

# ***GUYANA VS. AMERICA: MY CROSS-CULTURAL EXPERIENCE***

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# History/Independence

- Slavery was outlawed in 1834, and the great need for plantation workers led to a large wave of immigration, mostly East Indians.
- Currently, about half of the population is of East Indian descent and 36% are of African descent. (Indo Guyanese/ Afro Guyanese)



## Timeline:

**1498** - Christopher Columbus sights Guyana.

**1580** - Dutch establish trading posts upriver.

**1814** - Britain occupies Guyana during the Napoleonic Wars.

**1831** - Guyana officially declared a British colony.

**1834** - Slavery abolished; many slaves leave plantations to set up their own freeholdings and are replaced by indentured workers mainly from India.

**1879** - Gold is discovered in Guyana and is followed by an economic boom.

**1889** - Venezuela lays claim to a large portion of Guyana west of the Essequibo river.

**1899** - International arbitration tribunal rules in favor of Guyana (then called British Guiana) in the territorial dispute with Venezuela.

**1953** - Britain suspends Guyana's constitution, sends in troops and installs an interim administration after democratic elections for parliament produces a result not to its liking - a victory for the left-wing Indo-Guyanese Progressive People's Party (PPP).

**1957** - Britain restores Guyanese constitution; PPP splits along racial lines, with Cheddi Jagan leading a mostly Indian party and Forbes Burnham leading a party of African descendants, the People's National Congress (PNC).

**1961** - Guyana granted full autonomy, with Britain retaining control over internal and defence matters; Jagan of the PPP becomes prime minister.

**1962** - Venezuela revives its territorial claims on Guyana; Cheddi Jagan introduces austerity programme, sparking off violent riots and a general strike; British troops sent in to restore order.

**1963** - Racial violence between people of African origins and Indian supporters of Jagan.

**1966** - Guyana becomes independent with Forbes Burnham as prime minister.



# Geography/Climate

- To understand better, Guyana and Idaho are the same size
- Located - northern coast of South America, east of Venezuela, west of Suriname, and north of Brazil.
- Over 80% of Guyana is made up of rainforests
- Similar to other tropical countries, the humidity range is over half
  - in the cooler months: low of 68% and high of 77%
  - in warmer months: low of 79% and high of 86%
- In Georgetown (Capital) the temperature ranges from 71-80 degrees Fahrenheit. And the hottest temperature ranging between 83-90 degrees Fahrenheit.
- The sea breezes (east-northeast trade winds) significantly mitigate the heat on the coast.
- The coastal area typically has two wet seasons: May to mid-August, when about 40% of the total annual precipitation falls, and December to mid-January, which receive another 20%.





# ***Guyana Flag: What the Colors Represent***

- "The Golden Arrowhead, Guyana's National Flag has FIVE symbolic colors":
  - **GREEN**- the agricultural and forested nature of Guyana,
  - **WHITE**- the rivers and water potential of the country,
  - **GOLD**- the golden arrow represents Guyana's mineral wealth,
  - **BLACK**- the endurance that will sustain the forward thrust of the Guyanese people,
  - **RED**- the zeal and dynamic nature of nation-building which lies before the young and independent Guyana.





***OUR CULTURE: What Represents Guyana?***





## **Social**

## **Norms/Customs**

- Honesty is appreciated and expected.
  - Example: Being called “fat” is more a compliment.
- Humor is very important when communicating.
- If someone was to interact with an American, they would most likely be offended.
- We wear our heart on our sleeves; anger and a lot of emotion is something common among Guyanese culture
- Even in business settings, communication tends to be more indirect/informal (but still professional)
- It eliminates the awkwardness and the feeling of being uncomfortable.



# Food/Celebrations

- Basic foods reflect ethnic preferences and provide a variety of dishes.
- Many of our foods originate by Africans that have been adopted by all the other groups.
- Dishes made from "ground provisions"; such as plantain and yams are now a staple for Caribbean culture:
- crab or fish soups with plantains, eddoes, cassava, dasheen, and coconut milk; "cook-up rice" with black-eyed peas, pigtail, green plantain, and cassareep; and Indian curries and roti.





- At African festivals and life cycle rites, creole foods are served. Vegetarian curries are provided at Hindu weddings; the day after a wedding, curried meat is served.
- **Jhandi** – a Hindu celebration practiced primarily in Caribbean countries such as Guyana (and Trinidad). The Jhandi is a time of thanksgiving for family and sometimes friends, bringing them together in unity.
- This celebration can occur many times a year and is very common when moving into a new house or building one or celebrating something similar.
- People host the celebration in their local Mandir, but it is usually and most frequently performed in their own homes.

## **Holidays/ Celebrations**



# Gender Roles

- *Division of Labor by Gender.*

- The economic and political spheres are dominated by men

- Very few women are senior officials in the government despite having one for president; Janet Jagan.

- There is a lack of women in the cabinet, the legislature, and the leadership of political parties.

- Women are more known for their role as farmers, teachers, nurses, and doing housework.

- However recently, girls have outperformed boys in examinations, and it is reported that more women attend college/university than men.

- *Male/Female Status*

- There is a lack of father figures, where the males have a history of drinking and leaving the mother to be the caretaker and bread winner of the family.

- Which is especially hard for low class families since there is no social welfare or government aid.





# **Culture Shock in America**

- Emphasis on gender equality- feminism is much more prevalent in the United States.
- Familial relationships are more informal (lack of authority)
  - example: disciplining children takes many forms, however spanking your child is looked down on in America, but very common in the Caribbean.
- LGBTQ rights/acceptance
- Accents/ slang



# **Summary**

Despite being born and raised in America, I have come to learn and appreciate the culture, that is my entire family. America being one huge melting pot teaches us to understand and value where we originate from and how our culture differs from living in America.

Culture shock is beneficial as it a step towards less ignorance. Being able to identify the differences between your own culture and another is enough to admit that there isn't only one way of living.



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