

## TOWARDS A JUST AND CARING FUTURE

By

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Guyana's motto or mission statement is "**One People, One Nation, One Destiny**".

It's a motto that speaks of Nationhood. It is a motto that speaks of Unity. It is a motto that speaks of Equality. It is a motto that speaks of Justice.

In essence, our motto, "One People, One Nation, One destiny" speaks of a "just and caring" society.

At our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Independence, we are very far away from this reality.

The most recent National Elections revealed the depth of the racial divide in Guyana with an almost 50:50 split of the electorate, heavily along racial lines. Many have offered reasons why Guyana has been unable to overcome its political and racial problems which undermine Guyana's development.

Of great interest is the fact that the two competing Parties at the last General Elections had two symmetrically opposite themes.

The winning Coalition championed "a Government of National Unity".

The losing Party championed "racial divisiveness".

Yet the votes were very close, 207, 201 versus 202,656.

Why would a People seeking to Nation build vote for a Party that preached racial divisiveness and practiced ethnic empowerment and ethnic hegemony for the last 23 years.

A Government's highest responsibility is to ensure the physical, economic, psychological and spiritual well-being and security of its citizens. All its citizens.

This responsibility is also enshrined and guaranteed under its Constitution.

Yet for 50 years, Guyana, a country richly endowed with natural resources: 18 million hectares of pristine forest; an abundance of water (the source of life) ; sunshine and no hurricanes or earth quakes; oil ; gold; diamonds; manganese; bountiful seafood; unique bio-diversity; a land with over 200 fruits and vegetables ; a land that has produced brilliant scholars, scientists, engineers, lawyers who populate and develop other countries of the world; and a land that is English speaking and strategically located as an English bridge between the Caribbean and Latin America; a land that sits next to Brazil, a country of over 200 million and the 5<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world.....is a land of extreme poverty.

There are three primarily reasons why Guyana is where it is today: a broken, racially divided, lawless, poverty stricken country.

The first reason is Guyana's embrace of a Westminster "divide and rule" constitution that is not suitable for Guyana becoming a Plural Democracy that is resolutely committed to a just multi-racial, multi-

cultural, multi-party society in which every citizen is equal before the Law and in which every citizen enjoys freedom of speech, freedom of association, freedom of religion and the right to life, freedom, privacy and safety.

The second reason is racism.

Dr. Kean Gibson hit the proverbial nail on the head when she defined racism as “itself a political system, a particular power structure of formal and informal rule, socioeconomic privilege, and norms for the differential distribution of material wealth and opportunities, benefits and burdens, rights and duties”.

Our historical journey through enslavement and indentureship and the purposeful mistruths of our historical narrative has provided a suitable platform for nurturing racism. And racism is a crime as much as it is a human frailty. Racism undermines all human rights. Racism has plagued Guyana because of an incorrect historical narrative that has been promoted and maintained by racial entrepreneurs.

The third reason for our condition at our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary is criminality and the rejection of the Rule of Law.

Dr. Clive Thomas, years ago warned the nation that “there is the existence of a cabal or coterie of persons comprised mainly, but not exclusively, of selective crime bosses, state officials, security personnel, elements of the criminal justice system and political bosses, advisors and other insiders. The combination is unique and derives from the particular historical antecedents as well as social, economic and political circumstances in Guyana. This group as identified wields enormous power as well as commands considerable economic wealth. As the ruling elite this group has placed itself above the reaches of domestic law while at the same time leading the political charge in Guyana for law, order, public safety and human security”.

The last decade can be characterized as a period where there has been the greatest transfer of State wealth to an ethnic group in Latin America and the Caribbean, if not the whole world. It can also be characterized as a period in which the criminal economy is all pervasive and has penetrated the entire society.

The State inherited by the new Government is a corrupt State which partnered with drug Lords to exact extrajudicial killings and ethnic cleansing with impunity. The inherited State was one in which the Judiciary ignored Executive lawlessness. The inherited State is one in which Law enforcement was corrupt and was involved in torture and extrajudicial killings. The inherited State was one in which many businesses were corrupt because of money laundering of illegal drug monies. Gold smuggling, fuel smuggling and gun running were normal activities of some businesses. The inherited State was one in which many prominent individuals lived above and outside the Law.

We are where we are today because the last Government used race to win elections and after winning the elections used the “winner-take-all” constitution to steal state assets, partner with drug smugglers and money launderers, while become rich through kickbacks and the sale of Guyana’s patrimony.

SOCU and SARA are now only receiving information of the scale of this politically encouraged criminality. For example, 15,000 ounces of gold were smuggled out of Guyana on a weekly basis. Millions of acres of land were given away for G\$25 (12 US cents) per hectare for periods lasting 50 to 99 years.

The reason why the elections were close amidst the poor governance and racism over the years, was because corruption, racism and marginalization were rampant and political constituencies were being awarded for their loyalty, along racial lines.

Guyana will not be a caring and just society unless three things happen.

First, constitutional reform is critical. The pernicious winner-take-all Executive Presidency constitution must be changed.

A new Constitution must facilitate the building of a new inclusive multi-racial, multi-cultural, multi religious plural Democracy that is driven by the needs of People. Every Guyanese should be treated with dignity and with have the same rights regardless of race, color or creed. Democracy and the Rule of Law should be the hallmarks of a modern Guyana and constitutional reform should lead us to good governance through citizen participation, youth involvement. Our quest for racial harmony and international political legitimacy must be facilitated by the new Constitution so that Guyana can have goodwill in the international marketplace of ideas, funding and morality. In essence, Guyana's new constitution should be a framework for our national ethos so that our Nation adopts the core visionary founding principles and development paradigm of a democracy being **“a market of freedoms, collective ideas, inclusive and transparent institutions and community”**. This means that as a Nation, we pursue community based decision making, the primacy of Amerindian and minority rights and the protection of those unable to help themselves. Additionally, we should not compromise our sovereignty to other Nations, transnational organizations or criminal networks. No one, including the president should be above the Law.

Second, those who stole state assets such as our gold and lands must be sentenced to prison and our assets recovered. Those who corrupt in our procurement processes must be charged and sent to prison. Those who committed crimes such as extra-judicial killings should pay for their heinous crimes. Those who have broken laws such face justice. When the Rule of Law is re-established then Guyana will have a cleaner path to shared governance among all Parties. To include criminals in a Government of National Unity is itself a criminal act.

Third, Guyana must have its true history known by all. This is a prerequisite for social cohesion and Nation building. Guyana's history has been corrupted by omission and falsities. Guyana has many carefully false narratives which have be used to perpetuate untruths in the name of racial or political hegemony. Our historians as well as our politicians have failed us. Our history has been distorted for political gain. History has to be taught in schools as a mandatory topic. How many Guyanese know the following facts?

**For Guyana to become a just and caring Society, we must begin with a truthful historical narrative.** The truth may hurt once it is shared. But this will save the Guyanese Nation repeated pains as politicians will no longer be able to distort facts and universal truths.

What are these truths that are hidden from the Public? What are these truths that will help us to change our views of ourselves? What are these truths that will allow us to mutually respect each other out of a sense of Justice and Nation Building?

450,000 Africans died to build Guyana. How many people in Guyana know this fact? Have you ever seen this figure in any of our history books? No. Yet some racial entrepreneurs continue to argue that Indentureship was the same as slavery. This not only stretches the truth but is a vicious lie and is based on racism.

**Racism was created to justify chattel slavery.** The Church, European philosophers, European Governments, European scholars and European scientists were all involved in a systematic manner to deceive the world about the true criminal nature of this organized crime activity that went on for 400 years. Today, the world has been taught to believe they are superior to Africans or anyone of a darker color. According to Amanda Thompson the first justifications of slavery were far from scientific, including biblical references to the story in Genesis of Noah cursing Ham's descendants to be servants. This mind-set was a premeditated action. It is a construct of Europe as Europeans had to justify, against all the teachings of their God, and all recognized ideas of morality, that Africans were not human. They knew Africans were civilized after living under the Moors for 786 years just prior to slavery. Europe was civilized by the Moors. Racism is a particular form of oppression if not terrorism. "Slavery was not born of racism: rather, racism was the consequence of slavery".

**Guyanese have been taught that Africans are Descendants of slaves.** The reality is that Africans were enslaved for 200 years in Guyana. Africans were not born slaves. They were the first persons on this Earth. Africans were also the first persons in the Americas and in the Guianas as proven by the skeleton of Luzia found in Brazil and dated 2000 years earlier than Amerindians came to Guyana. Slavery has been deemed "a crime against humanity" by the United Nations. Slavery annihilated Africa, African culture, African family structures, African institutions, African commerce, African growth, African history, African Pride and African economic development.

**Guyana was built by Africans and there was over 450,000 enslaved Africans who were worked to their premature deaths during slavery to build Guyana.** The genocide rate for slavery throughout the British colonies was approximately 85%. In Guyana, because of the harshness of the land, a higher percentage probably died. It should be remembered Africans cleared 15,000 square miles of Guyana (18% of today's Guyana) just to create the plantations. History has also recorded that "in the process of building Guyana's economy during enslavement, Africans installed 2,580,000 miles of drainage canals, trenches and inter-bed drains; 3,500 miles of dams, roads and footpaths; 2,176 miles of sea and river defence. To build the coastal plain alone, a value of 100 million tons of earth had to be removed by the hands of Africans without machinery". Africans had already built the infrastructure for the plantations and Guyana before Indentured Servants arrived in Guyana.

This African Holocaust, because that is the correct term for this genocide, has resulted in today's economic, cultural and political inequality of Africans in Guyana and our history books and school programs need to acknowledge this fact instead of hiding it away in some dark corridor of the past as this further breeds today's racism. Discrimination in Guyana has been historical and purposeful.

The Guyana Reparations Committee, in response to the Terms of Reference (TORs) of the CARICOM Prime Ministerial Subcommittee on Reparations, of which you are a Member, has over the last 2 years, identified 15 reasons why African Guyanese are at "the bottom of the ladder" as described by Former President Cheddi Jagan and 4 years ago re-emphasized by former Attorney General Nandilall. Entitled "Linking past discrimination to today's inequality", the 15 reasons identified by the Guyana Reparations Committee were all Government driven, as seen below.

1. The criminal enslavement of Africans in Guyana from the 1600s to 1838. Dutch and British Governments passed laws to legitimize and institutionalize slavery which the UN has defined as a

“crime against humanity”. Governments did this for their own criminal enrichment and for the criminal enrichment of their Private Sector, the Church and even ordinary citizens.

2. The complete denial of the human rights of Africans for over 200 years during enslavement.
3. The purposeful creation of the institution of racism to justify slavery. This is one of the greatest negative legacies of slavery. Racism was systematically created by Western philosophers, clergymen and scientists to give credence to their criminal enrichment.
4. The annihilation of African culture as a complementary and historical strategy to slavery.
5. The creation of African Guyanese pauperism through free forced slave labour for over 200 years.
6. The British Government’s denial of justice and reparations to freed Africans in 1838 while empowering the 2,761 British owners in Guyana through a reparation payment of £4. 281 million of the £20 million awarded to 46,000 British slave owners. Freed Africans in Guyana therefore accounted for 21.8% of the total compensation to all British slave owners. Incidentally, this sum paid for free Africans in Guyana, in today’s value, multiplying by the objective factor of 839, amounts to £3.59 billion. Of the 382 largest single awards of over £10,000, 358 were in British Guiana.
7. The refusal to pay freed Africans fair wages after Emancipation and hence destroying their ability for generational wealth creation.
8. The importation of indentured servants to break the economic backs of freed Africans. Had there not been indentureship, Guyana at Independence would have been owned by Africans and Amerindians and the existing racial economy of today, which gives preferential treatment to Indians, would not have materialized.
9. An unrelenting attack on the Village Movement by the British Crown (Government) to destroy African Guyanese wealth. Within 12 years of the beginning of the Village Movement, freed Africans have spent US\$2.5 million which in today’s value is billions of dollars.
10. The granting of free lands to Indentured Indians in Guyana and not granting any to freed Africans whom had worked free for over 200 years. This “land” wealth gap and the multiplier effect still exists today.
11. The purposeful financing and nurturing of Indentured Indians into the rice industry while burning the rice fields of Africans whom were in rice decades before Indians arrived in Guyana. Wealth was therefore encouraged for one good but destroyed for the other.
12. The forcing of Africans by the British Crown to sell their produce at low prices to the Portuguese who would then re-sell to the British at great profit. Portuguese merchants, who were financially helped by Madeira and the British crown, were granted licenses to operate in African Villages, when Africans were not. The Portuguese were also paid during Indentureship. They were also hired by the British after Indentureship.

13. The splitting of Africa among European powers in 1885 at the Berlin Conference and the subsequent Colonization of Africa for more than 100 years. Unlike Indians and the Chinese who can easily network with India and China, there are no historically intact relationships or processes for Africans in Guyana to obtain products, finance, trading arrangements and business networks from Africa.
14. The British and Guyanese governments did not offer lands to Africans at Independence but promoted and ensured Amerindians received lands. Today, Amerindians in Guyana own 14% of Guyana's land mass regardless of the fact, the Wai Wai and some other Amerindian groups were not in Guyana during enslavement and only came here from Venezuela and Brazil in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This is a gross injustice.
15. The use of the education system as a tool of colonialism and imperialism. In addition, governance systems such as the British's divide-and-rule system, has helped to marginalize Africans culturally, socially and economically in Guyana, from Emancipation to Independence in 1966.

All groups in Guyana, except Descendants of Africans, have been significantly helped economically and culturally. At Emancipation, Africans were given nothing although they worked free and built Guyana for 200 years in the worst slavery conditions in the Caribbean before Portuguese, Indians and Chinese Indentured Servants were brought to Guyana.

Apart from this very large payment, the British slave owners in Guyana succeeded at Emancipation in holding onto their plantations thereby leaving the freed Africans "landless and as second class citizens in a country they had built for free". The British slave-owners were also able to keep Africans in Guyana colonized for another 130 years.

Guyana can only become a just and caring society when economic justice is given to Africans in Guyana.

**Guyanese have not been taught in their history books that freed Africans in Guyana were the most productive in the entire British Slave trade.**

Each freed African in Guyana was worth £51, 17s compared to £19, 15s for Jamaica and £21, 2s for all other British colonies except Trinidad. The Village Movement was no fluke. It was the intelligence, hard work and community approach to development that made the Village Movement the "greatest entrepreneurial effort" in any post slavery society.

Today, by Parliamentary approval, approximately 80,000 Amerindians have been given 14% of Guyana for being the First People. The 83,455 Africans who created the entire economy in 1838 and whose families died by the thousands during the 200 years of slavery were given nothing. This is unjust and needs to be corrected.

### **Correction of the current historical narrative**

The indifference today experienced by the descendants of the 450,000 Africans whose genocide and 200 years of forced labour built Guyana, is a stark reminder of the racism and denial of African rights in Guyana. Africans are the only group in Guyana whom have received nothing for building Guyana.

First, Africans were the first people in the Guianas, not Indigenous people. Luzia, the skeleton found in Brazil in 1975, proves that Africans were first in the region which had no national borders at that time.

Second, unlike the Caribbean Islands and in Latin America, there was no genocide of Indigenous people in Guyana. Rather, indigenous peoples were protected by the Dutch and British slave owners; were paid to hunt and kill enslaved Africans who sought their freedom (Quamina); and were used to prevent the success of the 1763 Slave Rebellion (fought against Cuffy).

Third, Indigenous peoples did not develop the economy of Guyana. Indeed, history has recorded it was enslaved Africans who cleared 15,000 square miles (18 % of Guyana) to make Guyana hospitable. Note, also that the total GDP of Guyana in 1838 was 100% African created. Indeed, at Emancipation, Africans in Guyana were the most productive people in the entire British Colonies as they were worth £51 compared to the average price of £17 across the Colonies.

Finally, one of the greatest untruths in Guyana's history is the claim that Indigenous Peoples were "stewards" of the forest. History will show they were small nomadic tribes interested in their own survival without any real economies or stewardship of the huge forests that Guyana was and still is.

In **1994**, Mr. Jorg Vereecke, UNDP's Associate Expert on Indigenous People, indicated there were "nine indigenous tribes living scattered all over Guyana. These were the Akawaio (3,800); Arekuna (475); Arawak (15,000); Machusi -Brazilian Macuxi, 7,000); Wapishanas (6,000); Patmuna (4,700); Wai Wai (198); and Carib (2,700)". A total of **32,873**.

In **2002**, the Guyana Census found that the Amerindian population numbered **68,675** and was the fastest growing in comparison to other ethnic groups, with a population increase of 47.3 per cent from 1991 to 2002 and representing an annual growth rate of 3.5 per cent. Based on these facts, it is unlikely there could have been more than **5,000** Indigenous Peoples in the entire Guyana in the year 1630, or more than 20,000 in 1838, when at that time there were 84,075 freed Africans. The claim that 2,000 people in the year 1630 or that 20,000 people in the year 1838, were "stewards" of 83,000 square miles of Guyana, lacks historical validity. Lacks fundamental truth.

The indifference to African rights is so profound that a small group of 300 Wai Wai in 2004, whom came to Guyana about 100 years after Africans were brought to Guyana, have been awarded 1 million acres. The idea that Indigenous Peoples of Guyana are stewards of the forests is a blatant historical untruth.

## **CONCLUSION**

The current Government should be quite aware of the stark plight of Africans in Guyana. During the Jadgeo years, there was a purposeful Indianization of Guyana. This is well documented by Freddie Kisson and many others, including myself. Contracts, state lands, corruptive deals, jobs and access to capital were denied Africans. Gold smuggling and money laundering were the exclusive domain of Indians with their embedded Government networks. Guyana, for example, lost US\$1 Billion in gold in 2013 according to overseas law enforcement sources.

Today, there is a focus on saving sugar which is G\$82 billion in debt. This industry was run into ruin by political interference and with a workforce whose top 23 managers were Indian and a company that is one of the most corrupted in Guyana. Procurement practices have been one of the most corrupt in Guyana.

All Guyanese need to know our true history.

This new Parliament has to ensure there is economic and social justice in Guyana. Without these, there is no social cohesion

And no just and caring society.

The Guyana Reparations Committee will soon publicize its findings and will call for land and financial reparations from the Government of Guyana. This precedence has already been set with 14% of Guyana legally given to Amerindians through a Parliamentary Act