling.

Another well-documented British connection can be seen in Guyanese popular music. Though local bands influenced by reggae, calypso, and Indian musical styles are common, a strong secondary music scene, British pop music, has been spread across the country by the BBC for decades. British pop music worked in Guyana through a kind of cultural reciprocity. The BBC stations and British cultural assimilation laid the groundwork for a general social acceptance of British music when it arrived; in turn, the popularity of British bands, particularly in the 1960s, tempered Guyanese opinions about the British and smoothed the way to Commonwealth cooperation, rather than distanced independence.

²⁸ Merrill, Section 33.

The best musical example of this cultural reciprocity could be found in Britain's most popular export through the 1960s, the Beatles. The Beatles experienced success on a global scale, including in Guyana, bridging a widening cultural chasm between former colonies and Britain by achieving airplay and record sales success in both places. In order to accomplish this transoceanic feat, groups like the Beatles encouraged acceptance of British rock music in places like Guyana (this was done by the BBC) and cultivated an appreciation of foreign musical styles at home. By integrating musical styles from abroad, particularly India (which would increase its popularity greatly among the many Indian immigrants in Guyana), the Beatles took the most adaptable and transportable cultural element, music, and created a common cultural ownership between British and former colonial citizens.²⁹ In early 1967, at the height of the Guyanese independence movement, the Beatles were chosen to represent the British Isles on the special television program *Our World*. The BBC televised the program in over thirty countries including Guyana, to more than half a billion people.³⁰ Designed to showcase nations' contributions to world culture, the show and the Beatles' selection brought the point home—the world identified the Beatles with Britain and all things British.

The world clearly equated the Beatles with Britishness, but their popularity in former dominions like Guyana did not suffer because of it. On the United World Chart, which takes popular music sales and radio play from all world markets into account, the Beatles claim sixteen of the hundred most successful records of all time, more than any other group. They had more number one hits as a group than any other band in history

²⁹ David R. Reck, "Beatles Orientalis: Influences from Asia in a Popular Song Tradition," *Asian Music* 16, no. 1 (1985): 83; Paul Saltzman, "George's Sitar," *The Beatles in India*, http://www.thebeatlesinindia.com/stories/stories_mainpg.html (accessed March 8, 2008).

³⁰ "Beatles on World TV," *The Times* [London], May 19, 1967.

not only in the United Kingdom, but in the “Old Dominions,” Australia, Canada, the United States, Ireland, and New Zealand, and the “New Dominions,” including Guyana.³¹ Still played liberally on Guyanese radio, the Beatles and their pop music successors represent one of Britain’s most enduring legacies in Guyana.

Britain also left behind a rich architectural tradition, particularly in Georgetown. One needs look no further than the cover of Steve Garner’s book *Ethnicity, Class, and Gender: Guyana 1838-1985* (cited earlier in this text) to find the tenacity of the English architectural heritage in far-flung Guyana. The cover features a Tudor-style clock tower, one of the many buildings in the country built not to local specifications or to meet tropical needs, but to resemble England as closely as possible. Other notable buildings include the Law Courts Building on Croal Street in Georgetown, opened in 1887 and sporting a statue of Queen Victoria.³² Even earlier examples occur along the Avenue of the Republic in the capital, where architect Joseph Hadfield’s Parliament Building has sat since 1833. This building, modeled after British government buildings, housed the offices which sold land to the emancipated slaves and the chambers of Parliament, most recently addressed by Queen Elizabeth II in 1994.³³ British cultural inheritance is therefore as much visual as auditory in Guyana.

Lastly, the Guyanese cultural ties to Britain can not be discussed without considering the country’s most popular sport, cricket. Sport’s seemingly harmless and neutral exterior often hides political undertones, and cricket is no exception. It is what

³¹ Mediatraffic, “United World Chart: 1967,” Mediatraffic Germany Online, <http://www.mediatraffic.de/previous1.htm> (accessed February 5, 2008).

³² Turquoise Systems Group, “Georgetown,” Guyana Online Tourist Guide, <http://www.turq.com/guyana/georgetown.html> (accessed February 23, 2010).

³³ Ibid.

Helen Tiffin calls “the most insidiously influential of all imperial cultural forms.”³⁴ Doubtlessly, cricket served as a substitute for more direct military and political adaptations of imperialism. Cricket’s popularity surged during the second half of the nineteenth century during the post-emancipation social restructuring in the colony. With shifting socioeconomic classes and an uneasy relationship with the home country prevailing, cricket (introduced by the East Indian immigrants, who had already embraced it) became a political consideration in its own right by allowing classes and ethnic groups to settle questions of rank on the pitch.³⁵ This period of reconsideration of community and caste allowed cricket to become a powerful tool wielded by those who directed community restructuring processes. Lower classes also looked to the sport as a way to challenge the elite. As a result, cricket clubs organized themselves along the same ethnic and economic lines as political parties, providing an interesting parallel to politics in the colony.³⁶ British sport mirrored British governing policy through the formalization of rules, organization of the administering bodies, and symbolism of the game itself.³⁷ All of these aspects of cricket would be applicable in Guyana.

Participating with other Caribbean nations as part of the West Indies cricket team (the “Windies”), Guyanese cricketers are among the country’s most famous athletes. As early as 1950, men of varied ethnic background, most notably East Indian, were playing

³⁴ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2007), 186.

³⁵ Brian Stoddart, “Caribbean Cricket: the Role of Sport in Emerging Small-Nation Politics,” *International Journal* 43, no. 1 (Autumn 1988): 622.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 624.

³⁷ Simon Featherstone, *Postcolonial Cultures* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 76.

for British Guiana on the West Indies team.³⁸ Winning the World Cup in 1975 and 1979, the Guyanese used cricket as a way to bolster their national image and achieve the kind of world legitimacy sought by the Burnham administration. Guyana's obsession with the sport has continued, culminating in the hosting of the 2007 World Cup in Georgetown. The country has been very successful both in growing cricket's popularity within its borders and using it as a nationalist tool and challenge to former colonial authority.³⁹ Ironically, though, Guyana's very use of cricket as a way to challenge British cultural authority in fact reaffirms the presence of a British "informal empire"—cricket was invented and first played in Britain, then transferred to its colonies. By utilizing a British social tool, rather than a Guyanese one, to challenge British authority, Guyana verifies its cultural benefactor.

Culturally, Guyana should be more fragmented, yet it retains many elements of its British past and fails to reject these remnants of colonialism as an independent state. The extreme ethnic diversity brought on by British immigration policies during the nineteenth and twentieth century has resulted in a curious lack of nationalism. No single ethnic group has dominated the demography enough to obtain total hegemony, but all have been strong enough to resist an across-the-board Creolization.⁴⁰ More simply put, Guyana has no ethnic nationalism, nor any overarching Creole version, either. The only things shared by these cobbled-together ethnic groups are elements of British culture. As Guyana continues learning how to cope with its fractured demography and disparate political

³⁸ Stoddart, 620.

³⁹ Paget Henry and Paul Buhle, eds., *C.L.R. James's Caribbean* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 93-95.

⁴⁰ Garner, 281.

factions, one truth has endured for nearly two centuries—“Britishness” (found in language, music, architecture, and sport) remains the only ideology these myriad groups truly share, in the only English-speaking enclave on the South American continent.

CHAPTER NINE

Odd Man Out

Considering demography, internal politics, foreign policy, and culture among the three Guianas, French Guiana is the outlier in almost all respects. A dichotomous *département* of coastal Parisian transplants and inland Amerindian groups, French Guiana (Guyane) plays host to the European Space Agency, tightly monitored by Europe. Residents pay for groceries with Euros rather than local currencies. Though the hulking edifices of Devil’s Island still stand, the *département* has traded prisoners for transient aerospace workers and expatriates, who outnumber the descendents of indentured laborers and plantation owners. Home soil is guarded not by a local state militia or army, but by the French Foreign Legion, which counts only a tiny number of French Guiana residents in its company. Most striking of all, these residents of French Guiana are not “French Guianese” or “Guyanaise.” They are simply referred to as “French.” The only similarity to its two counterparts French Guiana now possesses is a lasting colonial legacy. The legacy is, in fact, strongest here, for according to Paris, there are only two Guianas—the easternmost Guianese polity is not a Guiana at all, but simply another province of continental France.

Demographic statistics for French Guiana differ sharply from the rest of the Guianas, and many of the differences can be traced back to variations in administrative policy. Life expectancy, for instance, is much higher in the French territory than in either Guyana or Suriname. Curiously, in 1950, the numbers were comparable—life

expectancy at birth was 50.3 years for French Guiana, 50.8 for Guyana, and 54.4 for Suriname.¹ The similar numbers precisely reflect the level of involvement among the three imperial powers during the “abandoned experiment period” of 1914-1950. The French and British administrators had departed for Africa and busied themselves in recovery from two world wars; though the Netherlands also experienced rebuilding during the time, it retained a bit more interest in its South American holdings. This slightly better caretaking caused improved health and marginally improved life expectancy figures. By 2004, however, the discrepancy swings heavily in French Guiana’s favor. Life expectancy at birth for French Guiana jumped to 72.5 years (an improvement of 22.2 years over just five decades), while Suriname only increased to 68.5 (14.1 years) and Guyana barely reached 60.1 (9.3 years).² The figures reflect a harsh truth—French Guiana was absorbed into France and benefited from its comprehensive health care system, while Guyana and Suriname paid a price of reduced health care in return for autonomy.

Ethnic demographics, also, both isolate French Guiana from its neighbors and reflect differences in past colonial administration. French Guiana, for instance, chose abandonment of the plantation economy in favor of a penal colony when their agricultural enterprises failed and the colony began losing money. Therefore, while the cultural shock of emancipation plunged British and Dutch Guiana into critical labor shortages, the French colony experienced little real change. Not in need of immigrant labor to replace plantation slaves in large numbers, the French never pursued an immigration program like their neighbors. As a result, only around 4 percent of people in

¹ Guzmán, et al., 546.

² Ibid.

French Guiana are East Indian, and only about 4 percent more are Chinese.³ Instead, the overwhelming majorities in the state are mulattos and Creole blacks, who make up approximately two-thirds of the population; Caucasians, almost always from metropolitan France, make up 12 percent.⁴ A clear absence of Asian ethnic groups, the direct result of a dismissal of immigration programs by the French government, distances French Guiana from its neighbors.

A different population makeup is not the only demographic marker of French imperial rule. Internal political structures unique to French Guiana also directly resulted from this relative ethnic homogeneity and French governing policy. French Guiana has almost always been administered from Paris, rather than Cayenne; British and Dutch Guiana have both enjoyed access to local governing bodies and parliamentary organs. Because the colony had no real local bureaucracy throughout the nineteenth century, and little local representation in the twentieth, few reasons existed for the formation of political parties. The ethnic breakdown augmented this phenomenon; over three-quarters of the population was white or of mixed Creole descent leading into the twentieth century. Rather than a development of ethnically-based parties looking out for the welfare of their specific constituencies, French Guiana remained a colony of Creoles reporting directly to Paris.

Guyane's uniquely Creole demographic, coupled with a fragile mining economy and a great deal of migration to and from France, have stifled calls for independence at the grassroots level. First, as previously stated, there are no real coherent political parties

³ "French Guiana: Demographic Breakdown," Nationmaster, <http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/French-Guiana> (accessed February 23, 2010).

⁴ Ibid.

in the country as a result of the lack of ethnic competition.⁵ Second, over the course of the centuries, French Guiana has existed for only one purpose at a time. Originally intended to be an agricultural colony, it failed and was converted to a penal colony. Upon the failure of the penal colony, primarily due to extraordinarily negative publicity, several mining operations moved in, hoping to capitalize on bauxite and gold deposits in the area. French colonization of the Guianas had been short-sighted, focusing on a single money-making venture at a time, and then abandoning it completely for something new. The lack of economic diversification accompanying French Guiana's "parade of purposes" left behind a very fragile economy tied tightly to continental French purse strings. The need for monetary support from France (approximately US\$500 million per year) to supplement the economy has made residents uncomfortable with the idea of independence.⁶ In January 2010, voters rejected a referendum on increased autonomy with a 69.8 percent vote against on a turnout of 48 percent.⁷ The last demographic anomaly, constant migration of French citizens to and from France and a 33 percent transient population,⁸ keeps French Guiana from developing any real sense of nationalism.

The transient population of French Guiana exists because of the *département's* newest purpose, as a host for the European Space Agency's Kourou Space Center, and the many temporary aerospace and contracted jobs that accompany it. Next in the parade,

⁵ Robert Aldrich and John Connell, eds., *France in World Politics* (London: Routledge, 1989), 160.

⁶ Larry Luxner, "French Guiana: Separatists Clamor for Independence," Latinamerica Press, http://www.luxner.com/cgi-bin/view_article.cgi?articleID=661 (accessed February 23, 2010).

⁷ British Broadcasting Corporation, "Regions and Territories: French Guiana," BBC News Online, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/country_profiles/3516572.stm (accessed February 23, 2010).

⁸ Luxner, "French Guiana: Separatists Clamor for Independence."

Kourou has replaced mining and penal colonies as “the” source of French Guianese income; the center brings in over a billion U.S. dollars a year (the vast majority of which leaves French Guiana immediately) and accounts for 30 percent of the jobs in the territory and over half the tax revenue.⁹ Kourou Space Center represents both sides of the colonialism debate. On the one hand, the center brings high-paying jobs and auxiliary business to the *département* that would never have come otherwise; on the other, residents of French Guiana hold no shares in the facility, nor does much of its revenue remain in the territory. To some, Kourou represents progress in the third world. To others, it is simply another repository of wealth stolen from one land and siphoned off to another.

The story of the creation of Kourou Space Center and the determining of its location provides a window through which modern French definitions of empire can be viewed. First, the center’s very conception resulted from changing French views on imperialism. Recovering from two demoralizing defeats in World War I and II, both at the hands of the industrially, territorially, and militarily enlarging Germans, the French found themselves nostalgically yearning for the time when France ranked among the most powerful countries in the world. Devastated financially and humiliated militarily, the new French government (the Fifth Republic, formed in 1958 under the leadership of Charles de Gaulle) sought to recover its global image through technological, rather than military or economic, independence. As the twentieth century moved into the Cold War era, strategic weaponry, satellites, and space exploration became the tools of a successful nation. The French, determined this time to be on the winning end of the race, invested every franc they could into research and development, culminating in the founding of the

⁹ Luxner, “French Guiana: Separatists Clamor for Independence”.

Centre National d'Etudes Spatiales (CNES, the predecessor to the French space agency) in 1962.¹⁰ Having spent much of the twentieth century “losing face” either in war or in literary propaganda (recall Somerset Maugham), the French government focused on regaining its political edge through technology. CNES would need a new launch facility, though—the original site had been located in Algeria, which had just won its independence from France.¹¹ The hunt began for the next suitable site for the CNES facilities.

The negotiations that would finally land CNES in French Guiana bore eerie similarities to the discussions on where to locate France’s penal colony a century earlier. Above all, the French sought a prime location from which to launch rockets *within French territory*. Regaining some political clout would be impossible if France succumbed to renting facilities from other established powers. The launch facility had to be located on French soil. Once again, New Caledonia and French Guiana competed for the top consideration and, in 1964, French Guiana won out once again. CNES listed seven criteria for judging potential sites: the potential for placing satellites in both polar and equatorial orbits, proximity to the equator (which reduced the amount of fuel needed to achieve speed), a surface area large enough (and population density low enough) to ensure launch safety, a deep-water port facility, an airport capable of receiving long-range aircraft, proximity to Europe, and political stability.¹² A report was compiled in

¹⁰ Redfield, 119.

¹¹ Anatoly Zak, “History of the Launch Site in Kourou, French Guiana,” Russian Space Web, http://www.russianspaceweb.com/kourou_origin.html (accessed February 23, 2010).

¹² Ibid.

1964 to determine the optimum location for this newest experiment.¹³ By January 1965, the Guiana Space Center initiated operations in Kourou and opened to international organizations or foreign governments requiring launch facilities for space projects. France had traded its penal colonies and its mining camps for a space facility that now dominates the economic and political landscape of the tiny South American territory—without the space center, Guyane might now be independent but underdeveloped; with it, French Guiana joins, and reaps the benefits of, the more stable French economy.

Explaining exactly how and why French Guiana is still part of France requires some background information on the development and interpretation of France's Fifth Republic. Like the British and Dutch, the French had virtually abandoned their Guiana during the first half of the twentieth century. For the British and Dutch, however, expansion of democracy through suffrage reforms preceded their downfall, as new political parties clamored for support from the newly enfranchised. France, on the other hand, had kept its overseas territories out of the business of voting. In 1936, there were only 432,122 qualified voters in all of the French overseas territories combined, and most of these were European transplants, not natives or Creoles.¹⁴ This simple statistic underlies a uniquely French attitude toward empire in the twentieth century. The French had never been interested in assimilating native groups, granting them suffrage, and then encouraging them to set up mini-Frances around the world—this was a British model. The French government possessed no interest in a hands-off, solely economic relationship with its colonists either—this was a Dutch model. Rather, the French sought

¹³ Redfield, 117.

¹⁴ Martin Deming Lewis, "One Hundred Million Frenchmen: the 'Assimilation' Theory in French Colonial Policy," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 4, no. 2 (January 1962): 153.

after World War II an expanded and resurgent France, in which they rejected the idea of colonial autonomy or separation from the homeland.

In 1944, as World War II came to a close in Europe, the Free French government met in Brazzaville, Congo, to consider the direction France and its empire should take. The Brazzaville Declaration officially spelled out France's desires, asserting that the spirit and methods of French colonization should expand democracy for native citizens of the colonies but should not allow for autonomy, any attainment of self-governing status, or any possibility of development outside the French sphere.¹⁵ The Free French government determined that, for France to survive and maintain its influence the empire must be saved, colonies must not be allowed to break away, and strong, centralized laws must be applied equally across all holdings, regardless of geography or culture. Though some voiced concern that specific needs of colonies could not be met by a "one-size-fits-all" legal code, the new French attitude toward empire would move forward.¹⁶ Retention of its current colonies and recovery of its reputation became the chief pillars upon which France would be reseeded.

By 1958, Charles de Gaulle had been leading a concerted French effort to rewrite the Constitution and form a new kind of empire. The Constitution of the Fifth Republic achieved ratification in that year, marking one final shift in French policy toward its colonies. The Fifth Republic under de Gaulle hoped to redefine the empire in a way that would both strengthen and streamline it. Independence movements in Africa had become bloody and costly, and de Gaulle, like British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, recognized that the winds of change were blowing, and suppression of these movements

¹⁵ Lewis, "One Hundred Million Frenchmen," 129.

¹⁶ Majumdar, 235.

would bankrupt Paris. His solution materialized in an offer to each of the republics in French Africa. Each state could select the “assimilation path,” which would make it a *département*—a fully integrated, equal part of France with all the rights and privileges of metropolitan French citizens but with absolutely no home rule or autonomy. The alternative, the “independence path,” would grant the country independence but would sever it completely from French economic aid and military protection.¹⁷ Every polity in French Africa chose independence.

The Fifth Republic’s Constitution did not, however, offer this choice to holdings outside of Africa, where de Gaulle had the most experience. Instead, the ten remaining non-African French territories were left in their original categories as established in 1946 by the Fourth Republic. The *territoires d’outre-mer*, or “TOMs,” included French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Wallis and Futuna Island, Saint Pierre et Miquelon, Mayotte, and the French Southern and Antarctic Lands, and retained certain local statutory laws and limited self-government. The *départements d’outre-mer*, or “DOMs,” included France’s four “ancient” colonies—Guadeloupe, Martinique, Réunion, and French Guiana. The DOMs were fully incorporated into France, with no legal or administrative differences from France itself.¹⁸ Assigning French Guiana a DOM status sent a strong message—as an equal part of France, French Guiana had no more legal right to agitate

¹⁷ Lewis, “One Hundred Million Frenchmen,” 131.

¹⁸ Constitutional reforms, including the most recent in 2003, have restructured the French overseas holdings thus: *départements d’outre-mer* remain Guadeloupe, Martinique, Réunion, and French Guiana, with Mayotte scheduled to join them in 2011. *Territoires d’outre-mer* now only refer to the French Southern and Antarctic Lands. A new designation, *collectivités d’outre-mer*, includes French Polynesia, Saint Pierre et Miquelon, Wallis and Futuna, Saint-Martin and Saint Barthélemy (the last two seceded from Guadeloupe in 2007 and were granted COM status). New Caledonia has been given the designation of *sui generis* territory, meaning it is slated for an independence vote between 2014 and 2019.

for home rule or independence than any province in metropolitan France.¹⁹ Rather than being seen as a colony seeking autonomy, a DOM appealing for greater autonomy would be seen as a rebellious province.

French Guiana's foreign policy, then, can not be compared to the other Guianas because it simply does not have one; the lack of a foreign policy, though, is a French colonial legacy of the most obvious kind. Internationally, French Guiana is represented only through France; it has no representation in the United Nations, and is only allowed to send two deputies to the French National Assembly (Réunion, a much smaller entity, is allowed five, while Martinique and Guadeloupe, also significantly smaller, are allowed four each).²⁰ The *département* of Guyane can only interact with its Caribbean neighbors in CARICOM through France, which is an observing member, so attempts to forge regional ties have been frustrated. In 2010, it is easier for a resident of French Guiana to travel through Europe than to visit another of the Guianas.²¹ These oddities make tracing current political and cultural circumstances in French Guiana back to their French administrative origins a relatively easy task.

Politically, French Guiana is a vestige of the past; its DOM status confuses those who believe that imperialism died with the twentieth century. The French, though, have never been shy about sharing their logic and reasoning in regard to why French Guiana has been enveloped by France, thousands of miles away. Since the days of de Gaulle, the French government has tried to regain some of its pre-war legitimacy; imperial holdings

¹⁹ Aldrich and Connell, 163.

²⁰ A current list of deputies can be found at the website of the French National Assembly Website, http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/elections/2007/resultats/LDD_DEP.csv.asp (accessed February 23, 2010).

²¹ Majumdar, 237.

provide some validity to that self-image. In short, French Guiana remains part of France so France can feel better about its place in the global hierarchy. Pierre Messmer, Minister of the Army under de Gaulle, explained the retention of fellow DOM Réunion by stating, “It is not material interests which tie Réunion to the metropole, it is political, human, physical, and spiritual unity. Réunion is France in the Indian Ocean.”²² The same principle can be applied to French Guiana—proof of French influence over Guyane is easy to obtain. The territory is literally still part of France.

The only other French political influence visible in French Guiana today is the presence of the Foreign Legion. Another vestige of colonialism, the Foreign Legion is a unit of mercenary soldiers hired by the French government to protect overseas interests. Procured by France from areas outside Guyane, the Foreign Legion represents the pinnacle of French imperial involvement in the area. French Guiana is served by the Third Foreign Infantry Regiment, which consists of five companies of around six hundred soldiers in all.²³ These soldiers serve two or three year tours of duty in French Guiana, and are assigned to headquarters in Kourou, a support team, an infantry unit, or one of two units assigned to perform joint operations with local police forces.²⁴ This group, which rarely includes citizens of Guyane, is the primary military presence in the *département*.

The history and purpose of the Foreign Legion in French Guiana confirms France’s priorities in the region and reminds locals of their unique relationship with

²² Pierre Mesmer, quoted in Aldrich and Connell, 165.

²³ Foreign Legion Office, “Third Foreign Infantry Regiment,” Website of the Third Foreign Infantry of the Foreign Legion, <http://3rei.legion-etrangere.com/fr/unites/organisation.php?SM=112> (accessed February 23, 2010).

²⁴ Ibid.

France. The Third Foreign Infantry Regiment arrived in French Guiana in 1973, following its disbanding in Algeria upon that country's independence.²⁵ The Third Regiment took on the duty of, not surprisingly, providing security for the Guiana Space Center in Kourou—little French interest, especially military interest, had existed in the area until the building of the Space Center. Since its arrival, the units of the Third have added patrols of the Sinnamary gold mining region to their agenda, primarily to prevent illegal gold mining. As many as a thousand clandestine mines exist along the river in the jungle, most worked by illegal Brazilian immigrants that could number as high as 15,000.²⁶ Protecting the only other significant source of income in French Guiana from these *garimpeiros* is only half the job—the pollution from these clandestine mines has negatively affected water quality in the Sinnamary and Oyapock River Basins, so the Foreign Legion's presence there also has an environmental impact.²⁷ The Third Regiment still oversees security for the launching facility, too, and also supervises jungle training for other Foreign Legion units in the Guianese portion of the Amazon.²⁸ Despite its small size, the Foreign Legion can be found in many parts of the French territory, and has become part of the fabric of life in Guyane.

A lack of French desire to assimilate and consolidate the colony in the nineteenth and early twentieth century has led to cultural developments parallel to the demographic Creolization of the *département* mentioned earlier. Other than the demography of the province, the linguistic makeup is the most obvious indicator of this hybridization. A

²⁵ Foreign Legion Office, "Third Foreign Infantry Regiment."

²⁶ "Illegal, Polluting, and Dangerous: the Gold Rush in French Guiana," *The Guardian*, <http://www.buzzle.com/articles/167632.html> (accessed February 23, 2010).

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Foreign Legion Office, "Third Foreign Infantry Regiment."

recent study reports that, despite a large quantity of different ethnic groups in the province, less than 18,000 of French Guiana's 192,000 residents primarily speak a language other than French Creole.²⁹ While comparing the linguistic composition of French Guiana to Guyana, the administrative differences shine through. Britain, which followed an aggressive assimilatory policy toward its colonists, left in its wake a vast majority of Standard English speakers in Guyana. France, which avoided costly assimilation projects and generally left the widespread colonists and indigenes to their own devices, left a Creolized colony behind in which frequent interaction among ethnic groups without centralized French education present led to a hybridized, Creole French language.

Music in French Guiana followed a similar trajectory. During the first gold rush, in the late nineteenth century, coast-dwelling European and Creole African prospectors moved south into the territories of various indigenous groups like the Nkyuka and Aluku. Trade exchanges developed, and often the Creole prospectors would welcome indigenous tribes or maroons from the jungle to their nightly dances. Since the Creole music was, itself, adapted from African sources, the maroon musicians quickly learned the tunes. Maroons and Amerindians both were introduced to European instruments like the clarinet and concertina, and this lively exchange developed into a hybridized music form that can be heard throughout French Guiana.³⁰ This hybrid form of music, called “*aleke*,” has become a form of rebellion—Creolized culture in French Guiana, which includes basically every ethnic group but the French ruling elite, shares this music, particularly in

²⁹ Paul M. Lewis, ed., *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 16th ed. (Dallas: SIL International, 2010), http://www.ethnologue.com/show_country.asp?name=GF (accessed February 23, 2010).

³⁰ Kenneth Bilby, “‘Aleke’: New Music and New Identities in the Guianas,” *Latin American Music Review* 22, no. 1 (Spring-Summer 2001): 32.

multiethnic towns like Saint-Laurent.³¹ The result is a musical division similar to the division of French Guiana itself (into the French coastal areas and the vast interior Inini), in which all the groups lacking political power have combined their cultures, including their music, in a show of solidarity against French imperial intrusion.

The *aleke* street and club musical styles dominate the lower and middle class areas of French Guiana where Creole traditions have been forming for over two centuries, but the broadcast airwaves of Cayenne, Kourou, and the comparatively metropolitan coastal region are dominated by French interests. Commercial radio is provided chiefly by two corporations, both France-based and French-owned. The larger of the two stations is operated by Radio France Internationale, which is partially funded by the French government and provides Paris-based programming and popular French music.³² The same updates on French politics, Paris weather reports, and European Union informative pieces are broadcast through Cayenne and Saint-Laurent as in Marseille or Lyon. The smaller station, Radio Guyane, also plays heavily France-based news and music, though some local *aleke*-style songs work their way onto the play list. Nonetheless, Radio Guyane also headquarters in France; it is operated by Réseau France Outre-Mer (RFO).³³ Three television networks broadcast in French Guiana, though the largest by far is Télé Guyane, a public station also owned by RFO and serving primarily metropolitan French interests.³⁴ More than 70 percent of French Guiana's trade is with France, and its music and news agencies reflect this heavy French influence

³¹ Bilby, "'Aleke': New Music and New Identities in the Guianas," 39.

³² Radio France International Online, <http://www.english.rfi.fr/> (accessed February 23, 2010).

³³ British Broadcasting Corporation, "Regions and Territories: French Guiana."

³⁴ Ibid.

accordingly.³⁵ The business of radio and television, much like the other business of the country, is a French enterprise operating abroad.

French Guiana, then, is more like a Creolized version of France than the French version of the Guianas. Demographically, politically, and culturally, the *département d'outre-mer* known as Guyane and French Guiana is unlike Guyana and, as will soon be illustrated, vastly different from Suriname, as well. European Union investment in health care is reflected in its mortality statistics, particularly in the leaps forward after the establishment of the Fifth Republic. Politically speaking the only difference between Guyane and Brittany (roughly the same size) is representation in the French National Assembly. Culturally, French Guiana has experienced a hybridization in its language and music that can be directly traced to France's *laissez-faire* approach to colonization before de Gaulle. But it is still vastly different from its counterparts on the Guiana Shield, and these smaller, cultural discrepancies sum up to the ultimate disparity. Imperialism in French Guiana remains so tenacious, and the colony remains so culturally and politically enveloped in mother France, that it has become the only mainland territory in the world that is still owned by an overseas power.

³⁵ Luxner, "French Guiana: Separatists Clamor for Independence".

CHAPTER TEN

Acculturating a Culture of Cultures

While Guyana is a stronghold of British culture adopted by an ethnically diverse population, and French Guiana is a Creolized outpost of France and the European Union, Suriname's identity is elusive. The long-term effects of ethnic and cultural mixing, loosely supervised by an absentee investor, moved to the fore during Suriname's initial years of independence after 1975. The Dutch had managed the transition to independence like they had always administered the colony—distilling it to a purely business relationship. Ready to cut ties with its burdensome colony, the Netherlands authorized a large payout to Suriname, the “Golden Handshake,” as a guilt-free way to extract itself from colonial management. The new state left behind, Suriname, would have to develop its own brand of nationalism. Dutch colonial administration left for the Surinamese a dizzying array of self-sustaining ethnic groups struggling to find a unified voice and a place in the world. As with the other two Guianas, Suriname's demography, domestic politics, foreign policy, and cultural traditions will be discussed and linked to Dutch imperial protocols.

Suriname's demography, like Guyana's, was the direct result of concentrated immigration programs designed to bring in indentured laborers to work the plantations. Because of additional efforts made late in the nineteenth century to reduce repatriation rates, Suriname developed a more balanced demographic composition than its neighbors. 2009 population studies list the demographic breakdown thus: 27 percent East Indian, 18 percent Creole, 15 percent Javanese, 15 percent Maroon, 12.5 percent Mixed, 3.7 percent

Amerindian, and 1.8 percent Chinese.¹ A newly independent state with such a varied and evenly distributed population should expect many “growing pains” as it attempts to create a single national spirit from so many diverse sources—Suriname has been no exception.

Attempts to unify the country after independence in 1975 understandably failed, resulting in a collapse of the fragile Surinamese democratic system. The difficulty in finding national unity manifested fully in 1980, when a military junta led by Dési Bouterse overthrew the government. Legislation had been unable to bring the country together, so just five years into its nationhood the military stepped in to forge a nation at gunpoint. It would be 1985 before Bouterse’s junta agreed to allow elections for a new National Assembly. The assembly consisted of thirty-one representatives—fourteen from the military, eleven from trade unions, and six from the business community, an obvious collision of military ideology and old Dutch pro-business influences.² Though a military government temporarily held power, Dutch methods for structuring government and handling procedure still appeared in the actions of the Surinamese bureaucrats.

In 1987, the military party finally met defeat in general elections and another halting attempt at unifying the country’s disparate groups began. Though the process would be interrupted again in 1990 (another Bouterse *coup d’etat*, this one only lasting about a year), a change in the character of Surinamese political parties had already begun. The 1987 election signified a shift in strategy; the military junta had not been defeated by a single political party, but by several parties working together in a coalition (this

¹ United States Department of State, “Background Note: Suriname,” <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/1893.htm> (accessed February 23, 2010).

² Betty Sedoc-Dahlberg, ed., *The Dutch Caribbean: Prospects for Democracy* (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1990), 255.

particular version was known as the “Front Coalition”).³ Because the Dutch left no cohesive assimilation or unification strategy behind upon their departure, Surinamese politicians realized the need to find new ways to cooperate in order to be elected.

The Dutch program of paid immigration in the latter half of the nineteenth century created the diversity and the tension that exists among ethnic groups in today’s Suriname. Unlike Britain, which gathered its indentured laborers from its other colonies (hence the larger percentage of Indians in Guyana), the Dutch brought in a vast array of settlers from all over, with no plan of how to integrate them into Dutch society. As each group became self-sufficient and isolationist in practice, the power of the ethnically based political parties associated with each constituency grew. Experiencing electoral deadlock throughout the 1980s, Suriname endured racial rioting, violent civil war, and military overthrow. Only the development of coalition-based campaigning and government began to free the country from its political inefficacy. This behavior remains visible; the 2010 Surinamese parliamentary election will feature several coalition groups, including the powerful *A Combinatie*, seeking a majority of the fifty-one available parliament member seats.⁴ Though coalition governments had occurred before (the original 1975 government was a coalition), 1987 marked the most successful coalition election. It also marked a turning point; coalition campaigns and governments have been the norm for Surinamese politics after 1987.

The lack of a cohesive strategy to assimilate diverse groups under a single, Dutch cultural umbrella did not alarm the Dutch, who were only interested in economic issues

³ Sedoc-Dahlberg, 256.

⁴ Suriname Tourism Network, “Suriname Elections 2010,” Suriname Gateway, http://www.surinametourism.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=156:suriname-elections&catid=75:suriname (accessed February 24, 2010).

anyway, but plagued the Surinamese heirs to the republic. It would be the independent Surinamese government that would take the first steps toward assimilation policy, attempting to acculturate its citizens to a Surinamese national identity. Ironically, the government of Suriname would borrow its acculturation strategy from its British neighbor—Surinamese nationalism (itself a brand new idea) would be spread through a government-funded public school system. A public education campaign that had existed for over a century in Guyana was now, in the late 1970s, being implemented in Suriname. Table 10.1 reflects this shift toward public school education.

Table 10.1. Comparison of Education Methods in Suriname, 1938-1985

School Types	1938 ⁵	1985 ⁶
Total Enrolled Student Population	21,851	132,895
Government-Funded School Enrollment	7,478 (34%)	67,279 (51%)
Private Catholic School Enrollment	7,405 (34%)	29,295 (22%)
Private Protestant School Enrollment	6,968 (32%)	5,932 (4%)
Private Hindu and Muslim School Enrollment	0 (0%)	9,399 (7%)

Suriname’s government recognized the importance of assimilative education in a way the Dutch never had; but Suriname’s need to bring these groups together under one banner far exceeded any sense of urgency on the part of the Dutch. The Surinamese Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture defined the need in 1986, stating, “Familiarity with the cultural expressions of one’s countrymen generates mutual understanding and respect,

⁵ Hiss, 205.

⁶ Chin and Buddingh, 162.

and so creates the conditions needed for unity and national solidarity.”⁷ Suriname’s political structure and its newfound focus on public education, then, are the accidental by-products of the Dutch approach to colonial administration and the opportunities and challenges created by its departure.

Internal political structure and education reform did not exist as the only aspects of Surinamese national culture requiring redefinition after independence—without the Netherlands to act as its diplomatic proxy, Suriname’s government had to create its own foreign policy. A sudden severing of ties with the Netherlands made this an even more difficult adjustment for the Surinamese government. At the close of World War II and into the 1950s, it seemed the Dutch treatment of its colonies would parallel France’s. The loss of Indonesia in 1949 had damaged the Netherlands’ imperial psyche in much the same way the defeats of World War II had disillusioned the French. In a similar response aimed at retaining the rest of its empire, the Netherlands presented a renegotiated constitution in 1954.⁸ This new agreement, referred to as the *Statuut*, chartered the Kingdom of the Netherlands as a tripartite monarchy, with the Netherlands, the Antilles, and Suriname treated as equal partners.

This new Kingdom of the Netherlands at first seems identical to the new colonial structures of the French Union and its successor, the Fifth Republic. One fundamental difference, though, set Suriname on a different path—the equal partnership among the three polities did not apply to foreign relations and defense.⁹ The handling of foreign

⁷ Suriname Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, *Policy Aspects of the Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture* (Paramaribo: Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 1986), 23.

⁸ Rosemarijn Hoefte, “Thrust Together: the Netherlands’ Relationship with Its Caribbean Partners,” *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, 38, no. 4 (Winter 1996):36.

⁹ Ibid.

policy would rest completely in The Hague until Suriname's 1975 independence, giving the Surinamese little chance to build their own partnerships with Europe and other world powers. Thus, the underlying theme of Dutch colonial experience would hold true during the transition to independence. The Dutch would leave Suriname relatively well prepared for economic self-sufficiency through a series of well-planned economic initiatives, but completely unprepared for the business of foreign diplomacy, which the Netherlands had retained in full.

The actual move to independence became a fast and jarring experience for the Surinamese. The independence movement set into motion in 1972, when both Suriname and the Netherlands changed governments. A coalition government including the Social Democrats (advocates of independence for the colonies) gained control of the States-General under its leader Joop den Uyl. Suriname's new government, a coalition of African and Javanese political parties led by Henck Arron, took advantage of the change in Dutch political climate and announced in 1974 its intention to lead Suriname to independence.¹⁰ By New Year's Eve in 1975, Arron's government made good on its pledge, with the support of a Dutch government more than willing to unload its Surinamese economic burden.

The discomfiting speed at which Suriname received its freedom reflects in the populace's reactions in 1975. Though many Surinamese citizens possessed optimism about a future independent of the Netherlands, most Indian and Javanese groups adamantly opposed the plan.¹¹ Furthermore, the Surinamese parliamentary vote for independence was quite close, and the public's reaction appeared mixed at best. Many

¹⁰ Hoefte, "Thrust Together," 37-38.

¹¹ Ibid.

expressed their displeasure at being so quickly thrust into self-sustainability by leaving the country *en masse*.¹² Fearing a mass exodus of economically burdensome Surinamese back to the Netherlands, Dutch Prime Minister den Uyl offered the country the “Golden Handshake.” The limits on Surinamese emigration to the Netherlands in the agreement were well-publicized; a popular ballad in Paramaribo in 1975 was “There Is No Room for Surinamese in Holland Anymore.”¹³ The way foreign policy would be handled in an independent Suriname received definition in these early years of exodus. Those who had the closest relationship with the Netherlands and its government generally left the country; Suriname’s government would be left holding a collection of disparate and divergent ethnic groups with no common ally to which to turn, and no diplomats trained to keep European ties intact.

The sudden loss of the Netherlands as a diplomatic mentor, proxy, sponsor, and partner forced the Surinamese to seek out a place in the international realm independent of their colonial associations; they would find this place in CARICOM and in the Organization of American States (OAS). These regional bodies of the Western Hemisphere provided Suriname its diplomatic contacts, in contrast to Guyana (which cultivated diplomatic relationships through the British Commonwealth) and French Guiana (whose foreign diplomacy was handled by Paris). Paramaribo had chosen to seek its place in organizations of geographical, not cultural, proximity. The Dutch colonial administration’s unwillingness to invest in cultural assimilation culminated in Suriname’s foreign policy choices.

¹² Hoefte, “Thrust Together,” 37-38.

¹³ “Surinam: Birth Pangs of a Polyglot State,” *Time*, December 1, 1975, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,913778-1,00.html> (accessed February 24, 2010).

Searching for widened trade opportunities on its side of the world, Suriname joined CARICOM in 1995, becoming a full member in 1996. The country's trade policy has since been much more closely tied to CARICOM than to the Netherlands or any other foreign entity. Suriname's tariff laws and schedule have been based on CARICOM's common external tariff since 1995, and the state grants duty-free access to all CARICOM imports.¹⁴ Suriname has maintained a very active participation in the Caribbean Community since 1995, and possesses much stronger trade ties with the Caribbean than with the Netherlands or Europe. Competition policy, anti-dumping, and consumer protection laws recently passed in the Surinamese parliament all relate directly to CARICOM membership, as did Suriname's continued active support during negotiations of the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas, despite its eventual failure.¹⁵ In foreign trade relations, Suriname's interests clearly lay in the Caribbean, and not in the Dutch sphere of influence.

The OAS has supplemented CARICOM membership by providing Suriname with a diplomatic forum. Suriname's unique relationship with the OAS developed in 1990, when a special meeting of the organization convened to condemn the 1990 *coup d'etat* of Desi Bouterse. For perhaps the first time, situations on the ground in Suriname had been noticed by an outside party and considered seriously. The OAS monitored elections the following year, and used its experiences in Suriname as a basis for the crafting of Resolution 1080, the principal apparatus for emergency mediation activities in the

¹⁴ World Trade Organization Trade Policy Review Body, *Trade Policy Review of Suriname* (New York: World Trade Organization Secretariat, 2004), xii.

¹⁵ Ibid.

organization.¹⁶ Many Surinamese within the government welcomed the active participation of the OAS in Surinamese affairs, and interpreted it as a show of international interest in the country's well-being.

As a result, Suriname has actively taken part in the organization since 1992; currently, the Assistant Secretary General of the organization is Albert Ramdin, a Surinamese diplomat. Suriname's participation increased particularly during the crafting of the Inter-American Democratic Charter in 2001. In its most active international role ever, Surinamese government agents met with the Independent Election Board, the University of Suriname, various labor and human rights organizations, and the Suriname Chamber of Commerce to provide detailed suggestions and comments regarding the charter. Bringing its new foreign and domestic policy into cohesion, Suriname even suggested adding sections to the charter on education, stating that "education is a vehicle for arriving and effective and meaningful participation in the decision-making process. . ."¹⁷ The focus on new educational and diplomatic opportunities was unprecedented for Suriname's government, but designed to right years of neglect by the Dutch States-General. In the absence of Dutch interest, Suriname has turned to its neighbors, rather than its cultural relatives, resulting in a foreign policy quite different than that of the other two Guianas.

The Dutch legacy of fractured multi-ethnicity also pervades the non-political culture of modern Suriname, and this is reflected most obviously in its language. Unlike

¹⁶ These events are tied to Suriname's OAS relationship in the inaugural speech of Ambassador Jacques R.C. Kross at the OAS in 2007, which can be found online at <http://www.surinameembassy.org/03212007.shtml> (accessed February 24, 2010).

¹⁷ Interim Representative Henry L. MacDonald to Ambassador Hernán R. Castro, August 13, 2001, Office of the Permanent Mission of Suriname to the OAS, Online Archive of the Organization of American States, available at <http://scm.oas.org/pdfs/2001/cp08693.pdf> (accessed February 25, 2010).

Guyana and French Guiana, which have well-established official languages, the *de facto* and *de jure* languages of Suriname are not the same. The official language of Suriname is Dutch, but most resources will explain that English is a widely-spoken alternative in diplomatic and government offices. As a result, the websites of the Suriname Embassy and the Surinamese government are in both languages. The reality outside the walls of the offices of state is wildly different. On a walk down the street in Paramaribo, the average traveler can hear fifteen widely spoken languages.¹⁸ Of the traditional languages, Dutch or English, take third and fourth place behind a Guianese dialect of Hindi (known as Caribbean Hindustani) and Javanese, which together dominate the everyday culture. As a way of negotiating business and communicating within such a linguistically diverse area, a Creole language known as Sranang Tongo (sometimes known locally as “Taki-Taki”) has formed as the *lingua franca* of the younger population. Sranan Tongo is spoken as the primary language of over 100,000 of Suriname’s residents today; it features a small vocabulary based on a mixture of Asian, African, and European common words.¹⁹ Lacking rules on inflection or declension, the language is easy to learn and has become the Surinamese people’s preferred linguistic compromise.

The failure of Dutch to move from *de jure* language to *de facto* acceptance rests upon its treatment by the Netherlands’ colonial administration. As imperial overseers, the Dutch possessed little desire to teach their language to immigrants, resulting in schools and communities becoming segregated along ethnic/linguistic lines. By

¹⁸ Summer Institute of Linguistics, “The Languages of Suriname,” SIL International Online, <http://www.sil.org/americas/suriname/index.html> (accessed February 25, 2010).

¹⁹ Ibid.

independence in 1975, few citizens truly spoke Dutch at home—they would instead prefer their language of origin (Javanese, Hindustani, Arabic, and so on). Faced with the daunting task of uniting these groups into a single nation, Suriname recognized the need for a unifying linguistic education; however, the foundations upon which the language curriculum could be built did not exist. Dutch, nevertheless, is the language of Surinamese public schools. By trying to unify the country at least in language, the government has created a program that, in effect, makes a “language migrant out of every inhabitant of Suriname.”²⁰ Dutch is, for most Surinamese, a second language to which one is first exposed at school, not at home.

This lack of linguistic cohesion continues to be a concern within Suriname’s intellectual community, led by one of Suriname’s most respected novelists, Albert Helman, who remained vocal about the fundamental need for a single language up until his death in 1996. He posited in his writings that one’s sense of nation rested firmly upon language and that a people without a language, “the highest, profoundest, most intensive means of communication,” can not exist as a nation. He further suggested that when a group of people lacks a national language and, instead, is divided into smaller groups speaking minority languages (the case of Suriname), the people remain divided against themselves.²¹ The concerns of Helman have been echoed in the government, as it continues to seek a policy of language acculturation through education.

The struggle for balance within a polyglot society has been the cornerstone for Helman’s novels, which are still popular in Suriname. His first novel, *Zuid-Zuid-West*

²⁰ Wim Rutgers and Scott Rollins, “Dutch Caribbean Literature,” *Callaloo* 21, no. 3 (Summer 1998): 546.

²¹ Rutgers and Rollins, 546.

(South by Southwest), published in 1926, extolled the beauty of Suriname and its inhabitants in chapters entitled “The City,” “Vacation,” “The Family,” and “The Interior.” At the same time, though, Helman laid the plight of Suriname at the feet of the Netherlands; he reproached colonial authorities for being more interested in dividends than the lives of its people.²² Calling the Dutch “thieves” and lamenting the fractured state of his “poor, poor country,” Helman mourned the cause of Suriname’s cultural fragmentation—not exploitation, but neglect.

Suriname’s multi-cultural legacy can be found in other aspects of its culture, as well. Paramaribo’s architecture, for instance, is a unique collection of Dutch clapboard construction, detailed, native-inspired decorative woodcarvings, geometrically ornate Indian and Javanese architecture, and the bright colors of Africa and the Caribbean.²³ The fusion of architectural styles and techniques with traditional Dutch construction makes Suriname and Paramaribo a unique cultural asset to the world, so much so that the United Nations designated Paramaribo as a UNESCO world heritage site in 2002.²⁴ Architecture like that in Suriname can not be found anywhere else in the world.

This fusion can also be found in Suriname’s leisure activities—sports in Suriname are a myriad collection of different athletic traditions. First of all, the country shares two sports obsessions with the Netherlands—football and swimming. Football is the most popular sport in Suriname, another carryover from Dutch colonial rule particularly in the

²² Rutgers and Rollins, 544.

²³ “Paramaribo: Travel Story and Pictures from Surinam,” Travel Adventures, <http://www.traveladventures.org/continents/southamerica/paramaribo-architecture.shtml> (accessed February 20, 2010).

²⁴ United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, “Historic Inner City of Paramaribo,” UNESCO World Heritage Site Program, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/940> (accessed February 25, 2010).

first half of the twentieth century. To that end, the country has produced a long list of talented players; many play professionally in Europe. But the stigma of colonialism has affected even football in Suriname. A rule that the Netherlands passed through FIFA, football's international governing body, bars all Surinamese players who move to the Netherlands to pursue professional careers from representing their country in international competition. Instead, players performing in the Dutch leagues must play for the Netherlands. As a result, Suriname's prowess in developing football talent does not bear fruit for the nation. The country's national team plays in CONCACAF, the North American and Caribbean league, rather than in the more competitive South American field, because it simply lacks the talent to compete in the stronger South American group.²⁵ It is generally believed that, if Suriname could retain its players, it would be a formidable opponent in either group. Suriname also boasts an excellent swimming tradition, culminating in swimmer Anthony Nesty's two gold medals at the 1988 and 1992 Summer Olympic Games.²⁶ Other sports add to the "Dutch emulsion" that had been created a century before—badminton, tennis, judo, and even cricket enjoy a national following, as well, a testament to the varied interests of a varied culture.

If Suriname has been able to successfully integrate its varied cultures in any area, it has been through Surinamese music. Like the local music of interior French Guiana, Surinamese music is a hybridization of indigenous and immigrant musical styles, developed over decades of cultural interaction. Suriname's music scene is quite rich, and

²⁵ Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), "Suriname's Little Secret," *FIFA Website*, 15 February, 2008, <http://www.fifa.com/worldcup/news/newsid=692090.html#surinames+little+secret> (accessed February 25, 2010).

²⁶ Suriname National Olympic Committee, "Suriname," *Official Website of the Olympic Movement*, available at <http://www.olympic.org/en/content/National-Olympic-Committees/suriname/> (accessed February 25, 2010).

Surinamese bands have started to be recognized by people outside of the country. Though the entire country's population is little more than half a million, and less than two hundred thousand reside in Paramaribo, the amount of grassroots musical activity and exchange is described by one musical historian as "extraordinary."²⁷ The culture of Paramaribo, built upon the transient and fluctuating nature of its demography, provides a friendly space for musical experimentation and integration as ethnic groups with their own distinct music attempt to live and work together.

Paramaribo now acts as the center of Surinamese popular music based on the integration of different ethnic components into the Afro-Caribbean music style. A "steady output of polished, technologically sophisticated recordings" now emanates from the country.²⁸ But the music rarely travels beyond the borders of the country. Despite its heavily globalized sound and its "world music" feel, the hybridized music of Suriname is produced for local consumption, rarely heard anywhere but on the Creole radio stations dominating the music scene in Paramaribo and New Nickerie (Suriname's second city). Surinamese music provides, instead, a glimpse of what a successful Surinamese culture could look like—a cooperative society weaving its different strands of identity into a uniquely Surinamese product.

This dream has not yet become reality, though Suriname shows potential in developing its past into a usable future. The demographic, political, and cultural state of affairs in the country are the result of over a century of Dutch colonial administration, and it will take at least that long to change Suriname into something else. Whatever its future will be, Suriname's present is unique. Its uniqueness is confirmed on an early

²⁷ Bilby, "Roots Explosion," 257-258.

²⁸ Ibid., 260.

morning walk in Paramaribo. As one turns up Keizer Street in the central part of the city, one of the world's most exceptional sites comes into view. There, two iron gates a few hundred feet apart open onto the sidewalk. One gate leads to the Ahmadiyya Anjuman Mosque; the other opens into the courtyard of the Neveh Shalom Synagogue. There, in a remote corner of South America thousands of miles from Mecca and Jerusalem, Muslims and Jews worship side-by-side, even sharing a parking facility. This is daily life in a country that hosts every identity—and yet possesses no identity of its own. The unlikely neighbors provide a tangible illustration of both the challenges and the possibilities that Suriname's exceptional cultural inheritance has provided.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Conclusion

Guyana, French Guiana, and Suriname are products of three different administrations and ways of looking at empire. Though the historical forces acting on the three countries' inhabitants were quite similar, their responses to these challenges and opportunities have set them on diverging paths. A review of the history and present of this "laboratory of colonialism" reveals five distinct historical periods—following the trajectory of each country's history through these periods casts light on the true power of imperialism and of history itself in shaping the identities of nations.

The first period, which can be called the "Homogenous Period," should include not only the pre-contact period of indigenous control, but also the early colonization efforts before 1667. During this initial phase, the three Guianas were populated by groups of people exhibiting a relatively uniform Carib-Arawak culture. This group came into contact with British and Dutch explorers during the waning years of the sixteenth century, and the Guianas themselves became the site for small-scale colonization efforts for the next five decades. The Guianas diverged little from one another during this phase primarily because the colonial enterprises of the British, French, and Dutch were too insignificant to overcome the uniform external pressures of climate, environment, agricultural challenges, and indigenous presence. In essence, the Guianas moved forward through history as a single, homogenous unit until the Treaty of Breda in 1667.

Beginning with Breda, European powers made their first real attempts to delineate the Guianas, ushering in the second phase, the “Demarcation Period.” During this period, which reached its conclusion with the Treaty of Paris (1815), the first signs of divergence appeared in conjunction with struggles among the three empires for territory and influence. During this phase, the French portion of the Guianas became the first to distinguish itself from the others. The British and Dutch colonized both Guyana and Suriname early on, with English settlers in what would become Dutch Guiana and *vice versa*. Thus, by the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1815, British Guiana and Dutch Guiana were relatively difficult to distinguish from one another (swapping affiliations, in fact, with the treaty). The French, however, did not shift from their territory, and their influence remained steady. French responses to Guiana stayed negative, based on a number of failed experiments at colonization. During the fifteen decades of the Demarcation Period, the French developed a wholly different view of the Guianas than their two counterparts, setting up the process of transitioning French Guiana’s purpose away from that of an agricultural colony. The successes (or in the French case, the failures) of colonization during the Demarcation Period permanently affected the way the three colonies would be administered during the next two phases.

The third phase of a pan-Guianese history runs from the 1815 Treaty of Paris, which set up the division as we now know it, until the outbreak of World War I in 1914. This period, which can be termed the “Active Administration Period,” was characterized by three colonial administrations—British, French, and Dutch—implementing policies to respond to different social and economic changes in the region and the world. Each of the three administrations had to create ways to make their colonies conform to their

definition of “profitable,” and each had to respond to the social changes brought about by emancipation.

The British focused on cultural assimilation, first developed through their slave schools and furthered by their assimilative education system for later immigrants. As the British administration dealt with emancipation by importing laborers from other parts of its empire, the assimilative system continued, in the hope that British Guiana would become, culturally speaking, a “Britain in South America.” Guyana’s multi-ethnic demography is a direct result of the labor importation system, while its embrace of English language and culture is a product of the assimilation efforts began during the nineteenth century.

For the French, the Active Administration Period was characterized by a relentless search for colony profitability. Due to a series of colonization and agricultural failures, France abandoned the settlement and assimilation model in favor of an exploitative one. French Guiana was not settlement-friendly, so the French government utilized the land as a storage facility, eventually as a penal settlement. Minor economic changes brought about by the discovery of gold during this period made some of the few remaining settlers wealthy. This led to a push by the more privileged class for increased autonomy that was rejected by the French government. Shifts from a republic that favored expanded democracy to a monarchy that favored centralized control resulted in a century of instability for the colony. Regime changes meant occasional influxes of political prisoners into the colony and a lack of the administrative continuity required to build a settler colony.

For Dutch Guiana, the Active Administration Period consisted of the same challenges the British faced. The Netherlands' economic focus caused its colonial administrators to seek legislation that would improve the economic output of the colony, sometimes at the expense of its social stability. Dutch Guiana produced a profit during the time of slavery, and the idea of emancipation was resisted by both the Dutch government and the Guianese settlers alike. Programs designed to ease the economic transition from plantation society to free labor society characterized this period in Dutch Guianese development. The government pursued similar immigration programs to those of the British, resulting in a similarly diverse demography, but failed to invest in assimilative policies and education, instead focusing on the strengthening of corporations in the colony. By the outbreak of World War I, the demographics of British and Dutch Guiana were similar (because of similar government responses to emancipation), but their cultures (one moving towards uniformity, the other mired in fragmentation) were growing distant.

The fourth phase, which can be referred to as the "Abandonment Phase," was the result of outside pressures causing each colony to be given even lower priority in the policies of its administrators. Two world wars and a depression distracted all three countries from active administration of the area, while potentialities in Africa were leading them to explore other options entirely. In essence, this period of diminished European control over the area allowed the cultural aspects of each colony, both positive and negative, to develop unfettered. In British Guiana, cultural assimilation continued, but political parties began to be formed along ethnic lines, as full integration had not taken place before economic depression placed it in jeopardy. For French Guiana, the

penal system lost favor and little infrastructural development occurred. Dutch Guiana experienced a similar fracturing of the political system and a growing desire in the Dutch government to do away with the colony completely. The Abandonment Phase fueled internal instability, benefiting the independence designs of Jagan and Burnham in British Guiana and Arron in Dutch Guiana, while causing the French to split the colony into two sections (the coast, over which it retained minimal control, and Inini, in which it had no interest culturally or otherwise).

The final, fifth phase of pan-Guianese development begins after the close of World War II, and can be termed the “Decolonization Period.” In this phase, the three colonial powers redefined their roles in the Guianas, while the colonies redefined themselves and their place in the world. Britain sought continued cultural influence, but almost apologetically detached itself from its label as an empire, as illustrated by Harold Macmillan’s “Wind of Change” speech in 1960. Guyana achieved independence in this atmosphere, first distancing itself politically from the West, but then paying heed to its learned culture by returning to a close affiliation to the United Kingdom through the Commonwealth. In effect, cricket and The Beatles saved the relationship between the UK and Guyana.

France decolonized in a different way. Its losses in the world wars caused a crisis of identity in the country, as it sought to return to its previous position of world importance. Charles de Gaulle suggested that the solution to such a crisis was a reinvestment in the empire. While other colonies were becoming independent, France was investing money and bureaucratic talent in French Guiana in the hope of integrating it more fully into the French sphere. A lack of national identity in French Guiana,

coupled with this increase in French attention and investment (culminating in the construction of the Guiana Space Center), moved French Guiana from colony to *département*. Literally, French Guiana was decolonized, and then annexed into continental France.

The Dutch, wanting to get out of the expensive and troublesome business of imperial administration, effectively bribed Suriname into leaving. Issuing a generous aid package, the “Golden Handshake,” the Dutch government extracted itself from Surinamese affairs almost overnight. A lack of cultural assimilation and a sudden independence combined to make Suriname’s early years as an independent nation difficult. Existing as a newly formed confederation of distinct ethnic groups with no common culture, Suriname abandoned cultural and colonial ties in favor of geographical ones, becoming active in both the Caribbean Community and the Organization of American States, and embarked on a new program of assimilation designed to redefine Surinamese nationalism and unite everyone under its cause.

History is by no means an irrelevant study of the distant past when it comes to the Guianas; it is, instead, a powerful force with which each polity must contend. With different actors and different administrative decisions, the Guianas could still be what they were in 1595—a verdant stretch of South America in which the residents react to their tropical home the same way, from the Essequibo to the Oyapock. But this is not what Guiana is today. Instead, this seemingly homogenous stretch of river, jungle, and rocky shield has been permanently altered—a rock upon which the images of three distinct European cultures and values have been indelibly etched.

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