and dominated by a market-oriented ruling class. It was a production machine. People were separated by race, colour, status, occupation and ethnicity and the glaring system of social stratification along these lines was quite wide everywhere. One social scientist sums up the situation in the Caribbean:

In societies whose social arrangements have been laid partly on racial grounds, as is the case for many societies of the Caribbean region, the crucial social criteria are still social rather than biological. The social structure is predicated upon a distribution of statuses, life opportunities, and prestige allotments associated with ... ascriptions.

(Padilla, 1978)

Plantation, Society and Culture

Despite many differences – for there are sugar, coffee, cocoa, coconut, and sisal plantations scattered throughout the Caribbean – the Caribbean plantation has displayed distinct features. Plantation is a “capitalist” type of enterprise in which land is treated like a commodity. Plantations historically have opened up previously uncultivated land and resorted to coercion in the form of slavery and, later, white and Indian indentureship, to secure adequate labour supplies. Control of the plantation has been centralized, exerted either directly by the owner or his attorney. Absenteeism has been an annoying feature of most Caribbean plantation societies. A substantial importation of technology and equipment has also been a feature of the Caribbean plantation. Plantation has not only been a product of metropolitan capital, as already stated, but has also produced monocrops for an overseas market. As a result of this key role in our development, certain features of the Caribbean should be noted:

(a) the prevalence of monocrop agriculture;
(b) marginalisation of the peasantry due to hostility from the plantocracy;
(c) dependence on foreign capital and enterprise as the main investors;
(d) dependence on foreign markets for our crops;
(e) forced labour systems from early settlement to the twentieth century;
(f) a taste for foreign products;
(g) social stratification based on the gradations of colour and race;
(h) lack of democratic tradition because of the long existence of slavery.

The circumstances under which these societies in the Caribbean were formed five hundred years ago led to a struggle for freedom and have woven a common thread of conflict throughout our history. Exploitation of Amerindians led to genocide but met much resistance in the Eastern Caribbean from the Kalinago. White indentured servants were known to put up resistance to their servitude in Barbados. Slavery in the Caribbean was beset by rebellion throughout its existence. After emancipation, riots, disturbances and labour protests, like the slave revolts of the slavery era, punctuated the British West Indies. The most explosive riots during the nineteenth century can be mentioned here to highlight the significance of them to the social transformation of Caribbean society. The Guerre Nègre riot occurred in Dominica in 1844, the Angel of Gabriel riots in Guyana in 1856, the Vox Popular riots in St Vincent in 1862, the Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica in 1865 and the Confederation Rebellion in Barbados in 1876.

Activity 3:11

a) What are the differences between riots, rebellions and revolutions?
b) Caribbean people are always accused of having a 'dependency syndrome'. Is this a fair judgement on our people? If you think it is true, where did it originate? What can Caribbean leaders do to break out of this dependency syndrome?
c) Write an essay of about 2000 words explaining how the plantation system in the Caribbean contributed in any way to a feeling of dependency in the region.

Plantation System and Cultural Diversity

The plantation system brought about complex systems of social stratification, especially in colonies that experienced the arrivals of large numbers of varying ethnic groups. Guyana, Trinidad and Jamaica readily come to mind for they experienced considerable immigration of large numbers of people from outside regions, especially East Indians and Chinese. Between 1838 and 1917, more than half a million Asian indentures entered the region. In these colonies, the emergence of colour, race and class divisions became
pronounced. Hostility developed between Blacks and East Indians over space and wage rates.

Nevertheless, the new immigrant population also brought their cultural traits and values to add to the cultural richness of the region. East Indian cuisine has spread through the region. In Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana, there is the Hindu and Muslim festivals such as Divali, Phagwa and Eid-ul-Fitr, and the holy days recognised by this community, all existing alongside Christianity with its festivals and religious ceremonies. Over a period of time cultural hybridisation occurred as well. This process has been referred to as a unique form of creolisation, that is, mixing of cultural traits and exchange of values.

What has also occurred in the Caribbean was a process of racial admixture. Whites and Blacks produced an offspring of mulattoes and this racial mixing occurred from as early as the slavery era. Blacks and Indians produced a racial mixture called the douglia. The emergence of groups as a result of racial mixing has created a bewildering number of skin colours and features that are unique to the Caribbean.

A specific kind of cultural milieu evolved with the adaptation to the specific environment of the plantation economies in the Caribbean. Food, dance, music, language and family all adapted in their specific setting. It is this adaptation that has created the remarkable cultural variations seen in the region and which are developed as tourist attractions around the Caribbean. Carnival, limbo dancing, calypso, steel pan, are examples of our cultural riches. Some scholars have argued that, in many ways, a combination of European and African cultural practices adjusted to the new circumstances to create Creole culture expressions in the Caribbean.

The Shango religion in Trinidad and Tobago and Pocomania in Jamaica are examples of such cultural expressions of creolisation. Many West Indian “dialects” show evidence of mixing of African and European linguistic influences. St. Lucia, Dominica and Grenada have standard and non-standard forms of English and a French-based Creole. The Netherlands Antilles has Dutch and Papiamento. In Haiti and the French West Indies,
French and a French-based Creole coexist. Trinidad and Tobago has standard and non-standard forms of English, Bhojpuri and Urdu, and a French-based Creole and Yoruba are still used by small segments of the society.

Activity 3:12
- Research the concept of cultural pluralism. Describe the relationship between the plantation system, pluralism, social stratification and cultural diversity in the Caribbean.

The Aftermath of Plantation

The Tumultuous Thirties

During the early twentieth century, the culture of oppression and conflict from an earlier era persisted. Severe material deprivation and poverty remained with the majority of the working population well into the 1930s. Labour rebellions occurred in almost every colony in the British Caribbean, commencing in Belize in 1934 and culminating in Jamaica in 1938. The fact that social upheavals should have occurred in a short span of four years in colonies separated by hundreds of miles of Caribbean Sea suggests that there was widespread discontent among the masses in the Anglophone Caribbean.

Various local commissions that inquired into the causes of the social rebellion, such as the Deane Commission (1935) in Barbados and the Forster Commission (1935) in Trinidad, exposed a sad state of decay and crisis in West Indian society. The British Government, ever alarmed at the regularity of social unrest during the 1930s, dispatched the Royal Commission (Moyne) in 1938 to investigate the social conditions. The findings of the Moyne Commission were an embarrassment to the British Government. Some of the most disgusting forms of poverty existing anywhere in the British Empire were revealed by the investigations. The British Government, fearful that the Nazis would use the conditions of the British Caribbean as propaganda against them, released the evidence after 1945 when the Second World War was over. The social rebellions, however, were a watershed in the political history of the region upon which contemporary Caribbean society is built.
Out of the social rebellions of the 1930s emerged trade unions and the rise of political parties. This was the era of mass politics and the gradual political enfranchisement of the working classes. As early as 1943, the Jamaican working classes had achieved the right to vote. The process continued in a gradual fashion until 1951 when most of the colonies in the Caribbean had achieved adult suffrage. But, more importantly, the new political leaders, in almost every territory, started a process of social and political transformation designed to correct the ills that led to the labour rebellions in the first place. It is in the post-1930s era that we experienced the building of truly democratic and modern societies in the Caribbean through the promulgation of radical social legislation.

The right to self-government also featured prominently in the Caribbean. The days of Crown Colony government were also numbered. The West Indian Federation and, later, constitutional independence during the 1960s and 1970s, became the means by which the British Caribbean severed ties with their former colonial masters. The French Caribbean islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe chose to remain French Departments. In the Dutch colonies, a special arrangement under the Dutch Tripartite Kingdom was put in place. In short, some Caribbean nations chose to sever ties with the imperial powers, while others agreed to remain in various constitutional arrangements.

**Activity 3:13**

a) The labour rebellions of the 1930s in the British Caribbean were triggered by a number of social, political and economic factors that impacted negatively on the Caribbean. Interview an elderly person who lived through the period to obtain a firsthand account of living and working conditions, housing and wage rates in your territory. To what extent did your findings concur with what you discussed in your class?

b) Build up a profile of two persons in your society who were pioneers of the labour movement or founder of a major political party in the decades of the 1940s.
Key Concepts

- Hegemonic control
- Slavery
- Encomienda
- Indentureship
- Genocide
- Artefacts
- Manumission
- Plantation society
- Aboriginal people
- Diaspora
- Mulattoes
- Riots
- Rebellion
- Marronage
- Adult suffrage
- Crown colony
- Plantocracy
- Chattel slavery
- Repartimiento
- Immigration
- Remittances
- Conquistadores
- Free villages
- Emancipation
- Monocrops
- Reparations
- Dougla
- Revolution
- Revolts
- Trade unions
- Political parties
- W.I. Federation
- Atlantic Slave Trade
- Middle Passage
- Intra-Caribbean migration
- White indentureship
- Cultural diversity
- Social stratification
- Cultural pluralism
- Cultural hybridization
- Sugar revolution
- Creolization
- Culture of migration
- Anti-colonial struggle
- Regional integration
- Enfranchisement
- Self government
- Constitutional independence

References


