

Issues in Education

Education and Nationhood in Trinidad and Tobago 1956-1962

Lennox McLeod
School of Education
The University of the West Indies
August 2018

Welcome... to one of the few nations in the
civilized world where

religious denominations have more power over the
school's curriculum than the state

the teaching of morality, ethics, civics and constitutional
law in schools is optional

learning about is more important than learning to be

an average student with limited academic ability is

considered to be more intelligent than the most brilliant

auto-mechanic cosmetology or Physical Education student

**HOW DID WE GET TO THIS
SORRY STATE?**

**WE TURN TO
HISTORY FOR AN
EXPLANATION**

MYTHS AND TRUTHS ABOUT HISTORY

History is about past events and dead people, **therefore it has no relevance to my daily life**

Half true...**half myth**

If you don't know history, then you don't know anything. You are a leaf that doesn't know it is part of a tree

Spot-on

History takes us back to a disastrous past that is better to forget and move on to the future

Hahaha

What is History?

History is not faith or personal opinion and contrary to popular belief, common sense alone cannot make you a historian

History is an evidence-based academic discipline that uses primary sources: archaeological artefacts, official records and documents, parliamentary debates, cabinet notes

and secondary sources: scholarly writings, court judgments, newspaper articles, witness statements, constitutional arguments and so on

to reflect on the past so that we become better people, capable of making wise, ethical and moral decisions about our present and future

Entrapped by cultural bias and myopia

History is a moral compass...the supreme court of ethics and morality

slavery was normal 150 years ago in the same way that the SEA is considered normal today

the space, time, hindsight and objectivity to reflect on our collective behaviour.

did we perform well under the circumstances?

were mistakes made? If so, what can we do to fix things so that future generations would not have to endure them?

What does history have to do with education?

Education is the major means of transferring a culture from one generation to the next

Culture provides us with the images and perceptions of reality through the process of socialization

In T&T under British colonialism we were educated to be loyal to Britain—Not to ourselves, our ancestors or our culture and traditions

Education was aimed at creating the perception that Western culture was the benchmark for all things civilized and advanced

African and Indian cultures were demonized, degraded, outlawed and condemned as barbaric

EDUCATION WAS DESIGNED TO BE A
FORM OF MENTAL SLAVERY

WE CONTINUE TO TRANSMIT
IMAGES AND ATTITUDES TO
FUTURE GENERATIONS THAT ARE
AT ODDS WITH THE DEMANDS OF
A MODERN DEMOCRATIC NATION

EDUCATION AS TRANSFORMATION

On the eve of Independence in the 1950's and 1960's ALL **third world countries** around the globe were of the view that education had to be transformative

firstly, on the personal level, education had to address the misinformation ingrained in Western Education that made us feel that we were genetically inferior to whites

secondly education had to prepare us for replacing social institutions that were created to maintain the colonial status quo

education was the key to transforming society in the Third World

Political implications... change would undermine the power of the ruling elites

Social implications...transformation would disrupt the very system on which the entire population depended for social mobility

What were the choices?

Transform the education system by force and socialist ideology and suffer the fate of Jagan in Guyana in 1953?

Use moral suasion within the democratic system and hope to attract the loyalty of groups, some entrenched with benefits from the old order and others divided along class, economic, religious and ethnic lines?

Inspire all interest groups to believe that Nationalism was morally superior to the current colonial status quo and hope they buy into this argument?

The long journey to the 1950's

Colonial rivalry

Elementary Schooling

Secondary schooling

The Ordinance of 1870

CIC and QRC

The curriculum

Training colleges

World War 11 and the UN Declaration

SO HERE WE ARE ON THE EVE OF INDEPENDENCE 1953

The Gatekeepers of the system

Whites and “coloured” - 18% of the population dominated all institutions

Political through the Nominated Council (Senate) and the backing of the Colonial Office

Economic-banking, Insurance, Trade and Commerce

Social capital- based on perceptions of superiority- wealth, material possessions, exclusive clubs, beauty

Propaganda- The Trinidad Guardian (founded in 1917)

The undecided- Indo-Trinidadians

Population 35% (1953 census)

Social Capital: Mainstay of the colonial economy thus having more in common with whites and privileged groups; main labour force on sugar estates since arriving in 1846; considered docile and safe when compared to blacks who led the 1937 riots in the oilfields

Advantages: Held the bargaining power in national elections

Liabilities: Took a long time to organise politically due to their recent arrival (1846), incipient problems with language, relative isolation due to rural location and slowness to adapt to Western culture; conflicting leadership options between the charismatic Hindu Pundit, Bhadase Sagan Maraj, and the Physicist Dr. Rudranath Capildeo, more acceptable to the rising Middle class

Guardians of the system- The churches

Roman Catholics-from 1763

Anglicans-from 1797

Presbyterians- -from 1869

Hindus-from 1950's

Muslims-from 1950's

They owned the schools, plants and had a following of the entire population dependent on them for spiritual welfare and who were loyal and committed to their world view.

The RC schools were associated with prestigious education an account of high performance in National Scholarships examinations. Literally everyone wanted to attend them so they had the greatest influence in educational circles

Challenger to the system: *The Afro-Trinidadians*

Population- 47% (1953 census)

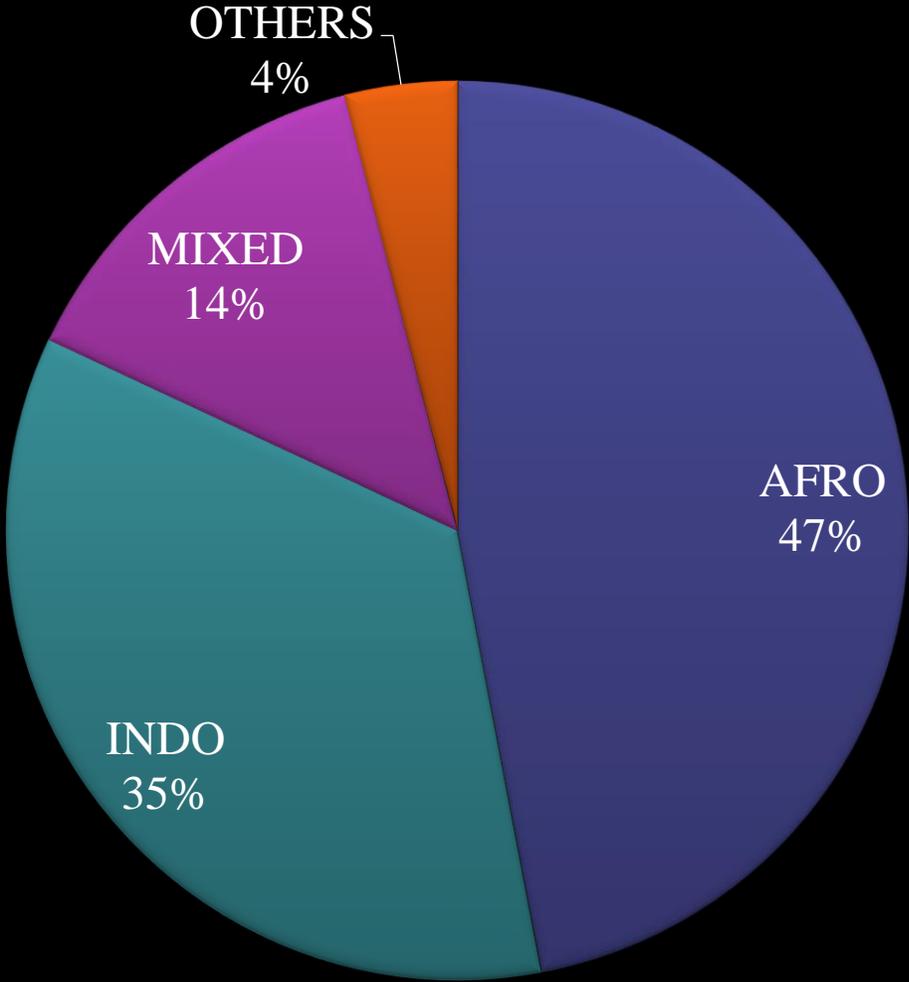
Social Capital: had political clout enough to win elections in 1956 with a handsome majority. Had the support of the majority black population.

Propaganda: The Nation newspaper

Advantages: could strike a deal with others in opposition to the status quo, such as, the Trade Unions; could divide the Indo-Trinidadian vote by forming an alliance with urban Muslims who did not identify culturally with the Hindu majority

Liabilities: Tendency to view ownership of the country as their natural right because of their length of tenancy and the suffering they endured during slavery. Their hatred of forming political alliances was a major flaw in their political strategy. This made them vulnerable to opposition coalitions and lost Federal elections in 1958 (4-6) because of it

Countdown to the 1961 national elections



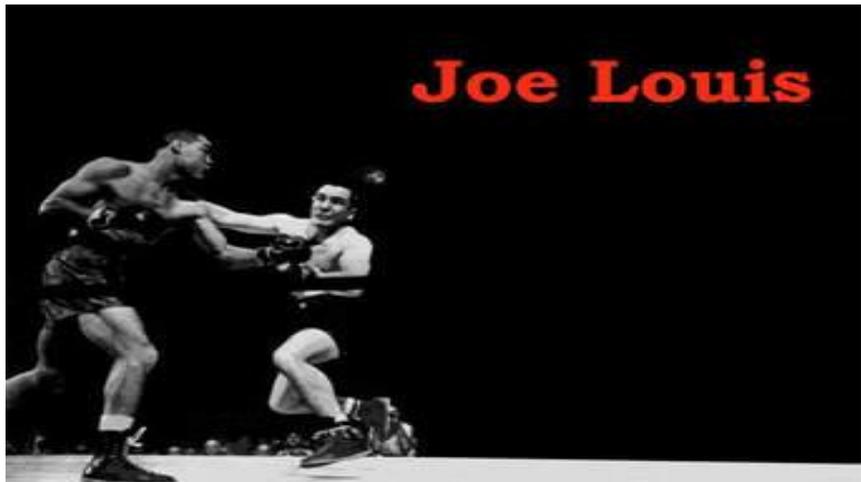
The reality of the Afro-Trinidadian in the 1950's



This is what decolonization was all about



THE WORLD OF ERIC WILLIAMS



The agendas

The Gatekeepers

- **Philosophical Paradigm:**
subservience to religious laws
- **Main Purpose of Education:**
Personal Development
- **Responsibility for Education of children:** The Family
- **Who should control the system:**
The Church

The PNM

Supremacy of the State and commitment to civil laws and the constitution

Citizenship and national development

The State

The State

The agendas cont'd

The Guardians

- **Teacher Training:** The Church
- **Selection to Secondary school:**
Streaming
- **Curriculum:** Church decides
- **Funding:** Private/State

The PNM

The State

Mixed abilities

The State decides

Private/State

Reconstruction of society through education PNM agenda

- **Mandate:** Use its political clout to destroy the Dual System established since the Ordinance of 1870
- **Strategy** : Force the Denominational Boards to give up control and secularize the system to appeal to national imperatives
- **Motive:** The Dual System perpetuates colonialism with its racist assumptions, its preference to class and privilege and its hold on the people through religion

CREATE A NATIONALISM BASED ON A MERGER OF ALL ETHNICITIES AND CULTURES

There can be no mother India for those whose ancestors came from India...There can be no mother Africa for those of African origin...and the Trinidad and Tobago society is living a lie and heading for trouble if it seeks to create the impression that or allow others to act under the delusion that Trinidad and Tobago is an African society...The only mother we recognise is mother Trinidad and Tobago...

(Eric Williams in History of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, 1962)



Reconstruction was an Afro-Trinidadian imperative –a frightening prospect for the rest of the population

Williams was the doctor that would surgically remove the scars inflicted by centuries of humiliation, mental abuse and hopelessness in a society governed instinctively by racial profiling and institutional discrimination. The black intelligentsia and the masses saw no difference between Negritude and Decolonisation.

Nationalism or Vested interest?

There was nothing that Williams could do to escape an emotional commitment to the cause of the black Diaspora. As a Historian and intellectual, his first loyalty was to his tribe in the search for the restoration of cultural identity of blacks worldwide

To the Afro-Trinidadian, the virtual replacement of Butler by Eric as leader of the nationalist cause was predictable given the society's predilection with learning. Williams was not only a leader and spokesman but akin to a Messiah, the undisputed black champion of the world, a doctor of knowledge, more intelligent than white men, even those who taught at the best Universities in mother England.

PNM nationalism created panic and paranoia
among all other groups in society

Nationalism, PNM style, presented the most serious threat to the status quo. It was associated with the violence and havoc in the African Diaspora. Its quasi-socialist rhetoric closely resembled that of racist posturing among the radical groups in the USA, Africa and Latin America.

It found favor with the militant Trade Unions whose struggle to overthrow the system materialized in rioting and death in 1937, a mere 20 years prior.

PNM strategy to change the system was a political failure

Would Whites, Indians, Chinese and mixed contribute to a National cause that virtually marginalised them at the expense of securing political and social advantage to Afro-Trinidadians?

Could National consciousness based on Steel Band, Calypso and Carnival with doubles and roti thrown in for good measure hold water at a time when groups were struggling to fill the vacuum about to be made vacant with the impending departure of Massa in 1962?

Recalcitrant minority

To compound matters, Williams became frustrated at the lack of support by the Indo-Trinidadians and referred to them as a recalcitrant minority. This label embarrassed the few non-blacks within the party who had bought into the nationalist argument and exposed the PNM to charges of being racist (Ryan).

Reconstruction gone wrong

In the final analysis the PNM was induced to concede to vested interests. The concordat signed between the government and the denominational boards on the eve of the 1961 elections was nothing more than a cowardly face saving gesture that took the country back to the Ordinance of 1870, the year of the first concordat

The education baby was thrown out with the reconstruction bathtub

Conclusion

OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM REMAINS AT ODDS WITH THE DEMANDS OF OUR DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY

The SEA is like a beauty contest run by a madman

The issue is not about discrediting the work of denominational organisations. The issue is about equality and equity for people of different learning styles and abilities. It is not about some at the expense of others. It is about everyone who functions in the society and calls this place home. It is about new pedagogy, human rights and freedoms.

While the battle for turf continues, each year over 20,000 of our students are made to suffer the shame and indignity of being described as failures at the tender age of 11.

Prestige schools are promoted under the illusion that their success has nothing to do with school placement but with their wizardry in providing quality education.

Clichés like “Every school could be a prestige school” and “the quality of teaching and family values are reasons for their success” ring hollow in the halls of common sense.

WERE THE PROPOSALS FOR A NATIONAL EDUCATION SYSTEM FLAWED IN ANY WAY?

The Maurice Report (1959) and the PNM vision of a diversified education system

The UNESCO Mission Report (1964) and manpower planning

The Education Plan 1968-83 and the Comprehensive school system

Resistance to CSEC and CAPE

The cowardly retreat of the State and Catholic church after 1970

The Chaguaramas Declaration: Perspectives for the New Society
November 1970

The Valdez Report 1972

The oil crisis of 1973/"money is no problem " and the state decides to go it alone

General reading list

1. Brereton. B, A History of Modern Trinidad 1783-1962, Heinemann: Trinidad, 1981
2. Campbell, Carl, The young colonials, A social History of Education in Trinidad and Tobago, 1834-1939, The University Press, Barbados:1996
3. Campbell, Carl, Charles Warner and the development of education policy in Trinidad 1838-1870, Journal of Caribbean History Vols. 10 & 11
4. Williams, E, History of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, PNM Publishing Company: Trinidad, 1962

5. Campbell, H. (1991). “Garveyism, Pan-Africanism and African Liberation in the Twentieth Century.” In *Garvey: His Work and Impact*, R. Lewis & P. Bryan, eds. pp. 167–188. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc.

.6. Friere Paulo, *Pedagogy of the oppressed*

7. Ryan, S , *Race and nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago*, University of Toronto, 1972 Sutton, P.K, (ed) *Forged from the love of liberty. Selected speeches of Dr. Eric Williams*, Trinidad: Heinaman Caribbean, 1981.

Any of the Works of Frantz Fanon, available at Amazon.com ---*Black Skins White Masks, Wretched of the Earth*

8. Any works on the philosophies of Pan Africanism: Marcus Garvey, Kwami Nkrumah, or Julius Nyerere

Supplementary Reading List

The Maurice Report (1959): Perspectives on the role of education in an independent society

The UNESCO Mission Report (1964)

The Education Plan 1968-83

The black power “revolution” 1970

The Chaguaramas Declaration: Perspectives for the New Society November 1970

The Valdez Report 1972

World Economic Report on global competitiveness (2014)