

CONSERVATION AS AN INDO-CARIBBEAN CULTURAL VALUE:
IMMIGRATION, GLOBALIZATION AND MULTICULTURAL
ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IN SOUTH FLORIDA

by

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A THESIS

Presented to the Program of Environmental Studies
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Science

June 2002

"Conservation as an Indo-Caribbean Cultural Value: Immigration, Globalization and Multicultural Environmental Education in South Florida," a thesis prepared by Alisha L. Deen in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Science degree in the Program of Environmental Studies. This thesis has been approved and accepted by:



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An Abstract of the Thesis of

Alisha L. Deen

for the degree of

Master of Science

in the Program of Environmental Studies

to be taken

June 2002

Title: CONSERVATION AS AN INDO-CARIBBEAN CULTURAL VALUE:

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6/4/2002

Indo-Caribbeans in South Florida have not participated with mainstream environmentalism, yet they have a strong ethic of conservation and a historic connection to the land. For the Indo-Caribbean community, like many other immigrant communities, conservation values and practices are framed in terms of ethnic identity, cultural history, and experiential knowledge rather than notions of mainstream environmentalism. Environmental education initiatives in South Florida have abided by a standardized public outreach methodology meant for a homogenous, white audience rather than a culturally diverse population made up of many immigrant communities. Additionally, environmental education initiatives have not acknowledged or incorporated the conservation values that immigrant communities like the Indo-Caribbean community bring to South Florida. Rather than imposing one dominant environmental paradigm upon immigrant communities, it is more effective to build off the existing cultural values of each community to achieve true multicultural environmental education.

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Deen, Alisha. "Wildlife Friend: FIU Society for Environmental Action."
Florida Wildlife, July/August 1999, 30-31.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author expresses great appreciation to the Indo-Caribbean community members who shared their stories with me. I would like to give special thanks to my advisor, Professor Matt Garcia for his exceptional guidance and confidence in my abilities from the beginning to the end of this project. Additionally I would like to thank Professors Susan Hardwick and Robin Morris-Collin for their enthusiasm and spiritual guidance, and Professors Bob and Robin Collin for their expertise and resources. This thesis would not be at its present quality without the editorial review, and directional suggestions of Professor Matt Garcia, Professor Susan Hardwick, Katherine Guttman, Tori Estrada, Running Grass, Badru Deen, Jason Steindler, Kiki Mutis, and Jeffrey Deen. I extend my sincere gratitude to the Environmental Studies Program for their financial support, the office staff for their continual assistance, and the graduate students in 6-Pac for their listening abilities and emotional support. Of course, I could not have gotten through this process without the long-distance involvement and support of my family in Miami: Mom, Dad, Jeff and Padma. Lastly I wish to thank my love, Jason for his patience, tolerance and never-ending sweetness throughout my graduate career.

This thesis is dedicated to my *Faddah*,

Badru Deen

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INTRODUCTION

In 1980, my parents migrated from Trinidad to Miami, Florida where I spent twenty years of my life. Over the years they made friends with other East Indians¹ from Caribbean countries like Trinidad, Guyana, Suriname and Jamaica through Hindu and Muslim celebrations, Indian musical performances and constant social gatherings. As Indo-Caribbeans came together for festivals, weddings, births and deaths, we witnessed our community grow in numbers. Like other East Indians from the Caribbeans who settled in South Florida during the 1960s, 70s and 80s, we began to realize that our community was merely one part of a larger network of Indo-Caribbean communities scattered across North America in cities like Toronto, New York, Los Angeles, Winnipeg, Chicago and Montreal. Though Indo-Caribbean communities are not entirely identical to one another, community-members share in the culture of a larger Indo-Caribbean diaspora because of their ties to their homeland in the Caribbean. My research focuses specifically on the history, migration and conservation values of the Indo-Caribbean community located in South Florida.

While living in South Florida I pursued environmental education and public outreach both academically and professionally. I could not help but notice that my academic and career efforts within mainstream environmentalism were not speaking to the interests of immigrant communities in South Florida, including my own. The U.S.

¹ The term East Indian refers to those people of the Caribbean whose ancestors migrated from India.

recognized the Everglades to be in a state of crisis, with wading bird counts down, agricultural runoff changing water quality, and buffer land around Everglades National Park continually consumed by urban sprawl. Though 7.8 billion dollars was allocated for Everglades restoration by Congress during my involvement with environmental policy in the late 1990s, funding was thrown at a complex array of symptoms, rather than at the root cause of South Florida's environmental situation.² Scientists, engineers and planners received abundant funding for their costly pilot projects and land acquisition initiatives. Comparatively, public outreach plans and environmental education programs were not prioritized or given any significant piece of the 7.8 billion dollars meant for Everglades restoration.

Sound environmental education seeks to raise the environmental awareness of the general population so that cultural behavior will not jeopardize natural resources or compromise environmental quality for future generations. While people's values, knowledge and awareness are the foundation behind every decision affecting the environment, environmental education programs did not offer Congress the short-term tangible benchmarks needed to ensure more Everglades restoration funding. Instead high profile, expensive projects were prioritized, like the "restoration" of the Kissimmee river which involved spending millions of dollars to undo what the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers had done to the river in the 1950s. Raising environmental consciousness levels in South Florida could have longer lasting effects on the health of the Everglades

² U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, *Central and South Florida Comprehensive Restudy* (2002, accessed May 21 2002); available from www.evergladesplan.org.

ecosystem than expensive scientific and engineering short-term band-aid projects could ever accomplish.

In South Florida, where first and second-generation immigrants make up the majority of the population and non-Hispanic whites represent only a minority, it is ludicrous for environmental educators to spend tax dollars on public outreach programs intended for a homogenous white audience. Yet, the prominent environmental organizations of South Florida and the local and state governmental agencies participating with the 7.8 billion dollar restoration plan seem trapped in an outdated, standardized public outreach methodology intended for a white audience. My work in South Florida's environmental policy arena exemplified how professional, mainstream methods of environmental education and public outreach neglect culturally diverse communities. Small environmental Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that target immigrant communities do exist, but are constrained by limited budgets, staff and political clout. For instance, "Citizens for a Better South Florida's" primary objective is multicultural environmental education, yet the struggling NGO has yet to receive a penny of public outreach funding allocated for Everglades restoration by Congress.³

My experience in environmental policy combined with my academic research on environmental education in South Florida, confirmed my suspicion; no one was actively working on environmental education inclusive of first-generation immigrants. Beyond South Florida I found several multicultural environmental education success stories, but few of these included foreign-born immigrants. I scoured the webpages of environmental

³ Citizens for a Better South Florida, (2000, accessed October 10 2001); available from www.ficus.usf.edu/ficusdd/orgs/CFBS.

organizations across America and only found reference to the word “immigrant” in discussions of population control and immigration restrictions. I searched through the community newsletters of various immigrant communities in South Florida and found no reference to the word “environmental” in them. Up until this point, my work in mainstream environmentalism remained separate from my place in the Indo-Caribbean community.

As a member of the Indo-Caribbean community in South Florida, and as an environmental educator, I needed to know why there was such a great disconnect between immigrant communities and environmental education. I explored factors like cultural identity, historic perceptions of the land, immigration, and the American influence on the community to better understand how culturally-specific knowledge shapes the environmental consciousness of this particular immigrant community.

Literature Review

Within Caribbean and West Indian studies, little has been written specifically on Indo-Caribbeans or East Indians in comparison to the large body of Afro-Caribbean literature.⁴ Indo-Caribbean history and identity are often lumped together with the Afro-Caribbean studies in umbrella terms like West Indian or Caribbean. However this common portrayal of Indo-Caribbeans as synonymous to Afro-Caribbeans is inaccurate as Indo-Caribbeans maintain a separate and distinct identity from Afro-Caribbeans fueled

⁴ V.S. Naipaul, a world-renown East Indian novelist from Trinidad & Tobago does contribute to the body of West Indian literature, though his writing is not in the same genre as the academically based social histories discussed in this literature review.

by decades of racial and political conflict. An independent Indo-Caribbean identity has not been acknowledged in some of the most recent Caribbean publications. For instance Mary Waters writes specifically about the differences between African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans in her 1999 book, Black Identities: West Indian Immigrant Dreams and American Realities,⁵ yet she uses the term West Indian exclusively for Afro-Caribbeans. Rachel Buff writes about Trinidadian carnival culture in Brooklyn as diasporic phenomenon of North America in her 2001 book, Immigration and the political Economy of Home: West Indian Brooklyn and American Indian Minneapolis, 1945-1992, yet she also discusses “West Indian-Americans” with only a passing reference to Indo-Caribbeans as part of the West Indian diaspora.⁶

For countries like Trinidad where the population is 40.3% Indo/ 39.5% Afro⁷ and Guyana where the population is 49% Indo/ 32% Afro,⁸ the literature does not adequately represent an East Indian or Indo-Caribbean voice. I found that in general encyclopedic and media representations of West Indians, the Afro-Caribbean identity often eclipsed the separate history and identity of the Indo-Caribbeans. This misrepresentation is particularly offensive to Indo-Guyanese and Indo-Trinidadian immigrants not only because their distinctive cultural history is unacknowledged, but because they have historically been marginalized by Afro-Caribbeans in Trinidad and Guyana.

⁵ Mary Waters, *Black Identities: West Indian Dreams and American Realities*, 2nd ed., Russell Sage Foundation (New York: Harvard University Press, 1999).

⁶ Rachel Buff, *Immigration and the Political Economy of Home*, American Crossroads (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001).

⁷ Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, *Background Notes: Trinidad and Tobago* (U.S. Department of State, 1998 2001, accessed June 9 2001); available from www.state.gov/www/background_notes/trinidad/tobago/0398_bgn.html.4

⁸ Ibid.

One of the earliest academic studies representing Indo-Caribbeans is Morton Klass' 1957 ethnographic study, East Indians in Trinidad: A Study of Cultural Persistence.⁹ Klass' study, which depicts Indo-Caribbeans as having a separate and distinct East Indian culture from Afro-Caribbeans was dismissed by the Afro-Caribbean former Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Dr. Eric Williams. "Williams... was convinced that Trinidadians of Indian descent were indistinguishable in their needs and aspirations from their neighbors of African descent."¹⁰ The emergence of a distinctively Indo-Caribbean voice in West Indian literature corresponds to the political situation in Trinidad and Guyana during the latter half of the twentieth century. Afro-Caribbean political parties dominated both countries for roughly 30 years: for Trinidad 1956 to 1986, and Guyana 1964 to 1992. The political situation in these countries is reflected in the literature as the 1980s and 90s saw a new Indo-Trinidadian identity surface within West Indian studies. For instance, Anthony de Verteuil published his 1989 collection of historically based vignettes, Eight East Indian Immigrants, which described the migration of indentured servants from India to Trinidad and their experience on British plantations.¹¹ In 1999 a history of Indo-Guyanese followed, when Basdeo Mangru published his book, Indians in Guyana: A Concise History From Their Arrival to the Present. Although books like Dennison Moore's Origins and Developments of Racial Ideology in Trinidad: The Black View of the East Indian have helped to explain the history of Indo-Caribbeans, the existing West Indian literature still under-represents the

⁹ Klass, M. (1961). East Indians In Trinidad: A Study of Cultural Persistence. Prospect Heights, Illinois, Waveland Press.

¹⁰ Ibid. xxix

¹¹ Anthony de Verteuil C. S, *Eight East Indian Immigrants* (Port of Spain, Trinidad, West Indies: Paria Publishing Co. Ltd., 1989).

larger Indo-Caribbean diaspora. South Florida, because of its close proximity to the Caribbean has a thriving Indo-Caribbean community, yet I was unable to find any published academic works on my community, in the archives of the Historical Museum of Southern Florida. Aside from community newsletters, unpublished dissertations and websites most Indo-Caribbean immigrant communities within the U.S. have not yet been documented by anthropologists, ethnographers, or social scientists.

Methods

Using oral history allowed community-members to speak for themselves in semi-structured, in-depth interviews. In August and September of 2001 I conducted my first round of oral histories with ten interviewees and in December 2001 and January 2002 I met with fourteen additional interviewees. I solicited participants from a range of economic and educational levels, though all interviewees were either first or second-generation immigrants to the U.S. Fifteen first-generation interviewees were born in either Guyana or Trinidad and nine second-generation interviewees were born in the U.S. or Canada, but their parents were born in Guyana or Trinidad. Rather than hand out rigid survey questions, or ask questions from a standardized list, I asked interviewees for their opinions, stories and experiences around several themes: migration, ethnic identity, historic association with agriculture, conservation values, environmental education in South Florida, agricultural practices in South Florida, globalization and acculturation.

I discovered that if my language was too academic it was perceived as intimidating, and therefore ineffective. I translated my ideas and questions into every day

language, on the spot, so that my interviewee felt comfortable with the questions. For example, I set out to determine how each person conceptualized the environment, and what their relationship was with it. I found that it was best to begin discussions of environmental issues without using the word “environmental,” and instead asked about the tropical fruit trees planted in most of the interviewee’s yards. By simply asking for a tour of the yard to see how the trees had grown (a common ritual when visiting a community member) I was able to solicit opinions, ideas and stories without getting lost in uncomfortable academic terms.

Overview of the Chapters

In her book Guests and Aliens, Saskia Sassen writes: “Today we see clearly that the colonial empires of the past created bridges. We have far more difficulty seeing how current forms of transnational economic activity are also creating bridges.”¹² Sassen discusses some of the large-scale socio-political, economic, and global forces that push Third World immigrants into the First World. Indo-Caribbean migration patterns to the First World can be traced back to a continuum of Caribbean occupation, beginning with British colonization and ending with economic globalization by the U.S. British colonial rule, American economic domination, Christian missionary activity, American industrial extraction of natural resources, and the inundation of American goods in the Caribbean

¹² Sassen, S. (1999). Guests and Aliens. New York, The New York Press.151

economy, have influenced East Indians during their entire history in Trinidad and Guyana.

Chapter 1 examines the impact of nineteenth century British colonialism and the twentieth century American influence in Trinidad and Guyana, on rural Indo-Caribbean lifestyles and values. The presence of American industry, along with development trends led to a rapid urbanization and modernization of the Caribbean. In conjunction, Christian mission schools and a British educational system facilitated higher education as an Indo-Caribbean cultural value, which in turn served as the primary mechanism for Indo-Caribbean immigration to the First World in the latter half of the twentieth century. Indo-Caribbean interviewees from the South Floridian community demonstrate the cultural resilience of the Indo-Caribbean diaspora with examples of their maintenance of rural Indian values while simultaneously adapting their traditional practices while living in the United States.

Chapter 2 explores the foundations of Indo-Caribbean conservation values: cultural identity and history with agriculture. The history of Indo-Caribbeans as indentured laborers on British sugarcane and rice plantations in Trinidad and Guyana was instrumental in shaping present-day notions of connections to the land through agriculture. In order to fully appreciate the present day agricultural practices of the Indo-Caribbean community in South Florida, an investigation of the complex feelings surrounding Indo-Caribbean identity and the place of agriculturalists in Caribbean society is necessary. Indo-Caribbeans exhibit an intergenerational conservation ethic that is deeply embedded in concepts of cultural identity rather than notions of American

environmentalism. This kind of conservation ethic, framed in terms of cultural tradition has yet to be appreciated by mainstream environmental outreach initiatives in South Florida.

Chapter 3 begins with a critique of the entire mainstream environmental movement in America for its exclusivity of immigrants, people of color, lower-income communities and those who live in cities. My attempt to find the root cause of inefficient multicultural environmental education in South Florida led me to examine the larger issue of the lack of immigrant community participation within mainstream environmentalism. A closer look at environmental organizations reveal exactly why immigrant communities are not participating with them; they are predominantly white and many hold an anti-immigration stance on the overpopulation issue. The environmental justice movement that emerged in the 1980s is one of the only existing means for people of color and immigrant communities to express their environmental concerns within organizations.

Effective multicultural environmental education must understand and incorporate each community's environmental values and perceptions of nature, rather than insist that immigrant communities conform to one dominant way of seeing the world and solving environmental problems. In trying to perform a simple assessment of the environmental consciousness level of one immigrant community, I became engrossed in a rich history including complex issues of racial conflict, politics and global economics that could not be omitted from the story of how my community's environmental values came into being. This thesis hopes to illustrate the importance of the histories, values and traditional knowledge that immigrants bring with them to the U.S.

CHAPTER II

THE CULTURAL GLOBALIZATION OF INDO-CARIBBEANS

An Indo-Caribbean Village Lifestyle: (1860-1950)

The 1860s through the 1940s proved to be a unique window of time for many Indo-Caribbeans to revive their Indian heritage while living in isolated rural villages composed almost exclusively of other East Indians¹ in Trinidad and Guyana. As Indo-Caribbeans completed their contracts as indentured servants on British plantations some returned to India, some renewed their contracts, while others were given land grants by the British in Trinidad and Guyana.² They gradually settled into small villages, on land near to the former sugar and rice estates where they worked. In these new settlements, they farmed rice, sugar, cocoa, and coffee for their livelihoods and individual families raised their own vegetables and livestock.

For nearly an entire century, many Indo-Caribbeans living in villages isolated from any other ethnic group strengthened and enhanced their cultural ties to India. Anthropologist Morton Klass in his book, East Indians in Trinidad: A Study of Cultural Persistence depicts the typical, rural, Indo-Caribbean village found between the 1880s

¹ East Indian, as opposed to West Indian, but not to be confused with Native Indian, refers to Caribbean people in Guyana and Trinidad whose ancestry can be traced back to India.

² Anthony de Verteuil C. S, *Eight East Indian Immigrants* (Port of Spain, Trinidad, West Indies: Paria Publishing Co. Ltd., 1989).

and the 1950s.³ Based on his experience and ethnographic observations while living in Trinidad during 1957 and 1958, Klass captured the lifestyle, values, traditions and practices of a particular Indo-Caribbean village called Amity.⁴ Fundamental characteristics that serve as the basis for Indo-Caribbean identity were enacted in Amity, including: a communal village lifestyle, a local economy, conservation values associated with farming, an extended family structure, and the importance of religious traditions and ceremonies, as well as culturally distinct music and foods.

According to Klass, most families in the village consisted of several generations all living in one house with one central kitchen and one family purse.⁵ As the family grew due to marriage and births, the family would expand the house by building additional structures to accommodate more beds yet the family would continue to share only one kitchen.⁶ The communal interaction between village families was evident from their pooling of resources and participation in village-wide affairs. Based on a Hindu⁷ tradition, the night before a marriage the entire village would gather for a wedding cooking party. The men of the village attended a weekly reading of the *Ramayan*⁸ accompanied by the singing of Hindu hymns called *bhajans*.

Indo-Caribbean villagers governed themselves with traditions and values from India, with minimal reliance on the British rulers of Trinidad and Guyana. For instance,

³ Morton Klass, *East Indians in Trinidad: A Study of Cultural Persistence* (Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press, 1961).

⁴ Ibid. 11

⁵ Ibid. 44-45

⁶ Ibid. 44-45

⁷ Although Klass emphasizes Hinduism as the predominant religion in Amity, there were also Muslims present in the village.

⁸ The *Ramayan* is a Sanskrit text, read by Hindu religious leaders.

from the late 1890s until the 1950s, the people of Amity held a village court called a *panceyt* to resolve disputes within the community.⁹ By the 1950s however, this type of local court authority was replaced by the British colonial courts of Trinidad. Additionally Indo-Caribbean villagers in Amity had not felt the need to legally register their Hindu marriages with the national courts until the British required it in 1946 with the passage of the "Hindu Marriage Ordinance."¹⁰ In the village of Amity, "a Hindu religious ceremony produced a perfectly respectable marriage, and [villagers] could see no reason for going to the additional trouble and expense of a civil ceremony."¹¹ Eventually Indo-Caribbean villagers agreed to hold civil marriage ceremonies in addition to their traditional Hindu ceremonies in order to protect the inheritance rights of their children from being claimed by non-family members.¹² From the late 1800s to the 1940s, an Indo-Caribbean village was a relatively closed system, self-reliant, rural, and relatively free from outside influences.

Klass observed a strong association between Indo-Caribbean cultural traditions and agriculture. Though all villagers spoke English by the 1950s, they continued to use Hindi terminology to describe the most important aspects of their lives: "kinship, religion and rice cultivation."¹³ By working the land, farmers had an experiential knowledge of the natural cycles of their land, and a cultural connection to nature through their relationship with the land and their pride in it. Families were self-sufficient, farming

⁹ Klass. 193

¹⁰ Ibid. 108

¹¹ Ibid. 109

¹² Ibid. 108-109

¹³ Ibid. xix

their own food and selling excess crops at a weekly village market. Although there were some shops in the village at the time of Klass' study, they were run by local villagers, who sold predominantly locally produced items. This would change quickly during the 1950s and in the coming decades as European and American goods began to surface in Trinidad and Guyana.

During the 1940s and 50s Indo-Caribbean villages began to feel the presence of England and America, as villagers ventured into Trinidad and Guyana's urban centers and as British and American goods and services simultaneously began to appear in the villages. Gradually the British and American influence took hold of the rest of the Caribbean, infiltrating the secluded Indo-Caribbean villages scattered across Trinidadian and Guyanese agricultural lands. Though Klass focused on the resilience of Indo-Caribbean traditions present in villages, he could not ignore the signs of Western influence that were already encroaching on Amity in 1957. Village children learned about the Western world and Christianity from a Presbyterian Canadian Mission School built in 1946. Klass noted, "Cricket [as] the most popular sport among the young men of [the village]."¹⁴ He described village boys on their breaks from work in the canefields and riceland congregating around the radio to listen to cricket games. By 1957 some villagers were choosing to be taxi drivers instead of farmers.¹⁵

¹⁴ Ibid. 186-188

¹⁵ Ibid.

The Shift from Rural to Urban

We live in such an economic world... that people sometimes are forced, or put into situations where you have to give up other values for the sake of economy. Now, people are running from the farms, people are trading in their farms for good city jobs... The reason is money.¹⁶

Taig Bahadursingh reflected on the reason behind the widespread transition from a rural to an urban lifestyle in the Caribbean. The rapid industrialization and modernization of Trinidad¹⁷ changed the previously agrarian existence for Indo-Caribbean villagers. In just a few generations, families who farmed in Indo-Caribbean villages moved to the urban centers of Trinidad to work for American oil companies or other industries. For example, another interviewee, Carl Rajmoolie stated that his grandparents and great grandparents were farmers, but his father was an administrator at an oil company in Trinidad during the 1950s.¹⁸

Port of Spain, the country's capital, was historically urban and also predominantly Afro-Caribbean. Over the years, however, many rural Indians left their small villages for the city in search of higher status jobs in the industrial sector. A rural town called Chaguanas, made up of many small Indo-Caribbean villages, identical to the village of Amity, that Klass described. In his 1993 ethnography of Trinidad, entitled Modernity, An Ethnographic Approach: Dualism and Mass Consumption in Trinidad, Daniel Miller observed:

¹⁶ Taig Bahadursingh. (Interviewed by Author) 2001.

¹⁷ The industrialization and modernization of Guyana was significantly more gradual than in Trinidad.

¹⁸ Carl Rajmoolie. (Interviewed by Author) 2001.

Chaguanas lies in the county of Caroni, the region usually referred to simply as 'Central': the region was traditionally important for agriculture, but was generally seen as backward, poor and associated largely with Indians. Today, however, Caroni is the fastest-growing region in population...and Chaguanas is the symbol of this new development.¹⁹

In just a few decades Chaguanas has become an urban center, bearing little resemblance to an historic, Indo-Caribbean village. When interviewee Baldeo Girwarr left Trinidad in 1961 he recalled that the traditional outdoor markets of Chaguanas, which sold produce and meats from family farms, were already struggling to stay in business.

[Villagers] were begging people to come in the markets, there was nobody there. After about one or two years one store went [up], then another store went and then another...today if you go there, now they have all the modern things.²⁰

Baldeo reflected on how his family plot of land in Chaguanas had changed over the years:

My grandparents bought that land in 1899 and we still have the land. My father [was] born and grew up there. I [was] born and grew up there...today when I go I see the land is bare and hardly anybody is planting because everything is industrialized. Everything is modernized.²¹

In an effort to prove Trinidad's economic independence after emancipation from British rule in 1962, Prime Minister Eric Williams²² aggressively led the country into a

¹⁹ Daniel Miller, *Modernity, an Ethnographic Approach: Dualism and Mass Consumption in Trinidad* (Providence, RI: Berg Publishers, 1994). 25

²⁰ Baldeo Girwarr, O. (Interviewed by Author) 2001.

²¹ Ibid.

²² For thirty years, beginning in 1956 Dr. Eric Williams served as the Prime Minister of Trinidad & Tobago, representing the Afro-Caribbean dominated political party, the People's National Movement (PNM).

modern, industrialized economy.²³ According to Daniel Miller's ethnographic study of Trinidad, Dr. Williams "attempted to assert Trinidad's emergence out of peripheral economic status through an explicit identification with heavy industry, the iron and steel and chemical works of the economic core."²⁴ Miller adds, "...from its inception Trinidad has been the creation of the global economy..."²⁵ The sudden presence of First World investors in Trinidad's economy during the 1960s and 70s and the resulting development of the country dramatically altered the lifestyles of many Indo-Trinidadians at that time including those currently living in South Florida.

The U.S. Presence in Guyana and Trinidad

Upon Trinidad and Guyana's emancipation from British colonialism in 1962 and 1966 respectively, each country managed their economies differently. While Trinidad steadily encouraged U.S. industrial interests, Guyana was slower to allow the U.S. into its economy. Over the latter half of the twentieth century, the U.S. dominated the economies of both Caribbean nations. The particular group of Indo-Caribbeans who took part in my ethnographic study felt the presence of the U.S. while growing up in Trinidad and Guyana in the 1940s through the 1980s. Those interviewees who grew up after World War II said they had always felt the American presence while living in the Caribbean. Even sixty-four year old Taig Bahadursingh admitted that in his lifetime he had never known a Trinidad free of either England or America's dominance: "The American

²³ Miller. 23

²⁴ Ibid. 23

influence was *always* there. It hung over the society of Trinidad and Tobago like an indelible residue.”²⁶

The installation of American military bases in Trinidad in 1940 and Guyana in 1942 was the first direct contact the people of these Caribbean countries had with the U.S.²⁷ During this time period some Indo-Caribbean men sought work on these U.S. military bases. Morton Klass mentions in his ethnography that this was the first time many Indo-Caribbean villagers had ever spent time away from their rural East Indian villages; this was their first opportunity to “observ[e] the life of non-Indians, both Trinidadian and American.”²⁸

Although he was only a child in the 40s, Taig distinctly remembered the American military presence in Trinidad. He saw its impact on Trinidadian culture: “Business, the free-market system, the monetary system, banking, investing, and general social attitudes and behavioral patterns of people all resembled the patterns that the American GIs left in Trinidad.” Aside from this small but somewhat influential population of Americans on Trinidadian and Guyanese military bases during the 1940s and 50s, the average Indo-Caribbean had little contact with Americans while living in Trinidad and Guyana. Tourism became an important part of the Jamaican economy but for different reasons, both Trinidad and Guyana attracted very few tourists.²⁹ If there

²⁵ Ibid. 24

²⁶ Taig Bahadursingh. (Interviewed by Author) 2001.

²⁷ Stephen and Mount Randall, Graeme, *The Caribbean Basin: An International History*, ed. Gordon Martel, The New International History Series (New York: Routledge, 1998). 77

²⁸ Klass. 38

²⁹ Trinidad did not need the revenues from tourism, thus it did not develop its tourism industry. Though Guyana tried, it never succeeded in attracting enough tourists to develop a profitable tourism industry.

were so few Americans physically present in Trinidad and Guyana, how was it that America became such a dominating force in the Caribbean during the latter half of the twentieth century?

American Goods in the Caribbean

It was through the American goods that surfaced in Trinidad and Guyana that the American influence quietly bled into the Caribbean. After World War II America experienced an industrial boom on a much larger scale than the original Industrial Revolution in England. A combination of factors, including the ability to extract resources, increased production at factories, breakthroughs in technology, government loans, and a post-war economic surge allowed the U.S. into this advanced position. The fruits of this boom were a multitude of new products, including new inventions, and mass-produced luxury items available to the middle-class for the first time. These commodities were packaged in a captivating way and marketed using radio announcements, and later television commercials. As advertising became more sophisticated and effective, Americans became more effective consumers. The narrator of a mid-50s animated film from the National Consumer Finance Association (NCFA) proudly announced: "The American consumer! Each year you consume fantastic amounts of food, clothing, housing, amusements, appliances, and services of all kinds. This mass consumption makes you the most powerful giant in the land."³⁰

³⁰ Wann De Graaf, David and Naylor, Thomas, *Affluenza: The All Consuming Epidemic*, Redefining Progress (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2001). 144

The economic boom in America reverberated far beyond U.S. boundaries to Third World nations like Trinidad and Guyana. The notion that First World goods were superior to Caribbean goods was introduced to Indo-Caribbeans long before the post-war economy during the 1950s American media in Guyana and Trinidad helped to reinforce this view. Morton Klass' interviews with Indo-Trinidadian taxi drivers in 1958 revealed, "People prefer to ride in the 'best' taxis, since the fare is the same, and if a taxi driver wants to get wedding business,³¹ he must have a new and expensive British or American car."³²

Throughout the 1950s and 60s Indo-Caribbean loyalty to American products intensified for several reasons. A negative view of the British developed and intensified among Trinidadians and Guyanese in the years preceding their sovereignty from British rule in 1962 and 1966, respectively. Taig explained that during his teen years in the 1950s sentiment toward the British was already beginning to change.

In Trinidad in our day people growing up, teenagers – we were already beginning to develop a rebellious attitude toward the British for the treatment meted out to us, so we would all from time to time go out to see American movies. We would take a look at their lifestyles, it would appeal to us and we would want to live like them: the freedom.³³

Taig and his teenage friends' desire to be like Americans was common among Indo-Caribbean youth during the 1950s. Pierre Martineau, marketing director for the Chicago Tribune in 1957 stated:

³¹ During this time period, taxis were hired for special occasions such as weddings and funerals. During wedding season, villages held weddings as often as once a week.

³² Klass. 79

³³ Taig Bahadursingh. (Interviewed by Author) 2001.

Advertising's most important social function is to integrate the individual into our present-day American high-speed consumption economy... our American level of living is the highest of any people in the world because our standard of living is the highest, meaning that our wants are the highest.³⁴

This message, intended for an American audience was also picked up by Indo-Caribbean airwaves.

Helena Norberg-Hodge, an expert on cultural globalization explains how media portrays a picture that is "irresistible" to a villager in an underdeveloped country:³⁵

It is an overwhelmingly exciting version of an urban American Dream, with an emphasis on speed, youthfulness, super-cleanliness, beauty, fashion, and competitiveness... In contrast to these utopian images from another culture, village life seems primitive, silly, and inefficient...³⁶

The advertising in American media led to an increase in American goods in Trinidad and eventually, Guyana as well. If Trinidadians showed an inclination toward American goods while a British colony in the 1950s, then the trend exploded after independence and into the 1970s and 80s. Trinidad's post-colonial economic success enabled many Trinidadians the finances to purchase U.S. products on an even larger scale. Trinidadians reaped the benefits of a flourishing economy during the period known as the Oil Boom, between 1976 and 1983.³⁷ Trinidad was in a position to consume much of First World culture and purchase more of the "best" products. The

³⁴ Pierre Martineau, *Motivation in Advertising* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1971). 190

³⁵ For over thirty years, Norberg-Hodge studied the effects of globalization and modernization in Ladakh, a village in northern India.

³⁶ Helena Norberg-Hodge, "The Pressure to Modernize and Globalize," in *The Case against the Global Economy and a Turn toward the Local*, ed. Jerry and Goldsmith Mander (San Francisco, CA: Sierra Club Books, 1996). 35-36

³⁷ Miller. 204

most affluent during this time consumed primarily American goods; it became a status symbol to have and flaunt American things. Miller describes the Oil Boom in Trinidad “as a period of legends – of those who flew to Paris for their wines and oysters and to Miami for the spare parts for their new cars.”³⁸

However, not all Trinidadians lived this kind of luxurious lifestyle. In fact, because economic prosperity appeared in Trinidad so suddenly and with such impressive force, the wealth was not distributed equally. Many who had been poor before the Oil Boom became even poorer despite the overall improvement for the country. Because industry was the major source of the country’s economic success, those who gravitated toward industry, and technology had access to riches, while many who remained in agriculture or other Indo-Caribbean traditional occupations struggled to stay out of poverty. The majority of agriculturalists at this time were Indo-Caribbean, rather than Afro-Caribbean. During the thirty-year political leadership of Trinidad by the Afro-Caribbean political party, the People’s National Movement (PNM), the situation for Indo-Caribbean farmers worsened.³⁹ PNM Prime Minister Williams was criticized by the Indo-Caribbean population for “systematically marginaliz[ing] their interests, for example, in the preference of industry to agriculture.”⁴⁰ According to A History of West Indian Migrations by Dawn Marshall “...for the agricultural smallholder, land was more valuable as a commodity for sale to the industrial and tourist enterprises than for

³⁸ Ibid. 204

³⁹ Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, *Background Notes: Trinidad and Tobago* (U.S. Department of State, 1998 2001, accessed June 9, 2001); available from http://www.state.gov/www/background_notes/trinidad/tobago/0398_bgn.html. 4

⁴⁰ Miller. 282

agricultural production. This crisis in the internal development of most Caribbean territories led to worsening urban problems and to the further decline in agriculture."⁴¹

Although the poorer, rural Indo-Trinidadians were not actively consuming American goods with the same zest as the affluent Trinidadians of the time, all income-levels were eventually saturated with American goods. By the late 1980s, according to Daniel Miller's ethnographic research, "In low-income homes, wall decoration ...[relies] more on cuttings from colour magazines, where tanned European or American models are found..."⁴² Prior to the Oil Boom most American goods were symbols of the upper class, but eventually by the 1990s "they [had] become the expectation of mass consumption for almost all members of society."⁴³ Those Trinidadians living in poverty were still exposed to the American products, worn, eaten, and displayed by the upper class in Trinidad. The use of American products as a status symbol created even more demand for those goods in the minds of the poor. U.S. television and film reinforced the idea that American consumables as superior to local Caribbean products.

Guyana and especially Trinidad did not foresee the effect of U.S. marketing on Indo-Caribbean values, traditions and behaviors over the next few decades. Indo-Caribbeans were given a taste of the First World. They caught a glimpse of the American Dream and in many cases accepted the modern, American way of life as better than their

⁴¹ Dawn Marshall, "A History of West Indian Migrations: Overseas Opportunities and "Safety-Valve" Policies," in *The Caribbean Exodus*, ed. Barry Levine (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1987). 26-27

⁴² Miller. 211

⁴³ Ibid. 213

previous Indo-Caribbean lifestyles. Daniel Miller comments on the loss of authenticity that accompanied Trinidadian affluence:

There is the decline in the knowledge of traditional folklore, attached to agricultural labour, medical diagnosis and treatment, the supernatural, and traditional folktales, as well as traditional foods and customs. Then there is the dissolving of family and community life as siblings travel, have independent lifestyles and reject older moralities. There is an associated loss of specificity as the country is flooded with international brand names and a culture of mass consumption indistinguishable from Indonesia or Alaska.⁴⁴

First World Education: A New Indo-Caribbean Value

In Trinidad, up until the 1950s Indo-Caribbean sugar cane and rice farmers exuded great pride in their livelihoods and considered themselves fortunate.⁴⁵ Throughout the 1960s and 70s agriculturalists were made to feel ashamed of their rural lifestyle by Afro-Trinidadians and newly affluent Indo-Trinidadians as well. As modernization gradually crept into Trinidad and Guyana's isolated rural villages, Indo-Caribbeans began to place more value on economic success than their cultural traditions. The East Indians still living in the outskirts were considered simple, uneducated, and they were pitied for not being a part of the industrial revolution that was sweeping Trinidad. "For the last century and more," Daniel Miller states in his ethnography, "the Indians have been seen as primarily agricultural and rural, and therefore also as backward and unsophisticated compared to the considerable section of the African population located in Port of Spain and surrounding suburbs."

⁴⁴ Ibid. 205

⁴⁵ Klass.

Helena Norberg-Hodge discusses the psychological implications of modernization on traditional peoples. The exposure of Western cultures on the people of Ladakh had a negative impact on their self-confidence. They began to value the material goods they saw from the modern world, rather than the richness of their traditional cultures. From her own research in Ladakh, she noticed an overall loss of cultural pride and confidence in the Ladakhi villagers over decades.

Young Ladakhis – whose parents ask them to choose a way of life that involves working in the fields and getting their hands dirty for very little or no money – feel ashamed of their own culture... this same pattern is being repeated in rural areas all over the South, where millions of young people believe contemporary Western culture to be far superior to their own.”⁴⁶

In an interview, first-generation Lloyd Rambaransingh explained that his grandparents farmed rice in Trinidad and his parents did as well. “I helped my parents plant rice and stuff like that.” Lloyd noticed that over the years children were not expected to farm anymore. “They have gotten away from the farming. You don’t see the kids being brought up into farming. They are more brought up like [the] American’s way of living... I think it has more to do with education. The parents are more educated now, and they have better jobs, so they don’t have to go to the fields to work.”

The idea of an agricultural livelihood as a mere stepping-stone in the stream of progress and social mobility had taken hold of Indo-Caribbeans. It was only through a Western education that Indo-Caribbeans could achieve American notions of success. Based on my interviews, it seemed like choosing higher education over farming was a

⁴⁶ Norberg-Hodge. 35-36

value of the Indo-Caribbean community in South Florida. Carmen Maharaj, for instance said:

Ya know, coming from Trinidad, we stress education. My children don't focus on looking at what tree to plant and what to grow as crops, because books, books, books are instilled in them... Parents want their children to surpass what they got with their education.⁴⁷

Though Carmen's grandparents and parents were cocoa and coffee farmers in Trinidad, she and her husband were not expected to continue in agriculture. Instead like many other Indo-Caribbeans of their generation, they emigrated from the Caribbean to the First World for the explicit purpose of higher education. Twenty-two year-old Varune Harnarine echoed the same values regarding farming and education when he said:

My grandparents farmed and had a garden. My dad had just a backyard garden, and that was about it because they were educated, and they were, I guess professional, they were nurses, so they worked and you know, farming was not their main thing, but they like gardening as a hobby.

Education as an Indo-Caribbean value can be attributed to the desire to achieve an American standard of living, but the true roots of this value were planted in the nineteenth century. A long history of missionary activity and eventually, a mandated British school system in the Caribbean contributed to current Indo-Caribbean ideas about education. The persistent missionary efforts in Trinidad and Guyana throughout the eighteenth century gave birth to a series of mission schools in the nineteenth century. As Indo-Caribbean children of remote villages in Trinidad and Guyana attended schools like the Canadian Mission School throughout the late nineteenth century into the twentieth,

they relied more on the formal education taught in school than intergenerational or experiential knowledge of their parents and grandparents. Indo-Caribbean children were indoctrinated with Christian ideals as part of their formal education. Anthony de Verteuil illustrates the conflict that arose when Indo-Caribbean children attending Christian schools took their new teachings home to Hindu and Muslim parents in his book, Eight East Indian Immigrants:

Capil was not altogether pleased that his boys should go to a Christian school because the express purpose of its foundations was to convert the Indians to Christianity...On one occasion, Capil's elder boy Simbhoonath being successful in an examination was awarded as a prize, a card with a printed message behind and on the front a picture of Jesus and Mary, which he very proudly brought home. When his father saw this...he was furious and tore the card into pieces, telling the boy that on no account was he ever to bring such things home again.⁴⁸

Capil was one of thousands of Hindu and Muslim parents who dealt with conflicting values and religious practices taught to their children in Christian schools throughout the twentieth century. As a result of Indo-Caribbean children attending these mission schools, they spent less time in the fields learning from their families and more time learning about the world from a Western model. Children in Trinidad and Guyana used British text books containing unfamiliar icons like trees that grew only in Europe rather than the familiar tropical vegetation they had experiential knowledge about. The formal education Indo-Caribbean youth received rarely applied to their village lifestyles. The Indo-Caribbeans have had to balance the importance of their parents' and

⁴⁷ Carmen Maharaj. (Interviewed by Author) 2001.

⁴⁸ de Verteuil C. S. 134

grandparents' traditional Indian values with the modern, Western values imparted to them through their education.

Helena Norberg-Hodge's observations about the effects of Western education on Ladakh in the 1970s and 80s also apply to the situation in Indo-Caribbean villages:

Education was location-specific and nurtured an intimate relationship with the living world. It gave children an intuitive awareness that allowed them, as they grew older, to use resources in an effective and sustainable way. None of that knowledge is provided in the modern school. Children are trained to become specialists in a technological rather than an ecological society. School is a place to forget traditional skills and, worse, to look down on them... In every corner of the world today, the process called *education* is based on the same assumptions and the same Eurocentric model. The focus is on faraway facts and figures, on 'universal' knowledge. The books propagate information that is believed to be appropriate for the entire planet. But since the only knowledge that can be universally applicable is far removed from specific ecosystems and cultures, what children learn is essentially synthetic, divorced from its living context⁴⁹

The British school system and the presence of Christian mission schools in Trinidad and Guyana allowed higher education into the value system of Indo-Caribbeans. Rick Maharaj, a first generation Trinidadian living in South Florida reflected on education as an Indo-Caribbean cultural value:

Education was always the foundation of Indian people. If you don't have the foundation, you really can't do anything. That's why [we] stress education and that's why our children have education, cause that gives them the foundation to do whatever they want. That was handed down to me by my father... My mother couldn't read and write, but she [has] a son who is a doctor, right, so we stress education in our family... In one generation... We always stress the importance of education because that is really part of our culture.

⁴⁹ Norberg-Hodge, . 37

It was simply impossible for Indo-Caribbeans of the 1960s and 70s to continue living the village lifestyle their parents lived in the early part of the twentieth century. Each generation of Indo-Caribbeans adapted their values, practices and traditions, to accommodate the changing world around them, while maintaining certain elements of their culture that remain distinctively Indo-Caribbean. The new Indo-Caribbean value of higher education proved to be a driving force behind Indo-Caribbean migration to South Florida, among other North American destinations in pursuit of a First World university education.

From the Caribbean to the U.S.

By the 1960s and 70s, younger Indo-Caribbeans who received an entirely British education, and grew up with American media throughout their lives were ready to explore the First World they had read about in books, seen on television and films. The idea that American goods and services were considered superior to those available within the Caribbean also applied to higher education. By the 1970s it had become a tangible option for an entire generation to pursue their university education in the U.S.

Daniel Miller writes specifically about the Indo-Caribbean trend to emigrate from the Caribbean during the 1960s and 70s:

For the Indian younger generation able to opt out of following their parents into the cane-fields, and instead gaining degrees in foreign universities...it was more than just a relief from oppressive constraints. For many it was a period of excitement,

of fulfilling themselves in the cultivation of style and new freedoms.⁵⁰

When asked to list their reasons for immigrating to the U.S., Indo-Caribbeans unanimously included “education” and “economic opportunities” as critical factors in the their decision.⁵¹ “Friends and family in Trinidad just started abandoning Trinidad in the 60s,” Taig explained to me, “really... for economic reasons, because the economic situation in the United States was very inviting, quite a bit of them for advancement of educational opportunities...”

For many Guyanese Indians, however, reasons for immigrating to the U.S. were not guided by entirely positive incentives. For roughly thirty years, politics in Guyana were intertwined with racial conflict. Continual political turmoil between the Afro-Guyanese People’s Progressive Party (PPP) and the Indo-Guyanese People’s National Congress (PNC) often resulted in racially driven hate crimes and acts of violence between Indo-Guyanese and Afro-Guyanese.⁵² By the time U.S. immigration policy opened up to Guyana, many East Indians immediately left Guyana in fear of persecution by Afro-Guyanese based on race. For example, a Guyanese interviewee, Indira Ramasar admitted that her parents’ primary reason for immigrating to New York was not for education and opportunities, but for their children’s safety. Indira was only four when she left Guyana in 1975. “The biggest thing that scared my parents was that girls were being harmed physically, especially if they came from a well-known family... Lots of

⁵⁰ Miller, 205

⁵¹ Based on all twenty-four interviews conducted.

⁵² Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, *Background Notes: Guyana* (U.S. Department of State, 1998 2001, accessed May 12 2001); available from <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/bgn/1984.htm>. 4

families that we know [in Guyana] have had some serious things happen; some dire things happen to them.”⁵³ As Indo-Guyanese struggled to break out of Afro-Guyanese political domination in the 1970s, violent incidences against Indo-Guyanese citizens increased, including the burning down of homes.

Though racial tension existed between Indo-Caribbeans and Afro-Caribbeans in Trinidad, incidences of violence based on race were less frequent in Trinidad than in Guyana. For Indo-Trinidadians, racial tensions manifested themselves in a strict social structure reminiscent of the caste system they had left behind in India. Many Indo-Trinidadians found themselves at the bottom of this system, unable to get beyond a glass ceiling once they ventured outside of agriculture. Indo-Caribbeans felt that Afro-Caribbeans not only dominated the country’s political arena, but its government and service sectors as well. Those Indo-Caribbeans seeking work in the urban centers of Trinidad, frustrated by the lack of options available to them, found the option of emigrating to the U.S. or Canada for education more promising than struggling against a long history of racial marginalization by Afro-Trinidadians. Rick Maharaj left Trinidad because he felt like his career options were limited there. He said in an interview, “You could either work in agriculture, work in the oil fields or work for the government.”

In 1962 the tightening up of immigration laws in the United Kingdom in conjunction with the liberalization of immigration policy in the U.S. altered the path of Caribbean migration flows away from England and Canada and toward the U.S. Beginning with the U.S. Nationality Act of 1965 the end of the 1960s through the 1980s

⁵³ Indira Ramasar. (Interviewed by Author) 2001.

1980s allowed for a significant rise in immigrants to the U.S. from the Caribbean.

According to Ransford Palmer in his book Pilgrims from the Sun: West Indian Migration to America, the number of reported Trinidadian immigrants to the U.S. rose from a mere 1,074 in 1951-1960 to 61,776 in 1971-1980.⁵⁴ Similarly, the number of Guyanese immigrants entering the U.S. in 1951-1960 was 1,593 but rose to an astonishing 84,012 by 1981-1989.⁵⁵ Indo-Caribbeans began to immigrate to places like New York City, San Francisco and particularly Miami because of its close proximity to the Caribbean and tropical climate. From the 1960s through the 90s, South Florida became a popular destination for Caribbean people. Consequently a large number of Indo-Guyanese and Indo-Trinidadians settled in the region, where they eventually united and forged a new identity as the Indo-Caribbean community in South Florida.

The Indo-Caribbean Community in South Florida

Some of the qualities Morton Klass observed in 1957 Trinidad have become rare traditions of the past in Indo-Caribbean communities, while other values, traditions and practices have persisted across generations, and across continents. Some Indo-Caribbeans, for example still live with their extended families in Trinidad and Guyana and in the Indo-Caribbean community in South Florida. As a way of adapting traditions to fit into modern life, many Indo-Caribbeans live separately, but within close proximity of one another. Many Hindu and Muslim religious songs are still sung in Trinidad and

⁵⁴ Ransford Palmer, *Pilgrims from the Sun: West Indian Migration to America* (New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan: Twayne Publishers, 1995).

Guyana and in the Indo-Caribbean community in South Florida today. Second-generation Indo-Caribbeans born outside of the Caribbean are receiving intergenerational knowledge, learning the traditional skills and values of their ancestors because of strong local communities like the Indo-Caribbean group in South Florida.

Ultimately, Indo-Caribbeans living in South Florida continue to practice many of the traditions their ancestors practiced in isolated East Indian villages in Trinidad and Guyana over fifty years ago. The tradition of multiple families gathering the night before a wedding to pool resources and celebrate with one another while cooking is ever present in the South Florida community. Weekly prayers called *pujas*, where community members sing Hindu *bhajans* and where musicians play Indian drums are the glue that holds the Indo-Caribbean community together in South Florida. Annual religious festivals and talent shows featuring Indian music and dance performances commonly bring the community together. Of the twenty-four Indo-Caribbeans interviewed, all of them preferred home-cooked Indo-Caribbean foods as opposed to restaurant food; many were outspoken about their pride in Indian or Indo-Caribbean values, as opposed to American values.⁵⁵ First generation Indo-Caribbeans unanimously saw themselves as either Trinidadian or Guyanese rather than American. The majority of second-generation Indo-Caribbeans also identified as Indian, Caribbean or as Hindu or Muslim before admitting they also identified as Americans. Despite the influence of American and British values in Trinidad and Guyana and upon Indo-Caribbean communities within the

⁵⁵ Ibid. 11

⁵⁶ Based on oral histories by author.

U.S., some Indo-Caribbean cultural values, traditions and practices have persisted while adapting.

Through my oral histories, I found that second-generation Indo-Caribbeans were regularly participating in religious events through the Hindu temple or Muslim mosques located in South Florida. They took classical Indian dance and drum classes, learned to speak Hindi, traveled to India, Guyana and Trinidad and communicated with their friends and family in the Indo-Caribbean diapsora. American-born Indo-Caribbeans, some of whom had never been to Trinidad or Guyana were still connected to their parents' homeland. For instance, Sita Garib's two children who were born in the U.S. regularly spoke to their cousins in Trinidad on the telephone and on the internet, though they had never visited them there.

When I asked American-born, twenty year-old Rajesh how American culture had impacted his life, he said, "It gives me a greater sense of pride in who I am." He discussed the importance of being raised by a community and the role intergenerational knowledge had on his cultural identity. He said, "Our typical family thing is to just sit in a big circle and just *talk* - tell stories about how it used to be in Guyana... I just think it's really important for young people [my] age to have conversations with elders."

Varune Harnarine admitted that he had been deeply affected by American culture when he said, "I definitely see myself losing a lot of my culture as I go on... I have been very much Americanized," yet he added, "but I am going to try to keep that as intact as much as I can."

The Indo-Caribbean diaspora in North America has served as a medium for cultural preservation. By examining the South Florida component of the larger diaspora I have discovered that this particular community maintains many Indo-Caribbean values, practices and traditions. Though American influences have an impact on Indo-Caribbean immigrants, both Indo-Trinidadians and Indo-Guyanese have managed to maintain and adapt a strong ethnic identity in the face of outside influences for over 150 years, during their indentureship, colonization, and economic globalization. Many of the Indo-Caribbeans living in South Florida practice the same traditions, and hold the same values as their parents and grandparents in isolated villages did over a century ago in the Caribbean. Within the Indo-Caribbean value-system are ideals of conservation, which are firmly embedded in cultural identity rather than environmentalism. The conservation values present in the South Florida Indo-Caribbean community have survived generations, persisted across migrations and have been bombarded with countless outside pressures to conform, yet my research shows that conservation values are being carried into the next generation. Despite the move away from rural, traditional lifestyles toward modern, urban lifestyles, Indo-Caribbeans have maintained and adapted many important values from their rural heritage. In the next chapter I will closely examine the foundations of existing Indo-Caribbean conservation values in the South Florida community, the history of these values, and their relevance to the environmental movement in South Florida.

CHAPTER III

CONSERVATION AS AN INDO-CARIBBEAN CULTURAL VALUE

The Indo-Caribbean community in South Florida maintains a strong conservation ethic for reasons that have more to do with cultural values and identity, than with mainstream notions of environmentalism. Immigrants are often criticized for being too newly connected to their homelands to feel a sense of stewardship to the land in America. Indo-Caribbeans however do have strong ties to their home countries, Trinidad and Guyana, but at the same time, have a stake in the land where they currently reside due to their conservation values. Aspects of Indo-Caribbean cultural identity including nationality, religion and race are primary facets of identity that contain the community's conservation values. Community members directly engage in conservation by planting fruits and vegetables in their yards. One of the most significant elements responsible for shaping the community's agricultural practices in South Florida is the community's long history of working the land, dating back to their collective experience as indentured laborers in the British West Indies. Interviews with first and second-generation Indo-Caribbeans living in South Florida confirm that their existing conservation ethic and practices are based in cultural traditions and Indo-Caribbean identity, rather than any ideals of mainstream environmentalism.

Nationality

Of the East Indians from countries such as Guyana, Jamaica, Trinidad, St. Lucia, Suriname, Grenada, and St. Vincent, the largest concentration of East Indians are found in the Caribbean nations, Trinidad & Tobago and Guyana.¹ Throughout the indentureship period for East Indians² of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, approximately 240,000 Indians migrated to Guyana and 144,000 Indians to Trinidad, compared to a mere 36,000 in Jamaica and 34,000 in Suriname.³ In present day South Florida, the Indo-Caribbean residents are primarily from Trinidad, Guyana and Suriname. Surinamese have a distinct identity from Trinidadians and Guyanese. They are separated by language, speaking Hindi and Dutch before English. They have stronger ties to Hinduism and the caste system than do Trinidadians and Guyanese and their culture is heavily influenced by the Dutch presence in Suriname. Being from former British colonies, Trinidadians and Guyanese have more in common with one another than they do with Surinamese; they have an almost identical history and speak primarily English with a heavy dialect containing traces of Hindi and Urdu. Trinidadian and Guyanese Indian immigrants tend to shed their national boundaries more readily than Surinamese when interacting with the larger Indo-Caribbean diaspora. I have chosen to focus on Trinidadian and Guyanese South Floridians because the two groups behaved as one in cultural, social and religious gatherings.

¹ Morton Klass, *East Indians in Trinidad: A Study of Cultural Persistence* (Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press, 1961). 10

² East Indian, meaning from India, not to be confused with the Amer-Indian Arawak and Carib indigenous tribes of the Caribbean.

³ Basdeo Mangru, *Indians in Guyana: A Concise History from Their Arrival to the Present* (Chicago, IL: Adams Press, 1999). 9

Overtones of nationalistic pride can create tension between Trinidadians and Guyanese to some extent, but for the most part, there is no real hostility between the two groups on the basis of nationality. For instance, intermarriage between Trinidadians and Guyanese community members is commonplace and supported by the community. The nationalistic tension between the two groups is played out in friendly social interactions involving "heckling" or teasing based on one's nationality. Although negative stereotypes about people of both countries do exist within the Indo-Caribbean community, nationalistic differences do not keep Guyanese and Trinidadians apart. Immigrants from both countries are commonly found together in South Florida community events. Upon migrating to North America, barriers of nationality quickly fade away and most Indo-Caribbeans embrace their new identity as simply Caribbean or West Indian.

Nationality proved to be central to community members' identities during interviews with Indo-Caribbeans in South Florida. The first generation tended to identify primarily by their country of origin, and secondarily by religion, ethnicity or as West Indian or Caribbean. While the second generation also identified as Trinidadian or Guyanese, they were more willing to accept the broader identity of West Indian or Caribbean than the first generation. The question of identity is complicated for this group because there are several levels of identity available to them: interviewees saw themselves as simultaneously Indian, Trinidadians or Guyanese, Hindu or Muslim, West Indian or Caribbean.

Six out of nine second-generation interviewees strongly identified by nationality even though they were born in America and had not spent much time in their parents' homeland. For instance, although both nineteen year- old Anil Kalicharan and twenty year-old Rajesh Prakash were born in North America and had never actually lived in Guyana, they both felt that they were more Guyanese than American. "Since I was small," Anil said, "I've been raised like I was a Guyanese pretty much, because my parents have lived there all their life. So they know mostly Guyana... I don't see any difference between myself and the Guyanese-raised people."⁴ Rajesh expressed similar views about his Guyanese identity as he explained, "I live my life like a Guyanese. Everything I know is taught to me by my parents and the only thing they know is from Guyana. All the traditions they have; the way they speak, the way they move, the sports [they like], the way we cook, everything. So I grew up as if I was a Guyanese."⁵

If first and second-generation members of the Indo-Caribbean community are relating so closely to the culture and identity of their homeland and not necessarily with American or South Floridian culture, then how can they have a stake in the land and the local environment where they currently live? This criticism is often made of immigrant communities, but in the case of the Indo-Caribbean community in South Florida, their allegiance to Guyana and Trinidad enables them to preserve those cultural values that are in line with conservation and environmentalism. Trinidadians and Guyanese participate in environmental practices, not because they are motivated by American environmentalism, but because they are invested in keeping their Indo-Caribbean culture

⁴ Anil Kalicharan. (Interviewed by Author) 2001.

⁵ Rajesh Prakash. (Interviewed by Author) 2001.

alive. The will to preserve culture and identity is far stronger and more effective than mainstream environmental education initiatives have been in getting through to this community.

Religion

For the community-members' ancestors in nineteenth-century India, relations between Muslims and Hindus were unheard of and relations between Hindus of different castes were forbidden. Religious barriers have slowly fallen away among East Indians living together in the West Indies over the past century and a half. British colonialism forced an unlikely group of Indians together; the Indians who were recruited as indentured laborers to the West Indies came from diverse religions, castes, and regions of India. Although emigrants could barely communicate with one another in their varied dialects, by the end of the treacherous three-month voyage from India to the West Indies, there was a distinct bond among surviving passengers known as the *Jahaji bhai*, or "brotherhood of the boat."⁶ Religious and class barriers were first challenged aboard the passenger ships leaving India in 1838 and for the next few decades, these barriers eventually crumbled as Hindu and Muslim Indians worked side by side on British sugar plantations in Trinidad and Guyana. Regardless of religion or caste, the East Indians of the West Indies eventually began to call themselves Indo-Caribbeans.

⁶ Anthony de Verteuil C. S, *Eight East Indian Immigrants* (Port of Spain, Trinidad, West Indies: Paria Publishing Co. Ltd., 1989).

When East Indians arrived in the West Indies, they unknowingly entered several fierce and aggressive campaigns for their conversion to various forms of Christianity. Roman Catholicism had been the dominant religion in Trinidad before British rule. Indians found themselves in the midst of anti-Roman Catholic competition between Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, and Anglicans.⁷ Though these Christian denominations did not share the same philosophy, they were united in their efforts to convert Indians from their “primitive, idolatrous, and uncivilized” Indian religions.

Missionary activities were also persistent in Guyana, but according to Basdeo Mangru’s book, Indians in Guyana, A Concise history From their Arrival to the Present, they were not very effective. Despite attempted missionary activity, between 1856 and 1896, a mere 1,163 Indians were converted in Guyana.⁸ The Presbyterians had the most success in Guyana because they included Hindu teachings in their church. In Trinidad, Christianity gained a stronghold through the children of Indian immigrants. In his book, Origins and Development of Racial Ideology in Trinidad: The Black View of the East Indian Dennison Moore wrote, “By 1890 the Anglicans were operating five separate schools for Indians.”⁹

By the 1930’s many Indo-Caribbeans willingly gave up their religion and ability to speak Hindi or Urdu in hopes of achieving higher socio-economic status as Christians. In fact, most of the Indians who had moved to the urban centers of Guyana and Trinidad, agreed with the notion that Christianity was somehow associated with higher education,

⁷ Dennison Moore, *Origins & Development of Racial Ideology in Trinidad: The Black View of the East Indian* (Orleans, Ontario, Canada: NYCAN International Inc., 1995). 189-206

⁸ Mangru. 39

⁹ Moore. 203

economic power, and the upper class. Indians were confronted with ideas that Hinduism and Islam were inferior to Christianity throughout their existence in the Caribbean. Upon arrival in the United States, many Indo-Caribbeans have benefited from their freedom of religion by allying themselves with Islamic mosques and Hindu temples in South Florida. Of the Indo-Caribbeans interviewed, sixteen of twenty-four were practicing either Hinduism or Islam. In South Florida, though many Indo-Caribbean community events are sponsored by Muslim and Hindu organizations, Indo-Caribbean Christians are often present.

Race

Indo-Caribbeans have a separate and distinct identity apart from the Afro-Caribbeans of their homelands. Both Indo and Afro-Caribbeans call themselves West Indians because they are from countries located in the West Indies.¹⁰ However, the term West Indian has been used inaccurately to describe Afro-Caribbeans exclusively, both in popular culture and in academia. In a recent Miami Herald article about West Indians in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, the authors assume that being West Indian is synonymous with being Black. Throughout the discussion on West Indians from Trinidad & Tobago, Haiti, and Jamaica, there is no mention of Indian West Indians.¹¹ The same mistake has repeatedly been made in academic writing as well. For instance, in the book Immigration and the Political Economy of Home: West Indian Brooklyn and American Indian

¹⁰ Guyana is considered part of the West Indies or the Caribbean despite its physical location in South America.

¹¹ Brad Bennett, Grotto, Jason, and Elliott, Andrea, "West Indian Residents Nearly Triple in Decade," *The Miami Herald*, August 17 2001.

Minneapolis, 1945-1992, Rachel Buff discusses West Indians or Caribbean immigrants throughout the book, yet describes only Afro-Caribbean culture and identity. She uses the term “Caribbean immigrants” with little mention of Indo-Caribbeans. Indo-Caribbeans reluctantly accept their broader identity as West Indians when identifying themselves to Americans, but they do not wish to share their cultural identity with Afro-Caribbeans because they feel they have been marginalized by them for over a century.

Racial tension between Blacks and Indians within Trinidad and Guyana, and throughout the West Indian diaspora is historically and politically based. Guyanese historian, Basdeo Mangru describes how former Afro-Caribbean slaves disliked Indians before they even arrived in Trinidad and Guyana because they “were imported to create competition for jobs and to reduce wages.”¹² Years later when Indians had completed their plantation contracts and began to settle in the Caribbean the animosity between the two groups intensified. “The Blacks showed their resentment against the Indian presence in two petitions to the British Government – one in 1873 and another in 1903.”¹³ The negative views Blacks had toward Indians in the West Indies persisted through the years. According to Dennison Moore, from 1832 onward, “Blacks still regarded Indians as ‘evil monsters,’ ‘primitive,’ ‘inferior,’ and looked down upon them as ‘dirt.’”¹⁴

Overall hostility between the two groups comes from both sides. The intermarriage of Indo-Caribbeans with Afro-Caribbeans is looked down on by Indo-Caribbeans. The word “dougla” meaning bastard in Hindi, was used to describe the

¹² Mangru. 65

¹³ Ibid. 65

¹⁴ Moore. 2

child of an Indo-Caribbean and an Afro-Caribbean.¹⁵ This term is now used popularly by all races in the Caribbean and in the Caribbean diaspora. "Douglas" are rarely accepted into the Indo-Caribbean community, but are accepted into the Afro-Caribbean community and the larger West Indian community.

Although there has been roughly an equal divide in population between Afro and Indo-Caribbeans living in Trinidad and Guyana, there has not been an equal divide in political control of both countries. According to the U.S. State Department, for both Trinidad and Guyana, "politics has been based more on ethnicity than on ideology."¹⁶ In Trinidad, the government was dominated by an Afro-Trinidadian political party the People's National Movement (PNM) for 30 years, beginning in 1956. In Guyana, a political party led by urban Blacks called the People's National Congress (PNC) controlled politics for 28 years until 1992. Many first-generation Indo-Caribbean negative perceptions about Afro-Caribbeans were influenced by their feelings of political constraint while living in Trinidad and Guyana during this time. Since 1986 for Trinidad and 1992 for Guyana, the struggle for Indo-Caribbean representation in government was turbulent. Although Indian-majority and Indo/Afro parties have won elections, there is still overt racial conflict between the Indo and Afro-Caribbeans surrounding politics. Both Indo and Afro-Caribbeans in the West Indian diaspora stay involved in the politics of their home countries, which encourages racial conflict to persevere within the community in South Florida.

¹⁵ de Verteuil C. S. 155

¹⁶ Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, *Background Notes: Guyana* (U.S. Department of State, 1998 accessed May 12 2001); available from www.state.gov/r/pa/bgn/1984.htm.

The History of Agriculture and Indo-Caribbeans

Of central significance to this research, the Indo-Caribbean community in South Florida has an historic association with the land through their Indian ancestors' participation in indentured labor on sugar and rice plantations in Trinidad and Guyana. Prior to 1808, African slaves were brought to the British West Indies to work on Crown sugar plantations. In 1838, upon the emancipation of slaves in the British Caribbean, plantation owners could not convince former slaves to work for them for the meager wages they offered.¹⁷ After several years of economic difficulty on the plantations, planters lobbied the colonial government to finance a large-scale migration project to bring in Indians to work the sugar plantations for profitable wages. From 1838-1848 and again from 1851-1917 indentured laborers were recruited¹⁸ from various regions of India to the British West Indies, primarily to Trinidad and Guyana, formerly known as British Guiana.¹⁹ They were paid 25 cents a day to work on sugar plantations, their contracts lasting a minimum of three years and if renewed for ten years, their return passage to India was guaranteed.²⁰

Many of the Indians who left India did so out of desperation. Devastating monsoons, famines, and epic diseases along with constant political battles with the British made India virtually inhospitable to everyone but the wealthy. Indian emigrants

¹⁷ Ransford Palmer, *Pilgrims from the Sun: West Indian Migration to America* (New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan: Twayne Publishers, 1995). 2

¹⁸ Lack of funding was the reason for the pause in migration. Sources say that Indians were misled about the labor contracts and in some cases kidnapped.

¹⁹ de Verteuil C. S. 5-6

²⁰ Ibid. 16, 154

found themselves in the West Indies because opportunities for livable wages and land ownership were so scarce in India. Anthony de Verteuil, in his book Eight East Indian Immigrants notes, "In 19th century India, conditions were so grim that it was totally impossible for many of the poor and downtrodden to acquire wealth or rise in social status. Throughout the sub-continent, for some 90% of the people, agriculture was the only door to prosperity, and proprietorship of land the key."²¹ The caste system prevented many of the lower and middle castes from ever owning land in India. In the West Indies, the promise of owning land was so alluring to the middle and lower castes that it was worth the risk of death aboard the ships en route to the West Indies.

Most of the Indians who migrated to the West Indies had no plans of returning to India. Some plantation laborers, though, did accept their return passage contracts, and made their way back to India ten years after initially leaving. After returning to their homeland, many decided that living in the West Indies enabled them to achieve a better standard of living than what was feasible for them in India. Between 1877 and 1892 there were 757 cases of re-emigration to Trinidad from India.

When the British authorities realized that more laborers wanted to return to India than they could afford, they began to issue land grants in Trinidad. The Indians who settled in Trinidad, managed to establish their own crops and livestock land that would eventually host Indo-Caribbean villages like Morton Klass' village Amity. According to the U.S. State Department, the same scenario was true for Guyanese Indians. "Many of the Afro-Guyanese former slaves moved to the towns and became the majority urban

²¹ Ibid. 3

population, whereas the Indo-Guyanese remained predominantly rural.”²² The Indian cultural value of owning property was transplanted to the Caribbean through this group of people. In Trinidad and Guyana, Indo-Caribbeans had a stake in the land through their ownership. Through agriculture, they forged a new identity for themselves. Their ownership of property served as capital for generations down the line. There is an undeniable connection to the land that is part of Indo-Caribbean history, heritage and identity.

Negative Associations with Agricultural Labor

When Indo-Caribbeans emerged from their indentureship and were free to take part in this new Caribbean society, they had limited options of making a livelihood for themselves. Because Afro-Caribbeans wanted nothing to do with agriculture because of their negative association with plantation work and slavery, Indo-Caribbeans easily filled the agricultural niche that no one else wanted. Indo-Caribbeans had to deal with stereotypes of agriculture as a lowly occupation by British and Spanish colonialists and by Afro-Caribbeans. Anthony de Verteuil explains that in 1909 the village of Chaguanas in Trinidad was made up of two separate communities, “The Indian immigrants differing in language, religion, race and culture from the blacks, remained quite apart from them. If they met, which was seldom, they did not mingle.”²³

²² Inter-American Affairs (accessed May 12, 2001).

²³ de Verteuil C. S. 134

Racial tension between Blacks and Indians has influenced the way Indo-Caribbeans view agriculture. Feelings of pride in working the land are also marred by feelings of inferiority by association with agriculture. Negative associations with agriculture have persisted throughout the century. Unfortunately overtones of these ideas have become part of the psyches of the Indo-Caribbean community in South Florida today.

During an interview with a first-generation community member, Taig Bahadursingh discussed his feelings about this:

In our days it was a real put-down, it was real low-down to be considered a farmer or agriculturalist or a gardener or such. Or to be raising cows, producing milk. That was a real low down the ladder occupation. That gave us such a complex; we were embarrassed. We were ashamed to admit it to our friends who lived... in the city. Even when we grew up to become adults, that became so strongly embedded in us, ...we were still embarrassed.²⁴

Despite his embarrassment, Taig still discussed the positive associations he had with agriculture. "Farming is one of the passions of my life. To plant, to nurture, and to watch what I plant grow successfully and produce. Even if I don't use it, somebody else will." This struggle to reconcile positive and negative associations with agriculture surfaced in discussions with many other community members about agriculture. This was a personal subject for interviewees since all but two of the twenty-four interviewees had parents or grandparents who had farmed in Trinidad or Guyana.

²⁴ Taig Bahadursingh. (Interviewed by Author) 2001.

Because Afro-Caribbeans did not want Indo-Caribbeans moving into the urban centers and “taking away” jobs, Afro-Caribbeans tried to keep Indians from leaving agriculture. Even educated Indians in urban centers of Guyana and Trinidad had to tolerate comments about Indians being backward, “country” or uneducated. Second-generation Indo-Caribbean, Rajesh Prakash was aware of the negative associations with agriculture facing Indo-Caribbeans. Rajesh explained:

My mother comes from a part of Guyana that used to be in the bush. She was a typical country-type girl, quiet, a little bit uneducated, but they sent her to the city for school. She would tell me stories of how the other town children would, not oppress her, but tease her, ‘oh here comes little bush girl’ or whatever, so there is a negative connotation [with] being from the bush.²⁵

However, Rajesh was also aware of the benefits of an agricultural lifestyle. He spoke of his grandfather who grew up “in the bush” with admiration. He explained, “When you live the bush that’s all you have. All your medicinal remedies, all your food, the way you cook, the way you live, your home is built out of that which you get from the land.” Rajesh showed a deep understanding of connecting to the land through dependence on it. Despite the negative associations with agriculture that Indo-Caribbeans have faced, they maintain a strong connection to the land and a sense of pride in their agricultural history. Ultimately, agriculture is an essential part of the history of this community and this can best be illustrated by examining their agricultural practices in South Florida.

²⁵ Rajesh Prakash. (Interviewed by Author) 2001.

Agricultural Practices in South Florida

As soon as I entered the house, my hosts Rick and Carmen greeted me, gave me a rum and coke and immediately led me through the house to the back yard. First we stopped at the zabuca (avocado) tree and inspected the flowers on it, as zabuca was not yet in season. Then we moved to the julie-mango tree, a particular type of mango endemic to the Caribbean. Rick stood with one hand on his hip, sipping his drink, staring up at his tree with admiration and pride. He said that when he closes his eyes and eats one of these mangoes, it transports him back to his childhood days in Trinidad. As he showed me the coconut tree and talked about how much it had grown since the last hurricane, his wife Carmen was gathering Scotch-Bonnet peppers, and Governor plums for me to take home to my family.

When their trees were laden, Rick and Carmen often sorted their extras into brown paper bags and drove around town delivering their tropical fruits and vegetables to other members of the community. It was not that they were exceptionally generous or kind-hearted people. They would often come home to a brown-paper bag on their doorstep, with a note from some other community-member who had something from the yard that was simply too good not to share. If Rick or Carmen were home for this "stop over," they would invite their unannounced guest inside for a drink.

All of the Indo-Caribbeans I interviewed either grew some kind of fruit, herb or vegetable on their property, or acquired homegrown produce from a relative or community-member. Even the younger generation of Guyanese and Trinidadians I spoke with indicated that they already did or would plant some tropical fruit trees or pepper plants on their property. For example, John Rider who lives with his brother and sister in an urban area of Miami felt that it was important to have fruit trees in the yard. He explained, "The reason why we chose to buy the house we live in was because of the land

in the back, there's a lot of land in the back. [The yard already had] four big fruit trees, two mango trees and two avocado trees."²⁶ Eighteen of the twenty-four interviewed, said they regularly relied on herbs, peppers, and vegetables from their yard for cooking purposes.

In addition to planting for food, many interviewees also grew medicinal plants in their yards. Rajesh Prakash explains how his household commonly uses plants for medicine. Rajesh says "If I say I have a headache, most people here would say, 'go take some Tylenol' but my mom says 'drink this tea.' She'll go in the backyard and pick some leaves and make me tea for my headache."²⁷ Sita Garib attributes the South Floridian community's knowledge of medicinal plants to the education they received in the Caribbean. She was taught about the uses of plants at school in Trinidad. Her knowledge was reinforced by family members and neighbors who prepared herbal remedies. Sita said:

In Trinidad they teach you about certain herbs and stuff you can use and you can get better over there, but over here you have to go to a doctor and they give you the medicine. That's a big difference, because [in Trinidad] you can always take care of yourself. Here [in Miami] we have fever-grass outside, so we use that when we have a cold or a fever. There are certain things you learn in Trinidad that you wouldn't learn here.²⁸

Despite the obvious agricultural practices community-members are engaged in, when surveyed about organic produce, community gardens or vegetable cooperatives, most Indo-Caribbeans did not recognize those terms as corresponding to their everyday

²⁶ John Rider. (Interviewed by Author) 2001.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Sita Garib. (Interviewed by Author) 2001.

practices. These people had acquired experience-based knowledge of the land, rather than formal environmental training, yet because of differences in terminology, Indo-Caribbeans may not be thought of as environmentally conscious or environmentally literate. Environmental educators measure environmental consciousness by the standards of mainstream environmentalism. For instance they gauge a group's concern for the environment based on whether or not they donate money to an environmental organization, or sign petitions.²⁹ When environmental educators use such narrow concepts of public participation, they are failing to consider the experience-based conservation values and agricultural practices that many immigrant communities possess.

An experience-based environmental consciousness has not yet been appreciated by proponents of formal environmental education in South Florida. There is a basic human connection to the land that anyone can feel regardless of his or her formal education. It does not have to be found in the scientific discipline of botany or ecology, in the words of Thoreau or Muir and it need not be expressed by political activism. Sixty-seven year-old Taig Bahadursingh said that the best source of environmental knowledge could only be learned directly from the land. He went on to say:

You appreciate the food, you appreciate the land... you begin to see the value of the land, for what it can do for you. You begin to see how useful that land is in sustaining your life. You begin to see all of these things only when you are exposed to it. If you are raised on it, you are guaranteed to know it.³⁰

²⁹ Lori Hunter, "A Comparison of the Environmental Attitudes, Concern, and Behaviors of Native-Born and Foreign-Born U.S. Residents," *Population and Environment, A Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 21, no. 6 (2000).

³⁰ Taig Bahadursingh. (Interviewed by Author) 2001.

When asked what the word “environmental” meant to first-generation interviewees, there was no consensus response. In fact, the answers varied greatly and few were in line with the rhetoric of mainstream environmentalism. Asking interviewees about the term “environmental” made them feel as if there were only one correct answer they had to guess at in order to prove that they were educated. It made them uncomfortable and eventually this question was omitted from the interviews. Most of the first-generation community members I interviewed were not able to speak in the language of formal environmental education, yet when asked about the fruit trees in their yard, they were very comfortable and extremely knowledgeable about them. They spoke of their connection to the land, their respect for nature and their ethic of conservation, yet they viewed the planting of fruit trees and vegetables as parts of their cultural identity as Indo-Caribbeans. They were engaging in environmental practices in a way that was not registering on the radar screen of the mainstream American environmentalism.

It is vital that environmental educators understand the people they are trying to educate culturally instead of assuming that the dominant mainstream environmental ethic will be embraced by people coming from a vastly different place in the world. Educators must find out how communities relate to nature, what has shaped their values, what their current practices are, and what their goals are. Only after understanding how communities connect to the environment, can educators improve upon a community's existing knowledge.

Conservation as a Cultural Value

Some first-generation interviewees admitted that for years they did not recycle bottles and cans in South Florida until the county mandated it and distributed recycling bins to residents. Based on this data, environmentalists might conclude that the Indo-Caribbean community lacks a conservation ethic because they were not engaged in recycling. However, it is important to understand how Indo-Caribbeans conceptualize recycling and how their conservation values came about while in the Caribbean. Sita Garib who moved from Trinidad to the U.S. at the age of fifteen, revealed a different perspective on the recycling issue:

Recycling was never an issue in Trinidad... Everything was mostly recycled. For example, the soda bottles; everybody used to buy soda bottles, and when it was finished, they didn't throw it away, they took it back to the store, and they got a next set of soda. But they never had to go to any recycle place... There wasn't much to recycle. We grew up recycling in Trinidad, and then you come to the U.S. and they weren't doing it. That would be bad for the environment and for everybody in whole and I thought that was wrong. People shouldn't have to learn how to do that, they should have known how to do that at first."³¹

Sita Garib remembered hammocks made from used flour sacks when she was a little girl in Trinidad, long before the "reduce, reuse and recycle" message was heard in South Florida.³² Although Sita had to adapt to way things were recycled in the South Florida, she already had a cultural understanding of concept.

Conservation is the utilitarian view that natural resources should be preserved for present and future generations. This view is criticized by some strains of

³¹ Sita Garib. (Interviewed by Author) 2001.

³² Ibid.

environmentalism for being too anthropocentric, or human centered. An important distinction between conservation and all other forms of environmental discursive frameworks is that conservationists are motivated to save natural resources specifically for human use, not for the inherent value of nature.³³ Despite the fact that Indo-Caribbeans do not consider themselves as conservationists or environmentalists, they do have strong conservation values that are part of their culture and they participate in environmental practices that are part of their cultural traditions. Their values and beliefs are closest to utilitarian conservation. Most of the community members interviewed said that their primary incentive for planting tropical fruit trees in their yards was so that they could use the fruit. Carl Rajmoolie explained that in Trinidad, "We always planted things that we can use. You plant mango trees, you'll be able to use it, you plant coconut trees, you will use it. We never plant trees for just shade. We plant trees that were edible."³⁴

Based on the Indo-Caribbean community-members I interviewed, conservation of water and electricity proved to be a cultural value for them. Though their reasons were not necessarily environmentally-based, community-members practiced conservation and taught it to their children as a cultural value. They spoke of conserving electricity and water as something they learned from parents, grandparents and community-members in the Caribbean. The first-generation had several reasons for conserving electricity and water in Trinidad and Guyana. Some attributed the unreliability of power and water to the inefficiency of government infrastructure. In some rural villages in Trinidad and

³³ Robert Brulle, "Environmental Discourse and Social Movement Organizations: A Historical and Rhetorical Perspective on the Development of U.S. Environmental Organizations," in *The Environment and Society Reader*, ed. Scott R. Frey (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 2001). p 224-225

³⁴ Carl Rajmoolie. (Interviewed by Author) 2001.

Guyana, phone lines and running electricity were not accessible until the early 1980s

Many Indo-Caribbeans were taught to conserve water and electricity not for the benefit of the environment but out of necessity because of scarcity and poverty. The average Indian family in the 1940s and 1950s in the Caribbean consisted of anywhere from eight to thirteen children. Family sizes tended to be larger in rural areas than in urban centers and water delivery and electricity was slower in reaching rural Indian villages. Indo-Caribbeans had no choice but to use their resources sparingly. Many first generation community members experienced forced conservation first-hand, growing up with limited resources. Alison Austin talked about what it was like living in St. Vincent. She said:

The culture is to conserve. The power went off several times a day, the water pressure was always very low, everyone had a cistern in their yards and their homes, because it was the nature of what you do when you lived on a contained place like an island and resources are limited.³⁵

First-generation interviewees grew up with parents and grandparents who continually commanded them not to leave the water running and not to waste current (electricity). When interviewees were asked whether or not they continued to conserve water and electricity even though they were no longer living in conditions of scarcity, they unanimously responded “yes.” Twenty-two year-old Farah Shakeer continues to conserve even though it is no longer necessary. “I do it up to now.” Farah said, “If we can use the fans instead of using the central air, we do that, if we are not in a room, we take the light off. That’s just something that I picked up from *home* [meaning Trinidad].

³⁵ Alison Austin. (Interviewed by Author) 2001.

I think it is just a way of life, you learn from small. I've had that habit since I was young."

Lloyd Rambaransingh, who has lived in Miami since 1967 noticed a difference in the way Americans used resources, compared to Indo-Caribbeans living in South Florida. He felt that Americans were more wasteful than Trinidadians and Guyanese. He remembers, "In the Caribbean when we were growing up, we went through difficult times. We knew what it was to be without something..." Despite the abundance of resources in the U.S., Lloyd admitted, "I continue to do the same [in Miami], to conserve. Even though I don't have to. I always believed in that and that's what I taught my kid to do. You don't waste. There is no way I'm going to come somewhere and waste."³⁶

Lloyd Rambaransingh was not the only interviewee to share this view. Most first-generation interviewees felt they had a duty to teach their children to conserve. Alison Austin believes that "If you are of an environmental consciousness, then conserving water is going to be something you do wherever you are in the world."³⁷

It is clear that first-generation Indo-Caribbeans in South Florida continue to practice conservation because of their direct experience with scarcity, poverty and poor government infrastructure in the Caribbean. However, would the ethic of conservation present in the first-generation transfer over to the second generation in a place where conservation was no longer necessary for survival? The second generation did not have the same first-hand experience with forced conservation that the first generation had. Instead, the second generation grew up in South Florida surrounded by available and

³⁶ Lloyd Rambaransingh. (Interviewed by Author) 2001.

³⁷ Alison Austin. (Interviewed by Author) 2001.

abundant resources. Second-generation Indo-Caribbeans demonstrated a resilient sense of conservation, which they considered part of their cultural heritage and identity.

Today's first and second-generation Indo-Caribbean Americans have been handed down a strong conservation ethic stemming from the harsh rural lifestyles of their Caribbean parents, grandparents or in some cases, great-grandparents. Conservation is a value that has survived within a strong sense of cultural identity and tradition. All nine of the second-generation interviewees said that they learned to conserve water from their parents or grandparents though it was no longer necessary.

Conservation is part of the Indo-Caribbean community's culture. Furthermore, experience-based conservation is a part of much of the foreign-born population in South Florida. Still, this kind of environmental consciousness has yet to be identified, studied or rewarded by environmental public outreach officials in government and in environmental non-profit organizations. In order to achieve effective public outreach to the population of South Florida it is first necessary to access the existing environmental connections, values and practices of each respective culture. Making assumptions about cultural knowledge without extensive anthropological or sociological study is inefficient as well as a misuse funding. Creating environmental public outreach initiatives geared toward a foreign-born majority, based on their already existing conservation values is important and vital for effective environmental public outreach in South Florida and beyond.

CHAPTER IV

THE GAP BETWEEN MAINSTREAM ENVIRONMENTALISM AND THE INDO-CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY IN SOUTH FLORIDA

Introduction

Growing up within the Indo-Caribbean community of South Florida, I often felt frustrated with my own community for not being as knowledgeable about the environment as I had become throughout my academic environmental training and career in environmental policy. I mistakenly thought that my community did not care about the environment because I was measuring their level of concern by standards that belonged to the tradition of mainstream environmentalism. My research with the Indo-Caribbean community and ethnographic observations of additional immigrant communities in South Florida have shown me that immigrant communities do in fact value nature and the environment, however, their worldview differs vastly from mainstream environmentalism.

Throughout the United States, a select number of environmental education initiatives have effectively incorporated multicultural approaches to public outreach. In South Florida however, multicultural environmental education has been unsuccessful in its involvement with diverse audiences despite the demographic makeup of the region.

Here, as in many other parts of the U.S., immigrant communities and people of color make up over half of the population.¹

While working on environmental policy and public outreach projects in South Florida, I noticed that public outreach initiatives continued to use standardized American environmental education strategies meant for white audiences, to target a general public made primarily of immigrant communities. At the same time, immigrant communities, particularly foreign-born members of the public, were not embracing the environmental education efforts of either the government or the environmental non-profit sector. There are a plethora of reasons behind the ineffectiveness of environmental outreach to immigrant communities in South Florida. Complex issues of elitism, racism, cultural insensitivity and disregard for socio-economic situations, must be dealt with before an honest dialogue about the environment is possible between immigrant communities and environmental educators.

The Whiteness of the Environmental Movement in America

Historically, the American environmental movement has been dominated by upper and middle class white, educated, Americans. In the spirit of Romanticism, it was the elite and educated of America who first ventured into wilderness for recreation, rather than for livelihood. As Roderick Nash illustrates in Wilderness and the American Mind, romantic ideas about wilderness flourished in early nineteenth century America as settled

¹ U.S. Bureau Census, *Demographic Profile for Florida, Counties and Places* (2000, accessed August 7

colonists began to associate the appreciation of wilderness with nobility and sophistication.² According to Nash, "By the 1840's, it was commonplace for the literati of the major Eastern cities to make periodic excursions into the wilds, collect 'impressions,' and return to their desks to write descriptive essays which dripped love of scenery and solitude in the grand Romantic manner."³ Transcendentalist philosophy also emerged from the nineteenth century when figures like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau and John Muir were heralded for writing about their experiences in secluded nature, apart from human civilization. The idea of wilderness as separate from human settlement has persisted and incorporated itself into the current paradigm of American environmentalism.

As William Cronon explains in his essay, "The Trouble with Wilderness," once Americans began ascribing adjectives like pristine, sublime and sacred to wilderness, wild nature without humans became the only kind of nature worth saving.⁴ While those wealthy enough to leave the Eastern cities were able to explore remote places in the American wilderness, most nineteenth century immigrants did not have the same experience with nature, they were unable to escape their work in the cities. Those who earned their livings by hunting, trapping or logging in the wilderness had a different relationship with nature than the transcendentalists, who only experienced nature in

2001).

² Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Third Edition ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

³ Ibid. 60

⁴ William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W.N. Norton & Company, 1995). 83

leisure. Native Americans and African slaves also had radically different experience with nature and the land, from the transcendentalist view of nature, yet it was this minority of wealthy, white, elite Americans whose perception of wilderness dominated environmental thinking and ultimately became the foundation for mainstream American environmentalism throughout the twentieth century.

Organizations such as the Sierra Club and the Audubon Society started out as outdoor clubs in the late nineteenth century, attracting members who were concerned with wildlife preservation, habitat loss and preserving the country's national parks.⁵ At the beginning of the twentieth century conservationist ideals began to define the environmental movement, as Americans realized that natural resources were in danger of being overused and depleted. During Theodore Roosevelt's presidency, the chief of the U.S. Forest Service Gifford Pinchot was able to secure huge tracts of land, including Yellowstone National Park. The motivation behind conservationism was to preserve natural resources for future human use, not necessarily for the intrinsic value of those natural resources. Some environmental organizations continued to follow a conservationist philosophy, while others branched out into preservationist thinking. Throughout the early twentieth century, there was a surge of preservationist environmental organizations that wanted to protect nature for the sake of plant and animal species, instead of simply for human use.

⁵ Dorceta Taylor, "Can the Environmental Movement Attract and Maintain the Support of Minorities?," in *Race and the Incidence of Environmental Hazards: A Time for Discourse*, ed. Bunyan and Mohai Bryant, Paul (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, Inc., 1992). 30

By the 1930s the environmental movement was linked to political liberalism and the Democratic Party. Mainstream environmental organizations gradually responded to emerging environmental issues that arose out of increased industrial activity and the overexploitation of natural resources, yet by the 1960s their membership continued to be predominantly white, educated, and middle to upper class. A 1969 survey of 907 Sierra Club members, according to Environmental Justice theorist Dorceta Taylor, showed “95% of the male respondents were professionals- physicians, lawyers, professors, engineers and teachers- and 5% occupied clerical and sales positions, were owners of small business, or were unskilled laborers.”⁶

While some non-traditional environmental groups like Greenpeace, Public Interest Research Group, and Citizens for a Better Environment took on more human-inclusive issues beyond transcendental protection of wilderness, in the 1970's the overall face of environmentalism remained homogenously white. Taylor notes that based on a 1972 study of 1,500 environmental volunteers, 98% were white.⁷ This phenomenon was persisted beyond the 1970s; in 1992 the Environmental Careers Organization, ECO performed a survey of 63 mainstream environmental organizations.⁸ The results indicated that 83% of the organizations' staff and boards consisted of less than 30% people of color. When ECO asked the organizations about diversifying their staff, “54%

⁶ Dorceta Taylor, "The Rise of the Environmental Justice Paradigm: Injustice Framing and the Social Construction of Environmental Discourses," *American Behavioral Scientist* 43, no. 4 (2000). 552

⁷ Ibid. 552

⁸ Ibid. 553

of the organizations indicated that they had no goals for minority recruitment in the 2 years following the survey.”⁹

Though the Civil Rights movement occurred simultaneously with the ongoing environmental movement, the two did not cross paths. The Environmental Justice movement was not an offshoot of mainstream environmentalism, but instead it arose out of the Civil Rights movement. When middle and upper-class grassroots environmentalists demanded stronger environmental regulation of pollutants in their neighborhoods by taking direct action and participating in “Not In My Backyard,” (NIMBY) campaigns, they actually made conditions worse for politically powerless populations, such as lower-income communities and communities of color.¹⁰ Areas with the least political resistance were always the most cost-effective location for individual industries to put polluting smokestacks, processing plants or toxic landfills. Over time though, the cumulative effect of multiple decisions to site polluting industries in the same communities resulted in devastating health effects due to environmental contamination. A disproportionate concentration of polluting industries sited in neighborhoods of color and of lower-income; this phenomenon is known as environmental racism.

In 1983 African-American residents of Warren County, North Carolina, protested the accumulation of hazardous wastes from eight states in their county landfills. As landmark cases like Warren County gained national attention, the Environmental Justice

⁹ Ibid.553

¹⁰ Riley and Mertig Dunlap, Angela, *American Environmentalism: The U.S. Environmental Movement, 1970-1990* (Pullman, Washington: Taylor & Francis, 1992). 6

movement emerged in the mid-1980s.¹¹ However, getting the environmental justice movement and the mainstream environmental movement to cooperate with one another remained a struggle throughout the 1990s. As recently as 1993, according to Giovanna Di Chiro, environmental justice issues were not supported by mainstream organizations like the Sierra Club or the Environmental Defense Fund because the issues were too human-based.¹² In response to publicity of environmental justice issues, some mainstream environmental organizations are currently attempting to incorporate environmental justice into their political agendas, but many grassroots environmental justice organizations are distrustful of them and are reluctant to join with them.¹³

How Do Mainstream Environmental Organizations View Immigrants?

The issue of overpopulation is fundamental to mainstream environmental philosophy and is often pointed to as the root of all environmental problems. In 1968, Paul Ehrlich's influential book *The Population Bomb*, predicted the collapse of human existence on earth due to the exponential growth of the human population surpassing sustainable levels of food supply.¹⁴ Because Ehrlich's prediction has yet to come true, the urgency of population control is continually debated within academia. U.S.-led population control programs both in the Third World and within the U.S. have not been

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Giovanna Di Chiro, "Nature as Community: The Convergence of Environment and Social Justice," in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W.N. Norton & Company, 1995). 299

¹³ Taylor, "Can the Environmental Movement Attract and Maintain the Support of Minorities?". 40

¹⁴ Paul Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb* (New York: Ballantine, 1968).

received well by people of color. Lesser-developed countries have been suspicious of First World population control programs in their countries for several reasons. Firstly, they do not appreciate lifestyle restrictions coming from another country, and secondly they wonder if the motive behind reducing their population is truly for resource conservation or to reduce their political power by reducing their numbers. Because it is the First World that consumes more resources per capita than the less developed countries, some see the First World's campaigns to reduce human population of the Third World as a form of genocide.¹⁵

Even within the U.S., people of color and immigrants are wary of population control initiatives. Dorceta Taylor cites examples of involuntary sterilization programs geared toward Native American, Puerto Rican and Chicana women during the 1960s and 1970s. "People of color," Taylor concludes, "are suspicious of the Ehrlich-Hardin¹⁶ policy prescriptions because in the past, women of color have been the targets of unethical population reduction programs."¹⁷ Despite the controversy surrounding population control, organizations like Zero Population Growth and the National Wildlife Federation, continue to support Ehrlich's prediction of a human population explosion.

Many environmental groups with overpopulation agendas consequentially take a political stance against immigration. The Sierra Club is one of America's most established, successful environmental organizations and up until the mid-1990s the group

¹⁵ Tyler G. Miller, *Living in the Environment: Principles, Connections, and Solutions*, Edition ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1996). 239

¹⁶ Garret Hardin was also an influential population reduction proponent during the late 1960s.

¹⁷ Taylor, "Advances in Environmental Justice: Research, Theory, and Methodology". 548

supported a reduction in immigration to the U.S. The Sierra Club backed down from its stance on immigration for fear of negative publicity during the controversy surrounding California's Proposition 187.¹⁸ However, a group of Sierra Club members who maintained their position on immigration reform started a new organization called Sierrans for U.S. Population Stabilization. The Sierra Club's first executive director, David Brower, who was known for his devotion to the club since his involvement in 1933, resigned in 2000 partly because of this issue. In his letter of resignation Brower wrote, "Overpopulation is perhaps the biggest problem facing us, and immigration is part of the problem. It has to be addressed."¹⁹

It is no surprise that immigrant communities are not participating with environmental organizations like the Sierra Club when these organizations view immigrants as a threat to the environment. In order for immigrant communities to participate with mainstream environmental organizations they would need to feel respected and appreciated by them. In an interview with Baldeo Girwarr, a first-generation American from Trinidad, Baldeo demonstrated an excellent grasp of the overpopulation issue from a world perspective down to local observations of South Florida's population expansion over the past 20 years. He said, "The whole place is getting too congested now." He described how the once quiet streets of his neighborhood were now inundated with traffic. "When we came here in the 70s, you know you get up in the morning, you take a nice walk up and down... now you have to watch out and see

¹⁸ An anti-immigration initiative passed in 1994, to prevent illegal aliens in the U.S. from receiving public services in the State of California.

that a car [won't] run over you." He spoke of urban sprawl in a suburb of Miami called Kendall, expanding over agricultural areas westward toward the Everglades. Baldeo acknowledged that foreign-born immigrants to South Florida contributed to the population increases that affected him personally, yet he would not take an anti-immigration position. Instead he said, "God stopped making land [a] long time [ago] but he makes people every day. You gotta put them somewhere, they have to live." Though Baldeo Girwarr speaks at city council meetings and is actively involved with local conservation and land use issues, he is not a member of any American environmental organization and has never been in his twenty-four years living in Miami.²⁰

Cultural Insensitivity

Apart from being overtly anti-immigrant, many environmental organizations and government agencies are uninviting to immigrants because of their perceived cultural insensitivity. The language used by environmental educators when dealing with immigrant communities, people of color and lower-income communities, has not been inclusive of these groups. At times the rhetoric used in the environmental policy arena can be construed as offensive to people of color, immigrants and lower-income communities. The United States Environmental Protection Agency, EPA for example, uses a system of colors to rank environmentally contaminated areas. According to EPA:

Brownfields are abandoned, idled or under-used industrial and commercial facilities where expansion or redevelopment is complicated

¹⁹ Meredith Burke, "Immigration's Dire Effect on the Environment," *the Seattle Times*, June 15, 2000.

²⁰ Based on follow-up telephone interviews. (2002)

by real or perceived environmental contamination. This leads to development outside of urban areas in pristine "greenfields." The goal of the Brownfields program is to encourage revitalization and reutilization of the nation's urban brownfields.²¹

EPA's choice of the word "brownfields" to describe contaminated areas is insensitive to the people of color living near brownfields sites and suggests that EPA's anticipated audience is white. The Brownfield's program deals directly with the cleanup of contaminated sites in urban areas, which are typically located in communities of low-income, and communities of color, due to environmental racism. A 1987 study titled "Toxic Waste and Race in the United States" put out by the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice, "found that race was the most significant variable in determining the location of commercial hazardous waste facilities; communities with the greatest number of commercial hazardous waste facilities had the highest percentage of nonwhite residents."²²

Local environmental agencies have modeled their rhetoric after the EPA, even in areas with high immigrant populations. In Florida, for example, the State Department of Agriculture has used the term "invasive exotic species" to describe biological pests that threaten native ecosystems. This kind of rhetoric is another example of language that excludes recent immigrants to South Florida. Regardless of the demographics of South Florida where whites make up only 20% of the population, government agencies continue

²¹ US EPA, *EPA Superfund Division, Brownfields Program* (US EPA, 2002, accessed April 27, 2002); available from <http://www.epa.gov/Region06/6sf/bf/bfpages/sbfhome.htm>.

²² Luke and Foster Cole, Sheila, *From the Ground Up: Environmental Racism and the Rise of the Environmental Justice Movement* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2001). 55

to use terminology designed to reach a white, educated, middle-class audience, rather than language inclusive of immigrants communities and people of color.²³

Alison Austin, an Afro-Caribbean and a recent hire at Florida Audubon, is one of the pioneers in multicultural environmental education in South Florida. She recounted a first hand experience with cultural insensitivity during a presentation given by a highly educated, white scientist on water conservation in South Florida. Alison sat in on the presentation aimed at an audience of Haitian-American children. Trying to make a point about the importance of water conservation, the scientist asked the children, "Can you imagine coming home one day and turning on the faucets and there is no water?" In preparing his presentation, he had not considered the realities of the children's low economic level and was shocked when a young, Haitian girl responded, "Yeah, we can imagine that. When you don't pay your bills, they turn the water off. It costs \$35 to turn the water back on too."²⁴

From Alison's experience with community outreach in South Florida, she believes the Haitian community in South Florida feels no sense of ownership with the big environmental organizations. She says, "Audubon has been historically perceived as a high-end, white-folks organization."²⁵ This perspective is also representative of the Trinidadian and Guyanese residents I interviewed, who did not relate to mainstream environmentalism. Of the first-generation Indo-Caribbeans asked about their

²³ U.S. Bureau Census, *Demographic Profile for Florida, Counties and Places* (2000, accessed August 7 2001).

²⁴ Alison Austin. (Interviewed by Author) 2001.

²⁵ Ibid.

involvement with environmental organizations, none of them had ever been members or volunteers and only one had ever donated money to a mainstream environmental organization. When asked why they had never participated with these organizations while living in South Florida, they unanimously responded that they had never been “approached.”²⁶

A twenty-one year-old Trinidadian/Grenadian student at Florida International University, Meera Mahabir told me that she enjoyed learning about nature during outdoor field trips through her university-level Ecology course, yet she spoke of the “outdoor people” in her class as separate and different from herself. Though Meera exhibited environmentally minded behavior and values, she did not consider herself an environmentalist and had not participated with any environmental organizations on campus.²⁷

Immigrant Perceptions of Government Agencies

Immigrant communities view the government differently from native-born residents of the U.S. do. Those who have entered the country illegally have a highly negative association with the government, its agencies and enforcement. Recent immigrants who are citizens or permanent residents are often mistaken as illegal immigrants and must deal with the same negative issues. Immigrant communities have

²⁶ Based on follow-up telephone interviews with eight of the original fifteen first-generation participants. (2002)

²⁷ Meera Mahabir. (Interviewed by Author) 2001.

been cautious of government environmental agencies in South Florida because interactions between residents and local environmental agencies are generally admonishing and authoritarian, rather than encouraging or proactive. For example, a resident may never deal with a county or state environmental agency except to pay an environmental fine or report flood damage after a tropical storm or hurricane.

Immigrant communities including Cubans and Indo-Caribbeans have little faith in local regulating agencies such as the South Florida Water Management District because of their bad past experiences with government in addition to negative sentiment about flood control issues. A Cuban community in West Miami-Dade, for instance, filed a lawsuit against the South Florida Water Management District, (SFWMD) for improper administration of the flood control system when their neighborhood was flooded after Hurricane Irene in 1999. In my own research with the Indo-Caribbean community in South Florida, it was made clear to me that distrust was the primary reason for community-members lack of participation with environmental agencies. When asked about water restrictions due to a recent drought, four Indo-Caribbean interviewees blamed the water shortage on the District. Carl Rajmoolie said, "That drought we had wasn't a natural drought, that was a manmade drought. That was bad planning by the water management. They are the ones that created that."²⁸ Ironically the SFWMD has one of the most aggressive public outreach campaigns of all the environmental local and state agencies in South Florida, yet the interaction between the public and the District has been full of negativity and controversy.

In 1999 I was involved in a series of heated public hearings involving mostly Cuban residents and the SFWMD. The secretary of the Department of the Interior had given the SFWMD the federal authority to use eminent domain, if warranted, for the land acquisition of homes within a buffer zone adjacent to Everglades National Park known as the 8.5 Square Mile Area. This particular area was not a residential zone; it was unincorporated into any of the local municipalities, yet residents were legally allowed to build their houses in this area in the 1980s. Residents of the 8.5 Square Mile Area were primarily Cuban agriculturists and feared that a federally mandated buyout of their homes would also destroy their livelihoods. The land acquisition decision ultimately rested on scientific hydrological evidence proving whether or not the area was a historic tributary to the Everglades watershed. While the scientists compared data, tension between the residents of this community and the SFWMD ignited at public hearings and in newspaper articles for a full year. Although the final decision allowed residents to continue living in the 8.5 Square Mile Area, the relationship between the public and environmental regulators was permanently damaged as a direct result of this saga. Members of the public unfamiliar with the environmental movement were given the impression that environmentalism equated the displacement of immigrants in exchange for the restoration of a natural area.

²⁸ Carl Rajmoolie. (Interviewed by Author) 2001.

What About Urban Environmental Issues?

When immigrant communities, people of color and lower-income communities responded poorly to mainstream environmental education strategies, mainstream environmentalists incorrectly assumed that these communities were unconcerned or unwilling to participate in environmental issues. This is not necessarily the case, as proven by Lori Hunter in her 2000 study "A Comparison of the Environmental Attitudes, Concern, and Behaviors of Native-Born and Foreign-Born U.S. Residents." The results of her study indicated, "immigrants tend[ed] to express slightly higher levels of environmental concern [than native-born U.S. residents] especially with regard to the impacts of pesticides, chemicals, pollution and the greenhouse effect."²⁹

In a 1992 piece entitled, "Can the Environmental Movement Attract and Maintain the Support of Minorities?" Dorceta Taylor explains that lower-income communities and people of color are concerned with those environmental issues that involve their standard of living within their community, rather than a separate notion of wilderness they may never travel to. She lists "toxins, pesticides, pollution, waste reduction, incineration, environmental health issues, the tradeoffs between jobs and health, lack of housing, recycling and living and working in polluted neighborhoods" as the primary environmental concerns of minorities and the working class.³⁰

²⁹ Lori Hunter, "A Comparison of the Environmental Attitudes, Concern, and Behaviors of Native-Born and Foreign-Born U.S. Residents," *Population and Environment, A Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 21, no. 6 (2000): 576

³⁰ Taylor, "Can the Environmental Movement Attract and Maintain the Support of Minorities?" 37

All of these issues are urban. People who live in the city do not often relate to transcendental notions of saving pristine forests, rivers or endangered species when these issues are not part of their daily life experience. Robert and Robin Morris Collin recognize this discrepancy in relating to the environment in a law review article section entitled, "Environmental Perspectives on U.S. Cities: The Need for an Inclusive Approach."³¹ They note, "When environmentalists in the United States speak of the 'environment,' they conjure images of uninhabited coastlines, verdant forests, and enticing mountains, but seldom create visions of where people actually live, work, and play."³² In fact, the mainstream environmental movement has not just forgotten to include the cities in its conceptualization of nature, but it has painted a negative picture of the city as anti-nature. Giovanna Di Chiro claims:

Many organizations, such as the Wilderness Society, the Nature Conservancy, and Not Yet New York, portray the large, modern, industrial city as a menacing, noxious sprawl of humanity representing the major threat to the survival of the natural world. The colonial discourse of nature has positioned cities as the repositories of waste, garbage, vermin, disease, and depravity – all features that, in colonial nature talk, are also associated with the people who must live there.³³

Only recently, have issues of urban environmentalism been acknowledged as valid concerns worth the attention of mainstream environmental organizations. Dorceta Taylor cited environmental justice scholar Paul Mohai's 1985 study entitled, "Public

³¹ Robert and Collin Collin, Robin Morris, "Sustainability and Environmental Justice: Is the Future Clean and Black?" *The Environmental Law Reporter News & Analysis: The Best Legal Resource on Earth* 31, no. 8 (2001). 10976

³² Ibid. 10976

³³ Di Chiro, 314

Concern and Elite Involvement in Environmental Conservation Issues,” when she stated, “Although mainstream environmental activists believe that people of color and the working class were unmobilized because they were not interested in environmental issues, the [new environmental justice paradigm] recognized that they were indeed interested, but what was needed was the appropriate framework and recruiting strategies to guide their mobilization and activism.”³⁴

In order to engage diverse communities in environmental issues, it is necessary to redefine environmental education based on direct input from the communities themselves. This can best be done when immigrant communities, communities of color and lower-income communities form their own grassroots networks around the very issues that concern them. These kinds of organizations are beginning to surface throughout the United States. In 2000 Robert Bullard, a leader in the environmental justice movement documented over 400 of these organizations in a directory called, “People of Color Environmental Groups.”³⁵ The directory includes groups like United Farm Workers of America, Asian Immigrant Women Advocates, and West Harlem Environmental Action, Inc. Though it is encouraging to see so many non-white communities organizing around specific issues and exerting their political power, the directory affirms the absence of multicultural environmental initiatives in South Florida. Bullard has mapped the people of color organizations throughout the U.S. and though clusters of multicultural organizations appear around most major cities reflective of the

³⁴ Taylor, “Advances in Environmental Justice: Research, Theory, and Methodology,”. 559

³⁵ Bullard.

demographics, there are no environmental organizations led by people of color in South Florida.³⁶

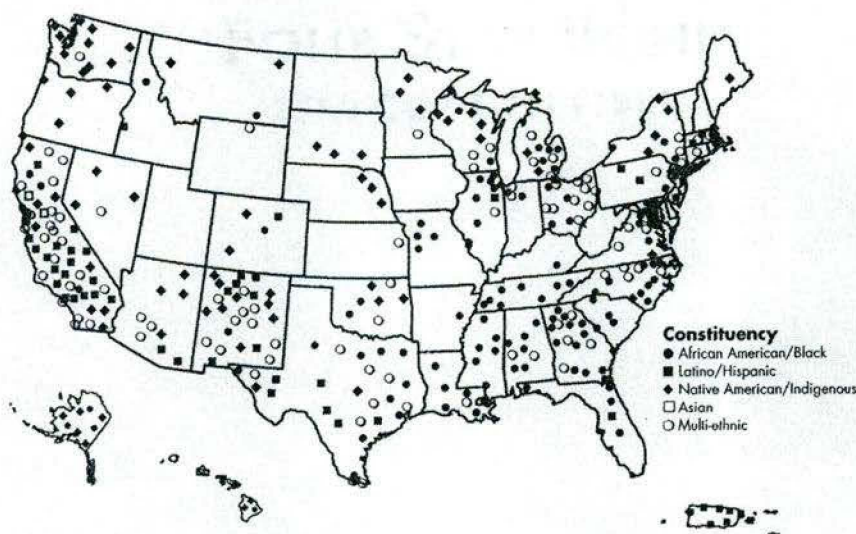


Figure 1. Map of People of Color Environmental Groups in the U.S.

Professor Ken Boodhoo a Trinidadian interviewee who has lived in Miami since 1972 was not aware of any environmental programs that specifically targeted the Latino, Haitian, or Indo-Caribbean populations living in South Florida.³⁷ In research for this thesis, I found that these initiatives do exist on a small scale, but they are either a minor component of larger initiatives, or they are independent, under-funded non-profit organizations that are extremely limited in their capabilities. Florida Audubon's public affairs coordinators, for example, have begun to target the Latino business sector, as well

³⁶ Ibid. 55

³⁷ Ken Boodhoo. (Interviewed by Author) 2001.

as Haitian youth in their recent programs. Citizens for a Better South Florida, (CBSF), a small non-profit organization that focuses exclusively on multicultural environmental education, is “dedicated to improving the quality of life through instilling environmental awareness within South Florida’s diverse multi-lingual communities.”³⁸ Though CBSF would like to “bring environmental programs to the multi-ethnic region” they have not been very successful because of their budgetary constraints.³⁹ These programs are a step in the right direction but in the grand scheme of funding for South Florida’s ecosystem restoration, environmental education is simply not a priority. Of the \$7.8 billion dollars allocated by congress for Everglades restoration, expensive engineering and scientific research projects attract the majority of funding, while CBSF projects aimed at diverse groups struggle to stay afloat.

Environmental Education and Second-Generation Indo-Caribbeans

Environmental education in the public school system curriculum is the most effective facet of South Florida’s environmental outreach efforts. Indo-Caribbean children are taught about recycling at the elementary school level, they are introduced to more complex environmental science concepts during secondary school, and by high school they are given the option of taking ecology courses. Programs exist within the school system to educate children specifically on the environment. Enviro-Cops/Enviro-Mentors, for instance, is an effective environmental education program that uses

³⁸ Citizens for a Better South Florida,,(2000, accessed October 10 2001); available from

mentoring as a teaching tool. The Enviro-Mentors are high school or university students who guest lecture environmentally themed lesson plans once a week, and elementary school children are the Enviro-Cops whose duty is to police pollution. In 1995, the program was implemented in over 60 schools in Dade County.⁴⁰

Another successful environmental education initiative that has gotten through to second-generation Indo-Caribbeans is the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Nature Center. The nature center, located on Key Biscayne, is one of the oldest environmental education programs in Miami. Students go to the center for a "Seagrass Adventure" field trip where they wade in the ocean shallows with nets, collect aquatic life, then go through hands-on science labs where they learn more about biology, ecology and marine science.⁴¹ Of the Indo-Caribbeans interviewed, three second-generation interviewees remembered going to the nature center and two of the first-generation had children who had gone there on a school field trip.

Getting Through to the First Generation

Although the children of first-generation immigrants are exposed to formal environmental education in public school curriculum, the first-generation has not been reached by environmental outreach initiatives. My research findings indicate that even

www.ficus.usf.edu/ficusdd/orgs/CFBS.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Edmund and Susan Bensen, "Enviro-Cops/Enviro-Mentors," (Miami, FL: The ARISE Foundation, 1995).

⁴¹ Marjory Stoneman Douglas Nature Center, *Seagrass Adventure* (2002, accessed March 13 2002); available from <http://www.biscaynenaturecenter.org>.

organizations specifically targeting immigrant communities, have no way of reaching the first generation directly. The only programs in existence are geared toward children - they rely on children who have been educated in these programs to then go home to their parents and teach them about environmental issues. Public outreach goals of both the government and non-profit environmental organizations fail to reach first-generation immigrant communities like the Indo-Caribbean community in South Florida. The only way that they are taught about mainstream environmental issues and local Florida issues, is indirectly through their children. Ken Boodhoo said:

Our kids helped us because they brought in issues from the school. [His daughters would come home from school saying,] "Daddy we need to recycle the plastics." I am pleased with what the public schools did [to address] the environment in that context...to that extent [the public schools] were able to introduce some values into the home; that we can't spend and we can't waste and all this sort of stuff and we can't pollute.⁴²

Public Outreach and Indo-Caribbeans in South Florida

Immigrant communities in South Florida, like the Indo-Caribbean community, do have strong values that are in accord with traditional environmentalism, yet they are framed in terms of ethnic culture and community. Giovanna Di Chiro has found this to be true of environmental justice groups as well. She says, "Ideas of nature, for environmental justice groups, are therefore tied closely to ideas of community, history,

⁴² Boodhoo, (Interviewed by Author), 2001

ethnic identity, and cultural survival, which include relationships to the land that express particular ways of life.”⁴³

Professor Boodhoo felt that the first generation being approached by their own community-members (rather than the government) would probably be more effective. “The message has to resonate towards the particular group.” Boodhoo reflected. Lloyd Rambaransingh, a Trinidadian interviewee commented on the lack of environmental efficacy in South Florida. He said, “People don’t look at how to conserve or [how they are] polluting the place. I don’t think they look at that as critical.” He felt that it was the social responsibility of local policymakers to educate the general public on environmental issues. He continued, “There has to be education on the environment, and I don’t think they do enough of it. They do very little of it.”⁴⁴ Boodhoo also agreed that from his experience, environmental outreach was ineffective in getting through to the Indo-Caribbean community. “It never gets to me for instance,” he said, referring to environmental education. “I get it when we take the family down to the Everglades. Then you get propagandized for two hours, but beyond that no. There is very little impact upon your life.”⁴⁵

The Indo-Caribbean community has been overlooked by environmental education initiatives. This cannot continue, as the number of Indo-Caribbeans living in South Florida steadily grows.⁴⁶ According to the Miami Herald’s article on the 2000 U.S.

⁴³ Di Chiro. 318

⁴⁴ Lloyd Rambaransingh. (Interviewed by Author) 2001.

⁴⁵ Boodhoo. (Interviewed by Author) 2001.

⁴⁶ The number of West Indians living in Florida has more than doubled in the past ten years, according to the 2000 U.S. Census report.

Census results, "Of Florida's largest immigrant populations, people from the Caribbean have the highest naturalization rate at 53 percent."⁴⁷ Indo-Caribbeans like other Caribbean and Latin American immigrant to South Florida are increasingly becoming permanent residents and citizens of the United States who deserve a voice in local environmental politics.

The gap between the public and mainstream environmentalism must be bridged from both sides. Immigrant community-members must show an interest in environmental issues, and when they do policymakers must facilitate their political empowerment. It is imperative that members of immigrant communities, communities of color and lower-income communities become part of the political and regulatory process that secures South Florida's ecosystem for the future of all residents. The environmental policy in South Florida should be reflective of the cultural diversity of its demography.

⁴⁷ Jason Grotto, "Survey: Immigrants Outpaced out-of-Staters in Florida," *The Miami Herald*, August 6 2001.

CONCLUSION

Immigrants are commonly criticized for their foreign ways, their lack of allegiance to America, and for their use of domestic resources. Additionally, environmentalists see immigrants as part of the overpopulation problem, and the lifestyle of city dwellers as inherently anti-nature. Few environmental thinkers focus on the positive things that immigrants bring to the U.S. Immigrants have a wealth of cultural knowledge, diverse values and perspectives based on their place in the world. Though recent immigrants' practices are not necessarily more sustainable than native-born Americans', their voices and ideas have not been acknowledged, appreciated or respected by American environmentalism. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, there are at least one million foreign-born immigrants living in the state of Florida.¹ In the region of my study, South Florida, the numbers are even higher; some surveys indicate seven out of every ten South Floridians are members of immigrant communities.² In addition to people who identify as foreign-born immigrants on official surveys, naturalized citizens, illegal immigrants and second-generation residents all contribute to the immigrant population in South Florida.

The cultural insensitivity of government environmental agencies and mainstream environmental organizations must be rectified in order to guarantee the participation of

¹ U.S. Bureau Census, *Demographic Profile for Florida, Counties and Places* (2000, accessed).

² Jason Grotto, "Survey: Immigrants Outpaced out-of-Staters in Florida," *The Miami Herald*, August 6 2001.

these parties. Immigrant communities are only reluctant to participate with predominantly white agencies and organizations that disrespect, insult, or misunderstand them. What if immigrant communities felt empowered to participate in local environmental policy? What if immigrant communities were rewarded for their already existing conservation and agricultural practices on U.S. soil? What if environmental education aimed at culturally diverse audiences was actually initiated by immigrant community leaders rather than white environmental leaders? Environmental educators must take into consideration the complex histories and cultural identities of individual immigrant communities when ascertaining their levels of environmental consciousness. Environmental educators must be trained on issues of cultural sensitivity if effective public outreach is to be achieved.

Further studies like this thesis must be performed on many more immigrant communities in South Florida and beyond, so that their histories can be understood and appreciated, and their environmentally relevant values and traditional practices can be assessed and perhaps incorporated into American environmental policy. Policymakers in South Florida and other cities with high concentrations of immigrants must expand their public outreach approaches to include the environmental issues of immigrant communities. Many "multicultural" environmental education programs merely preach mainstream American environmentalism to diverse communities without actually connecting with them because of a desire to appear inclusive of non-white audiences. Those "multicultural" programs that assume diverse communities will conform to a standardized conception of environmentalism but are troubled when their projects fail to

attract and maintain non-white participants. Instead of mainstream environmental organizations and agencies scratching their heads over how to get immigrant communities to cooperate with one dominant way of thinking about the environment, why not ask the communities directly for their input? Why not let the communities build the framework for their environmental education themselves?

Community gardens, vegetable cooperatives and organic farming are already taking place within immigrant communities in South Florida. Environmental educators can reach immigrants by acknowledging their existing culturally-specific environmental or conservation practices. If immigrant communities felt respected and understood by mainstream environmentalism, they might also feel empowered enough to give public comment at environmental policy meetings, join environmental organizations, or help to lead them. The present relationship between local governmental agencies and immigrant communities is built on distrust and fear of penalty. What would a cooperative relationship based on positive reinforcement, trust and a shared vision of a better environment for all residents of South Florida look like?

South Florida is made up of immigrants from Latin American and Caribbean countries. To some degree, each of these communities maintains their traditions, values and practices intergenerationally through networks of small, thriving communities, which are often connected to larger diasporas spanning North America. Immigrant communities like the Indo-Caribbeans of South Florida share a strong bond with other Indo-Caribbean communities based on their shared histories of colonialism, globalization and immigration to the U.S. Conservation values may be found within the cultural identities

of many more immigrant communities besides Indo-Caribbeans, yet mainstream environmental educators have yet to look at environmental consciousness in terms of culture. Once immigrant communities can come together in partnership with environmental educators, mainstream organizations and governmental agencies, a multitude of diverse views, values and ideas will inevitably lead to more possibilities for effective environmental education.

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