

THE CHRISTIE METHOD

STUDY GUIDE · CARIBBEAN HISTORY

A HISTORY OF BERBICE

*Study Guide — Chapter by Chapter, with Answer
Key*



THE WATER LILIES OF NUMBER NINETEEN, CORENTYNE

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A HISTORY OF BERBICE — STUDY GUIDE

A chapter-by-chapter companion for senior-secondary and first-year university students, with comprehension and essay questions, timeline, glossary and answer key



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How to Use This Guide

This guide follows the book chapter by chapter. Nothing in it comes from outside the book. Every fact, date, figure and quotation you will meet here is drawn from *A History of Berbice* itself, so that when you answer a question you can put your finger on the page that gave you the answer.

Each chapter section gives you:

- **What the chapter does** — the argument in a few sentences
- **Key points** — what you must be able to state
- **Terms introduced** — the words the book puts into your hands
- **Comprehension questions** — three to five, all answerable from the chapter
- **Discussion questions** — one or two, for the classroom or the essay

At the back you will find a glossary, a timeline, a set of key passages for close reading, whole-book essay questions, and an answer key.

A rule for the student, taken from the author's own rule. In the Note to the Reader the book sets out its method: "Where the sources disagree — and on the Berbice of 1763 they often do — I say so plainly rather than choosing quietly. Where a thing could not be verified, it does not appear here as fact." Hold yourself to the same standard in your answers. If the book does not say it, do not write it. Where this guide has had to leave something out because the book does not supply it, you will see a **[gap]** marker. That is not an error. That is honesty, and it is the historian's first habit.

THE BOOK AT A GLANCE

What the book argues

A History of Berbice argues that Berbice is older than the country that contains it — "older than Guyana, older than British Guiana, older even than the idea that this coast should belong to anybody who had to cross an ocean to reach it" (Prologue) — and that its history has an unusual shape. Most colonial histories in the Americas begin at the sea and move inland. Berbice's begins deep in the bush, at a wooden fort ninety kilometres up the river and at Indigenous villages whose black earth still holds the ash of ancient cook-fires, and only later comes down to the coast.

At the centre of the book stands 1763: the rising of the enslaved people of Berbice, the largest and longest slave rebellion the Guianas ever saw. The book insists that this is not a footnote to Guyanese history but its foundation — "the reminder that freedom in this land was not granted. It was claimed, first, here" (Prologue).

Around that centre the book sets everything else the county became: the sugar coast and its machinery, the free villages bought acre by acre with pooled shillings, the ships from Calcutta and the numbered villages of the Corentyne, the market mornings of New Amsterdam, rice and coconut and cattle, a floating bridge, a university campus in a cane-field district, and cricketers who walked out of one small plantation village into the history of the West Indies.

The three strands

The Prologue tells you plainly how to read the whole book. The chapters "braid three strands again and again":

1. **Water** — "every Berbice story is a story about drainage, distance, or a river-crossing, from the first raised fields to the floating bridge."
2. **Land** — "who was forced to work it, who was forbidden to own it, who bought it anyway, and what they planted."
3. **Memory** — "this is a county that has kept its accounts — in monuments and mandirs, in churchyards and village numbers, in a bronze governor in the capital and a great-grandmother's stories under the house."

The Prologue's conclusion on the third strand is the book's thesis in one line: **"History here is not a subject. It is infrastructure."**

Track these three strands as you read. Almost every chapter can be opened with one of the three keys, and the strongest essays use all three.

How the book is built

Part	Chapters	Covers
Front matter	Note to the Reader	The author's two rules: fidelity and respect
Prologue	The County of the Long River	The view from the New Amsterdam stelling; the shape of the story
Part One: The River Before	Ch. 1	The First Peoples
Part Two: The Dutch River	Ch. 2–3	The Van Peeres' river; the world the plantation made
Part Three: 1763	Ch. 4–6	The Rising; Governor Cuffy; the Fall and the long memory
Part Four: The British Century	Ch. 7–9	The changing of the flags; the free villages; the ships from Calcutta
Part Five: The Lands of Berbice	Ch. 10–18	District by district: the anatomy of the county, New Amsterdam, the Canje, East Bank, East Coast, the Corentyne, West Bank, West Coast, the Upper River
Part Six: Berbice Now	Ch. 19	The county today

Part	Chapters	Covers
Epilogue	The Verandah	—
Appendices	Timeline · A Note on Sources · Glossary · Ten Stops itinerary · Bibliography	

Note the design of Part Five. Having carried the story forward in time through Parts One to Four, the book stops and walks the county in **space** — district by district. If you are studying for an examination, read Parts One to Four for chronology and Part Five for geography, then bring the two together.

The author's method, and why it matters to you

The Note to the Reader sets out two rules. **The first is fidelity:** "Every date, name, and figure in these pages has been checked against published scholarship, archival histories, and the record of Guyana's own newspapers and institutions; the notes at the end of each chapter show my working, and the bibliography lists the books that carried me."

The second is respect: "Each tradition in this book appears as itself, in its own terms. The cruelty of slavery and of the indenture system is told truthfully, because anything less would be a second theft; and it is told with dignity, because the people who endured those systems were never only victims. They were founders. This county is their monument."

The book also warns you about **names**, and this warning will save you marks. The river, the colony and the county have all been called Berbice — the sentence tells you which is meant. The leader of the 1763 revolution appears in the records as **Coffij, Coffy, Kofi, and Cuffy**; the book uses **Cuffy**, "as Guyana's national monuments do." Dutch plantation names wander in spelling from document to document.

The book describes itself as "a work of popular history: a story told on a verandah, with the scholarship visible in the notes."



PROLOGUE: The County of the Long River

What the prologue does

It puts you on the New Amsterdam stelling at first light, gives you the geography of the county from that one standing place, then tells you the shape and the argument of the book you are holding.

Key points

- **The river.** The Berbice River rises far to the south, in the high country east of the Kanuku Mountains, and travels some **595 kilometres — 370 miles** — through rainforest, white-sand hills and savannah before reaching the Atlantic at New Amsterdam, past **Crab Island** in the river's mouth. It has been "a highway for five thousand years."
- **The Canje** is the Berbice's great tributary, winding in "through its own green world of courida and manicole to join the mother river."
- **The Corentyne coast** runs eastward from New Amsterdam roughly **a hundred kilometres** to the Suriname border — "village after village after village, some with names and some with numbers."
- **The shape of the history is inland-to-coast**, not coast-to-inland: it begins at a wooden fort ninety kilometres up the river and comes down to the coast only later. "The county's capital moved downriver. Its people moved downriver."
- **1763.** In February 1763, on a plantation on the Canje, the enslaved people of Berbice rose. Within weeks they held nearly the entire colony. Their leader, an enslaved cooper's man named **Cuffy**, declared himself Governor, wrote letters of state to his Dutch counterpart, and proposed to divide the colony — the coast for the

Europeans, the interior for the free. For the better part of a year "the men and women whom Dutch law counted as property ran Berbice as their own country."

- **The memory of 1763 is national.** Guyana dates its republic from the rising's anniversary. The **fifteen-foot bronze Cuffy** in Georgetown's Square of the Revolution is "Berbice's gift to the nation."
- **The name has never moved.** Through every change of flag — "a Dutch personal fief, a chartered company's estate, a British possession, a county of a Crown colony, a county of a republic" — the county has kept its name.

Terms introduced

- **stelling** — the river landing at New Amsterdam, where the Prologue begins
- **courida** and **manicole** — the vegetation of the Canje's "own green world"
- **Crab Island** — the low green shoulder of land in the Berbice River's mouth
- **Square of the Revolution** — the Georgetown site of the bronze Cuffy monument

Comprehension questions

1. How long is the Berbice River, and where does it rise?
2. Why does the author say Berbice's history has "an unusual shape"? What is the usual shape of a colonial history in the Americas?
3. Name the three strands the book says it will braid through every chapter.
4. What did Cuffy propose to do with the colony, according to the Prologue?
5. What single sentence does the Prologue use to sum up the place of history in Berbice life?

Discussion questions

1. The Prologue claims: "History here is not a subject. It is infrastructure." What does it mean to call history infrastructure? Test

the claim against your own village, town or district.

2. The Prologue lists five different political forms Berbice has taken while keeping the same name. What does the survival of a name through such changes tell us about how places hold their identity?



PART ONE: THE RIVER BEFORE



Chapter One: The First Peoples

What the chapter does

It demolishes the old textbook story — a thin scatter of Indigenous people living lightly on the land until Europeans arrived and "history properly began" — and replaces it with the archaeological evidence from the middle Berbice. The chapter's opening line is its argument: "Long before Berbice was a colony, it was a civilisation."

Key points

- **The old story was convenient and wrong.** The chapter states it plainly: "It was a convenient story for the people who told it. It was also wrong."
- **The Berbice Archaeology Project.** Beginning in **2009**, archaeologists from the University of Guyana working with colleagues from the United States opened trenches at **Dubulay** and other middle-river sites. The excavations were co-directed by the anthropologist **Neil Whitehead** and the archaeologist **Michael Heckenberger**. The Guyanese Lokono artist and archaeologist **George Simon**, of St. Cuthbert's Mission, was central to the collaboration.
- **What they found.** Not a campsite but "the signature of settled, engineered, long-lived village life": deep deposits of *terra preta*, pottery in layer upon layer, raised agricultural fields, mounds, forest islands and ritual earthworks.
- **The numbers.** The dark soils at Dubulay and neighbouring sites run as much as **two metres — better than six feet — deep**. Radiocarbon dates push the human story on this river back some

five thousand years, with a marked intensification of mound-building and agriculture beginning roughly **1,800 years before the present**.

- **The scale image.** "When the pyramids at Giza were new, there were already people on the Berbice, and they were already farming."
- **The coast was not an edge.** "Guyana's coast, in other words, was not the edge of anything. It was the seafront of a very old interior — and the Berbice was one of its address streets."
- **The peoples.** The middle Berbice has long been **Lokono** country — the people Europeans called Arawak — of the great **Arawakan** language family. On the coast and in the wetlands lived the **Warrau (Warao)**, master boat-builders. Ranging the rivers were the **Carib-speaking peoples** — the **Kalina** or Caribs proper, with their kin the **Akawaio** and **Arekuna** deeper inland. Their relations were "old, complicated, sometimes commercial and sometimes warlike, long before any European learned to exploit the difference."
- **Indigenous science on the modern table.** Bitter cassava — poisonous until processed — was domesticated and mastered here. The **matapee**, the flat cassava bread, and **cassareep** (the dark syrup that keeps meat sound in the tropics and "gives the Guyanese pepperpot its soul") are "Indigenous science, thousands of years old, sitting on every Berbician table at Christmas." The word **canoe** is itself Amerindian, passed through Spanish.
- **What dark earth proves.** Ordinary rainforest soil is poor; the forest holds its wealth in the canopy. Dark earth is human-made, built from hearth ash, bone, potsherds and household refuse over generations. "You do not get six feet of it from a camp. You get it from a town." The chapter calls it "the accumulated housekeeping of a civilisation."
- **Water discipline begins here.** The coast lies below the level of spring tides — a fact that "would later force every farming people on this shore — Indigenous, Dutch, African, Indian — to become engineers or drown." The raised fields are "the earliest chapter in a story of hydraulic ingenuity that runs unbroken to the sea-dams and sluices — the kokers — of the modern Corentyne."
- **The Warrau inheritance.** Their name "is often glossed as 'boat people'; Dutch records across the Guianas prize Warrau

boat-builders above all others. "When a Berbician today steps from a stelling into a boat without looking down, five thousand years of other people's practice is holding her up."

- **First contact was commerce, not conquest.** Spain claimed the coast on paper for a hundred years but planted nothing; Europeans called the shore between the Orinoco and the Amazon the "**Wild Coast**" — "wild meaning, from their ships, unclaimed." **Sir Walter Raleigh** came seeking El Dorado in **1595** and wrote a book that made the Guianas famous in Europe as a country of gold. Dutch traders were working the Essequibo and smaller rivers **by the 1590s**, exchanging cloth, iron tools, beads and spirits for annatto dye, letterwood, balsam and food. "For the Indigenous nations, these first Europeans were not yet conquerors; they were customers."
- **Who held the power at first.** For the better part of a century the Europeans were "few, sickly, and dependent" — unable to feed themselves without Indigenous cassava bread and fish, unable to travel without Indigenous pilots, unable to communicate along the coast without Indigenous go-betweens. "It was an exchange between sovereignties." The colonial government maintained alliances with formal annual presents to the nations "deep into the eighteenth century."
- **The turning point, precisely named.** "The catastrophe was not the trade. The catastrophe was what the trade financed: the plantation, which needed not partners but property."
- **1627 did not bring history.** "The tragedy of the next three centuries is not that history came to the Berbice in 1627. History was already here. What came was ownership."
- **The first peoples did not vanish.** They remained guides, trading partners, fishermen and hunters — and they were also enslaved: a census of **1762** counted **244 enslaved Indigenous people** in Berbice alongside the enslaved Africans. In 1763 the colony's survival "would turn, in part, on which side the Indigenous nations took."
- **The honest blanks.** "We do not know what the river's first peoples called the river, or themselves, in the deep centuries... Archaeology recovers floors and fields, not voices." And the rule that follows: "A history that will not say 'we do not know' cannot be trusted when it says 'we know' — and this book intends to be trusted."

- **The names are Indigenous.** *Guyana* means "land of many waters." *Berbice* "is generally traced to an Indigenous name for the river the Dutch wrote down and wore smooth" — the chapter notes the precise source language and meaning are uncertain and refuses to assert a folk etymology.

Terms introduced

- ***terra preta*** — Amazonian "dark earth"; a human-made soil that forms only where people live, farm and burn in one place for centuries
- **Lokono** — the Indigenous nation of the middle Berbice, called Arawak by Europeans
- **Warrau (Warao)** — the coastal and wetland nation, master boat-builders; the name often glossed "boat people"
- **Kalina** — the Caribs proper; kin to the Akawaio and Arekuna
- **matapee** — the long woven press that squeezes the poison from grated bitter cassava
- **cassareep** — the dark preserved syrup boiled down from cassava juice
- **koker** — a sluice; the modern descendant of ancient water-management on this coast
- **the Wild Coast** — the European name for the shore between the Orinoco and the Amazon
- **annatto, letterwood, balsam** — the goods the Indigenous nations traded to the Dutch

Comprehension questions

1. What was the "standard story" of the Guiana coast told for most of the twentieth century, and why does the author say it was convenient?
2. What is *terra preta*, and why does its depth at Dubulay prove settlement rather than camping?
3. Give the two headline dates the radiocarbon evidence supplies for human life on the Berbice River.

4. Name the three groupings of Indigenous peoples the chapter describes, and give one thing each was known for.
5. According to the chapter, what exactly was the catastrophe for the Indigenous nations — the trade, or something else?

Discussion questions

1. The chapter insists on stating what cannot be known: "Archaeology recovers floors and fields, not voices." Why might a historian choose to advertise the limits of the evidence rather than fill the silence? What does the reader gain?
2. "We live, all of us, in a house whose foundations we did not lay. This chapter is the deed." Discuss what it means to call a chapter of history a *deed* — a legal document of ownership.



PART TWO: THE DUTCH RIVER



Chapter Two: The Van Peeres' River

What the chapter does

It tells how Berbice passed from a family's private property to a company's share-traded asset, and sets up the two conditions — isolation, and the world the enslaved built within captivity — that will decide 1763. Its opening line: "Berbice began as a family business."

Key points

- **1627. Abraham van Peere**, a merchant of **Vlissingen** (Flushing) in the Dutch province of Zeeland, obtained leave to plant a settlement on the Berbice River, acting under the newly chartered **Dutch West India Company**, whose **Zeeland Chamber** claimed the Wild Coast.
- **The 1602 question, handled honestly.** In July 1602 Abraham's father, **Jan van Pere**, and a group of Zeeland merchants obtained freedom from convoy dues for ships trading the Guiana shore. The chapter is careful: "That was a trading privilege, not a grant of territory," and the Dutch historian **Netscher**, reading the States-General's own resolution, "found no record that any Van Pere ship ever reached the Berbice on it. 1627 remains the founding date Berbicians keep." This is a model of the book's method — note how a tempting earlier date is examined and set aside.
- **A colony as private property.** "For nearly a century, the colony of Berbice was the private, hereditary property of one Dutch family, the way another family might own a farm or a warehouse." On **14 September 1678** a charter formalised Berbice as a hereditary fief held by the Van Peeres under the Company.

- **Fort Nassau.** Built where high ground touched the water, "fifty-five miles and more into the interior"; the wooden-then-brick heart of the colony, on the **east bank** of the Berbice roughly **eighty-eight kilometres** above the river's mouth.
- **Why put the capital in the bush?** Three sound seventeenth-century reasons: it lay beyond the easy reach of Spanish patrols and freebooters; it sat among the Indigenous nations whose trade was the colony's first income; and "the river itself was the only road, so whoever held the narrows held the country."
- **Trade first, then plantation.** Tobacco, then cacao, cotton, coffee, "and above all sugar" took root on cleared riverbanks along both shores of the Berbice and up the Canje — and to work them the colony turned to the Atlantic slave trade. "By the early eighteenth century the colony's population was overwhelmingly African and enslaved, governed by a few hundred Europeans."
- **Life at the fort** was "small, damp, and surprisingly formal" — governor's quarters, Company store, garrison barracks, chapel, warehouses, and a craftsmen's village. European mortality "made remarriage almost a civic duty." The annual ships brought tools, cloth, wine, news, soldiers and letters. "When the ships were late, the colony ran short of everything at once" — including the flour and salt provisions on which the garrison and, in part, the enslaved workforce were fed. The chapter plants the warning: "A colony provisioned on that thread would one day discover, in the middle of a war it had brought upon itself, exactly how thin the thread was."
- **1665.** During the Second Anglo-Dutch War, an English attack on the colony was beaten off.
- **November 1712 — Cassard.** In the War of the Spanish Succession the French privateer commander **Jacques Cassard**, "who was ransoming Dutch colonies along the whole coast that season," brought his squadron to Berbice. Fort Nassau "was bombarded for four days together and the colony was held to ransom." The chapter flags the disagreement: "some later accounts say the original fort was burnt outright, though the Dutch sources of the period describe only the bombardment."
- **The ransom broke the Van Peeres.** The family would not pay; the bills drawn on them went unhonoured. A group of **Amsterdam**

merchants met the paper instead — **some hundred and eight thousand guilders** — and took the colony by a deed of **24 October 1714**. A month later the Van Peeres formally renounced their claims, "though Cornelis van Pere kept a quarter share and would be one of the five founders of the Society six years on."

- **1720 — the colony floated on the stock exchange.** In the autumn of 1720, "the same feverish year that gave Europe the South Sea Bubble," the owners floated the ***Sociëteit van Berbice***, the Society of Berbice, as a public company on the Amsterdam exchange. "Shares in the colony — in its land, its works, and, it must be said plainly, its people — could now be bought and sold on the Damrak like barrels of herring."
- **Amsterdam, not Zeeland — and why it still matters.** Berbice answered to Amsterdam while its neighbours on the Essequibo answered to Zeeland. The Dutch West India Company, chartered in **1621**, "was less a single company than a federation of provincial chambers with sharp elbows," and the Guiana colonies inherited separate charters, governors, account-books and fates. Hence Berbice was always "a colony *apart* — governed on its own, invaded on its own, ransomed on its own, and finally sold to Britain as its own line-item." The chapter's verdict on Berbician distinctiveness: **"It is constitutional history remembered as personality."**
- **A company town the size of a country.** From 1720 the Society appointed the governors, shipped the supplies, set the prices and took the produce. By **1733** a village of some **twenty-five to thirty houses** had grown around Fort Nassau to lodge craftsmen; by **1735** there was a schoolmaster and a minister of the Dutch Reformed Church at the fort; in **1738** two **Moravian** brethren came out at one Amsterdam proprietor's invitation to minister to the enslaved on his estate — "an early, ambiguous crack in the wall between Christian and chattel" — though the mission that followed after **1749**, at **Pilgerhut** on the Wironje creek, "drew an overwhelmingly Amerindian congregation." Plantations along both banks and the Canje came to number "well over a hundred, most owned by absentees in the Netherlands, run by hired managers whose interest in the colony rarely outlived their contracts."

- **The Middle Passage, said plainly.** The chapter refuses to pass it in silence: people sold on the Berbice riverside had survived capture or sale in Africa, the barracoons of the coast, then "months in the holds of purpose-fitted ships, chained close, in heat and stench and grief that the shipping records register only as percentages lost." The Dutch were among the age's principal carriers, and Zeeland's ports — "including little Vlissingen, the Van Peeres' own town — grew fat on the trade." Its judgment: "Every fortune in this chapter, every brick at Fort Nassau, every dividend in Amsterdam, is downstream of those holds."
- **Two things to carry into 1763. First, isolation** — "a thread of cleared riverbank through an immense forest, weeks from help," with a European population of a few hundred, sickly, living "at the sufferance of the thousands they enslaved and of the Indigenous nations around them." **Second, the world the enslaved were building** — Africans of many nations (Akan-speakers from the Gold Coast, Kalabari and other Ijo-speakers from the Niger Delta, Loango and Kongo people from Central Africa) thrown together with Dutch overseers and Arawak neighbours.
- **Berbice Dutch.** Out of that crucible came a creole weaving Dutch words together with a body of **Eastern Ijo** morphology — "its aspect endings, its plural marker, its third-person pronouns" — with Arawak threads through both: "one of the very few creole languages on earth with so strong and specific an African signature." It lived on this river for two and a half centuries.
- **The chapter's closing arithmetic.** "The people who actually worked it owned, in law, nothing — not the crop, not the cottage, not their children, not themselves. The eighteenth century would test how long such an arithmetic could hold."

Terms introduced

- **Dutch West India Company** — chartered 1621; a federation of provincial chambers, not a single firm
- **Zeeland Chamber** — the chamber that claimed the Wild Coast; Essequibo's authority, as against Amsterdam's over Berbice
- **hereditary fief** — the form of property by which the Van Peeres held Berbice from 1678

- **Fort Nassau** — the colony's capital, c. 88 km up the Berbice on the east bank
- ***Sociëteit van Berbice*** (Society of Berbice) — the public company floated on the Amsterdam exchange in 1720 to own the colony
- **the Damrak** — the Amsterdam street/exchange where shares in Berbice were traded
- **Pilgerhut** — the Moravian mission on the Wironje creek established after 1749
- **Berbice Dutch** — the river's creole language, Dutch vocabulary over Eastern Ijo grammar with Arawak threads
- **absentee proprietor** — an owner resident in the Netherlands, the colony run by hired managers

Comprehension questions

1. Why does the book keep 1627, and not 1602, as Berbice's founding date? Set out the evidence on both sides as the chapter does.
2. Give three reasons why the Dutch put their capital eighty-eight kilometres up the river rather than at the coast.
3. What happened in November 1712, and what did it cost the Van Peere family?
4. What changed about the ownership of Berbice in the autumn of 1720?
5. What is Berbice Dutch, and what makes it unusual among the world's creole languages?
6. Name the two conditions the chapter tells you to "carry forward" into 1763.

Discussion questions

1. "It is constitutional history remembered as personality." Explain how a difference in eighteenth-century company administration could still shape how Berbicians see themselves today. Do you find the argument convincing?
2. The chapter says shares in the colony "in its land, its works, and, it must be said plainly, its people" were traded on the Amsterdam exchange. Why does the author insert "it must be said plainly" into

that sentence? What does the phrase do that a bare statement of fact would not?



Chapter Three: The World the Plantation Made

What the chapter does

It refuses to let the word *plantation* stay "worn smooth." The chapter reconstructs, concretely, what a Berbice estate of the mid-eighteenth century was — its shape, its clock, its punishments, its hierarchy — and then shows the life the enslaved built inside it. Everything here is loaded to explain 1763.

Key points

- **The shape of an estate.** A strip of cleared land running back from the river: the manager's house at the water's edge, the boiling house (sugar) or drying sheds (coffee, cacao), the **logies** where the enslaved were quartered, and beyond the fields "the wall of forest." There were no roads worth the name between estates — "the river was the street, and everything — canes, coffee, letters, soldiers, sickness — moved by boat."
- **The 1762 census.** **346 Europeans** in all of Berbice, ruling **3,833 enslaved Africans** and **244 enslaved Indigenous people**, spread across "something approaching a hundred estates." The chapter notes the true enslaved population was likely higher, "for such counts missed many."
- **The ratio, and what it means.** "Roughly ten enslaved people for every European in the colony, and on many estates the only Europeans present were a manager and perhaps an overseer or a carpenter. Berbice was an African country governed by a Dutch rumour of force."

- **The estate names as a historical record.** Dutch planters named properties "the way people name boats — with piety, homesickness, and bravado": *Zorg-en-Hoop* ("care and hope"), *Goed Fortuin* ("good fortune"), *Dageraad* ("daybreak"), *Peereboom* ("the pear tree"). The British added Albion, Kilcoy, Fyrish; the freed people and the indentured added theirs. The result is "a four-language archaeological dig you can read off the front of a minibus. Every Berbice address is a history lesson wearing a signboard."
- **The estate year.** On sugar properties, **crop time** ran mill and boiling house day and night "because cut cane sours in a day," and the boiling house was "as dangerous a workplace as the eighteenth century devised." Out of crop came planting, trenching and weeding — "the endless war with water and grass." Coffee and cacao estates, numerous on the Berbice, kept "gentler but no freer calendars."
- **The demographic verdict.** Deaths among the enslaved outran births year upon year, so the system "could maintain itself only by continual new purchases from the ships." The chapter's judgment: "A society that must import human beings annually merely to stand still has pronounced its own verdict; the planters heard it, and bought on."
- **Punishment was the design, not a fault in it.** "Punishment was not an aberration of the system; it was the system's engine. The lash was ordinary. Mutilation and exemplary execution were within the law." And a caution about evidence: the records were "kept by the perpetrators, remember, not the sufferers."
- **The labour hierarchy — essential for understanding 1763.** At the bottom, the **field gangs**, men and women together. Above them the **drivers**, enslaved men set over the gangs, "holding the whip for the manager and absorbing, from both directions, the system's pressures." Apart stood the **craftsmen** — coopers, carpenters, sawyers, boat-builders, boilers — "whose skills the colony could not replace and who therefore moved with a dangerous degree of freedom, hiring between estates, carrying messages, seeing the whole river." In the houses, the **domestics**. The conclusion: leadership in 1763 "would be drawn heavily from the skilled and the trusted... Cuffy the cooper's man was not an anomaly. He was the pattern."

- **The logies were not only barracks.** People came from many African nations — **Akan**-speakers whom the records call **Coromantee**, from the Gold Coast; **Ijo**-speakers from the Niger Delta; Central Africans from Loango and Kongo — joined by a growing generation of the country-born, "called **creoles** in the language of the day." They married "after their own fashion since the law recognised no marriage among them"; they "raised children the law priced like stock"; they "planted, fished, drummed, mourned, and remembered."
- **Names kept.** Akan day-names survived alongside the names the Dutch imposed: **Cuffy** (Kofi, "born on Friday"), **Quashie**, **Amba**, **Accara**.
- **The provision grounds — "the seed of everything."** Obligated to feed themselves, the enslaved "became, perforce, independent producers": plantains, cassava, yams, corn, peppers, fowls and fish, with surplus carried on Sundays to informal markets "that the law tolerated because the colony ate from them." A small stubborn economy of skill, property and bargaining grew inside the tightest unfreedom. The pay-off comes generations later: when the freed produced purchase-money for whole plantations, "the astonishment only measured how badly the masters had understood what was happening in the provision grounds all along."
- **The third Barbice — the maroons.** From the colony's earliest decades enslaved people ran upriver, up the creeks, into the swamps of the Canje basin. The Dutch called them by the Spanish-derived word **maroons**, "hunted them with paid Indigenous auxiliaries, and never eliminated them." Every maroon camp was "proof, visible from the cane rows, that the system had edges."
- **The Indigenous nations' position was structural.** The Dutch needed them as trading partners, as slave-catchers (a role "the colonial government cultivated deliberately, and paid for"), and as a buffer. In 1763 the government would lean desperately on Indigenous allies, "and the rebels would discover, to their cost, that the forest around their new republic was not neutral ground."
- **Everyday resistance — where most people lived most of the time.** Tools broken, tasks slowed, cattle strayed, sickness feigned, "food pilfered from the stores that pilfered lives"; flight for a night, a

week, a season; and "everywhere the guarded face — the plantation's true architecture of survival." The managers called it laziness and cunning. "It was neither. It was a population conducting the longest, quietest labour dispute in history, while it waited."

- **The colony's fragility was an open secret.** In **1762** — the year before the great rising — enslaved people on the Canje "had already risen once in revolt, a rising suppressed but remembered on both sides of the whip." Fevers thinned the garrison; the Society in Amsterdam kept the soldiery small and the fort ill-repaired; the plantations were scattered along a hundred miles of river. **Governor Wolfert Simon van Hoogenheim**, in office from **1760**, "presided over a colony that was profitable on paper in Amsterdam and threadbare in fact on the river."
- **The chapter's closing.** In February 1763, on a Canje estate called Magdalenenberg, some of them "decided that the world the plantation had made was finished. **They were nearly right.**"

Terms introduced

- **logies** — the quarters where the enslaved were housed on an estate
- **crop time** — the months of cutting and grinding on a sugar estate
- **boiling house** — where cane juice was boiled to sugar; the estate's most dangerous workplace
- **driver** — an enslaved man set over a field gang, holding the whip for the manager
- **Coromantee** — the records' name for Akan-speakers from the Gold Coast
- **creole** — in the language of the day, a person born in the colony rather than in Africa
- **provision grounds** — the plots on which the enslaved were expected to grow their own food
- **maroons** — those who freed themselves by flight and lived beyond the estates
- **Akan day-names** — Cuffy (Kofi, born on Friday), Quashie, Amba, Accara

Comprehension questions

1. Set out the 1762 census figures for Berbice. What ratio do they produce, and what does the author conclude from it?
2. Explain the four levels of the enslaved labour hierarchy on a Berbice estate. Why does the chapter say the leadership of 1763 came from the skilled and trusted?
3. What were provision grounds, and what long-term consequence does the chapter draw from them?
4. What does the chapter mean by "everyday resistance," and give three examples it lists.
5. Name three weaknesses in the colony's defences on the eve of 1763.

Discussion questions

1. The chapter argues that "punishment was not an aberration of the system; it was the system's engine." What difference does it make to how we judge slavery if cruelty is understood as designed rather than as excess?
2. "Every Berbice address is a history lesson wearing a signboard." Take the place-names of your own district and try to read them as the chapter reads Berbice's. What languages and what histories are stacked in them?



PART THREE: 1763



Chapter Four: The Rising

What the chapter does

It narrates the outbreak — from Magdalenenberg on the Canje to Hollandia on the big river — the collapse of Dutch control, the massacre at Peereboom, the burning of Fort Nassau, and the retreat to Dageraad. Its opening sentence sets the scene in three strokes: "It began on the Canje, on a Wednesday, on an estate named for a saint."

Key points

- **23 February 1763.** The enslaved people of **Plantation Magdalenenberg** — "the name is spelled Magdalenenburg in some records" — rose against their masters. "They killed the manager and a carpenter, burned the owner's house, and moved off to the neighbouring estates of the Canje, calling others out as they went." Word ran up the creek and east toward the Corentyne. "Risings had flared on this river before and been stamped out. This one did not stop."
- **27 February 1763.** Four days later the fire crossed to the big river. On **Plantation Hollandia**, beside **Lelienburg** on the Berbice, the enslaved rose and armed themselves, "and it was here that the movement found its centre of gravity."
- **Cuffy.** "Coffij in the Dutch documents, Kofi in the Akan naming that says he was born on a Friday." An Akan man, born on the Gold Coast and carried across the Atlantic into slavery, who lived and worked at Lelienburg "in the skilled world of the cooperage — whether as a cooper himself or in a cooper's household the records leave unclear." Note the honesty here: the chapter's own note records that the sources divide, one making him a cooper and another a house-slave

to a cooper in the household of the widow Berkey, and that "his age at capture is nowhere recorded."

- **What made him a leader.** "Literate in the ways of the colony, deliberate where others were rash, and possessed of the rarest thing in any revolution — the ability to make freed people into an army." He organised the rebels into **companies under captains**, and the rebels acclaimed him their leader.
- **March 1763 — collapse, not battle.** "Estate after estate fell — the managers dead, fled, or bargaining for their lives; the buildings burned or occupied; the stores of guns, powder, and rum seized. The colony's Europeans, who had lived for a century on the arithmetic of ten-to-one, now met the other side of the equation."
- **The extent of rebel control.** Within a fortnight the rebels effectively held the plantations of the Berbice and the Canje — "a country of upwards of a hundred estates passed into the hands of perhaps **2,500 to 3,000 rebels in arms**, out of an enslaved population of some **four to five thousand**." Study the note to this passage: the book sets out the competing counts (135 plantations in one modern summary — the colony's total, not the rebel-held total; Netscher's c. 95 estates in cultivation from the 1762 poll-tax rolls, 84 private and 11 Society; rebel numbers from about 1,000–1,500 in contemporary Dutch reports through c. 3,000 in Kars) and warns that "the figure of 5,000 sometimes quoted is the colony's whole enslaved population, not its fighters." The point is expressly "flagged for archival verification." **This is the single best example in the book of how to handle numbers you cannot settle.**
- **The Corentyne as a second front.** The rising's first messengers ran east down the Canje and across the empty coast toward the Corentyne; Suriname's government, "terrified of contagion among its own enslaved majority," moved to seal the border river. Throughout the war the Corentyne saw "patrols, refugees, rumours, and the rebels' unrealised hope that the fire might jump the river." So "today's peaceable Corentyne of rice and cricket — entered written history as a war zone's flank."
- **Peereboom.** In the first days of March, dozens of Europeans from the upriver estates — men, women and children — fortified themselves in the plantation house at a bend of the river called Peereboom and

were besieged. Terms were offered: they might take to their boats and go downriver unmolested. "As they embarked, the attack came. Many were killed on the riverbank or in the water; some escaped downstream; others, mostly women, were taken captive and held by the rebel government for months."

- **How the book judges Peereboom.** The killings "filled the Dutch newspapers that summer and hardened Amsterdam's resolve for vengeance; they must stand in this book as what they were — a massacre in a war begun by a far greater and longer one, the century of violence that made the colony. History owes the dead of Peereboom truthfulness, and owes the enslaved dead of a hundred unnamed punishments the same."
- **Why they rose — in their own terms.** In Cuffy's letters and the testimony the Dutch afterwards transcribed, the rebels "did not speak of abstractions. They named names: particular managers whose cruelty had passed bearing, particular punishments, particular hungers." The year before, shortage — "the provisioning thread from Europe pulled thin by war" — had travelled downhill to the logies as smaller rations and harder demands. The chapter's formulation: they "concluded, plantation by plantation, that the risk of dying free had fallen below the certainty of living owned."
- **Fort Nassau burned by its own governor.** The garrison was a handful and the fort, decades neglected, could not be held. The colonists demanded evacuation. **Van Hoogenheim refused to surrender the colony outright but could not hold its capital:** the government abandoned Fort Nassau, and on his own order the fort — "seat of the colony since the Van Peeres' century — was set alight so the rebels should not have it."
- **Dageraad.** The Europeans fell back downriver "until the colony they still claimed had shrunk to the deck-space of their ships and a single riverside estate near the river's mouth: Dageraad — 'Daybreak.'"
- **The picture in April 1763.** "The plantations from the Canje headwaters to the middle river: in rebel hands. The capital: ashes, by its own governor's order. The colonial government: a fevered remnant clinging to the last mudbank before the Atlantic... And upriver, at the heart of a freed country, a new government forming around a cooper from Lelienburg."

- **The counterfactual the chapter puts to you.** Had van Hoogenheim run for Suriname, "the Berbice rising would stand alone in the history of the Americas: a plantation colony not merely convulsed but *abandoned* to its enslaved people." He did not. And what his stubbornness preserved was "not the colonists' lives, which flight would have saved more surely, but the colony's *claim* — the paper world in which four thousand human beings were still, in Amsterdam's ledgers, property worth returning for."
- **28 March 1763.** The ship ***Betsy*** arrived from Suriname carrying **a hundred soldiers** — "enough to stiffen Dageraad, nowhere near enough to retake a colony." Van Hoogenheim dug in and wrote to Suriname, the islands and Amsterdam, pleading for troops.
- **The hinge into Chapter Five.** "And then, extraordinarily, letters began to arrive from the other side."

Terms introduced

- **Magdalenenberg / Magdalenenburg** — the Canje estate where the rising began, 23 February 1763
- **Hollandia** and **Lelienburg** — the Berbice River estates where the rising found its centre and its leader
- **Peereboom** — the river bend and estate house where besieged Europeans were massacred as they embarked
- **Dageraad** ("Daybreak") — the riverside estate near the river's mouth where the colonial remnant made its stand
- **the *Betsy*** — the ship that brought a hundred soldiers from Suriname, 28 March 1763
- **companies under captains** — the military organisation Cuffy imposed on the rebels

Comprehension questions

1. Give the date and place of the outbreak, and say what the rebels did there.
2. What happened on 27 February 1763, and why does the chapter call it the moment the movement "found its centre of gravity"?
3. What do we know, and what do we *not* know, about Cuffy's trade and background? Answer using the chapter's own careful wording.

4. Describe what happened at Peereboom and explain how the author says it should be judged.
5. Why did van Hoogenheim burn Fort Nassau, and where did the colonial government retreat to?
6. What arrived on 28 March 1763, and why was it not enough?

Discussion questions

1. The chapter says the rebels "concluded, plantation by plantation, that the risk of dying free had fallen below the certainty of living owned." Is this a satisfying explanation of why a rebellion happens in one year rather than another? What else does the chapter offer?
2. Examine the note on rebel numbers, where the book lays out three different estimates and declines to settle them. Some readers find such passages frustrating. Argue for or against the author's decision to flag the point "for archival verification" rather than choose a figure.



Chapter Five: Governor Cuffy

What the chapter does

It treats the rebel year not as a riot but as a **government**. The chapter examines how Cuffy built a state, what the archive lets us see of daily life inside the freed country, the diplomacy conducted by letter across the river, the failed assault on Dageraad, and the internal split that ended in Cuffy's death.

The chapter's opening — memorise it

"For most of 1763, the colony of Berbice had two governors. One held a plantation by the sea. The other held the country."

Key points

- **The title was policy, not vanity.** "In the world he and his people had seized, the Dutch title was the technology of legitimate rule, and Cuffy understood — as revolutionaries after him in Haiti would understand — that a rising becomes a state the moment it starts doing the boring things states do."
- **Why we can see so much.** The historian **Marjoleine Kars** reconstructed the rebel administration from some **nine hundred interrogation transcripts** in the Dutch archives — an intimacy "almost no other slave rebellion in the Americas allows."
- **The government he appointed. Captain Accara,** "an African-born veteran of the estates," became his second, with charge of military affairs. Companies were organised under captains, "many along African national lines, Akan and Congo and others each with their own officers."

- **The tasks of a new state.** A monopoly of force and a working economy: plantations kept in production where possible, "for an army and for the thousands of women, children, and elders now living free"; sugar and rum stores rationed; discipline preached and enforced with mixed success.
- **The hard fact the book will not sand away.** "Some of the formerly enslaved were set to work in terms uncomfortably like the old ones — a hard fact the records preserve and an honest history must not sand away. Revolutions inherit the world they overthrow; this one had a year, under siege, to remake a slave colony with the tools a slave colony left behind."
- **Women in the archive.** Working the provision grounds that fed the free country, managing households on seized estates, moving as traders and messengers, "holding rank and influence in the camps" — and later standing before the Dutch interrogators in their hundreds, where their testimony, "wrenched from them under threat, became perversely the fullest self-portrait any enslaved community in the Americas left behind."
- **Children born free.** "A generation with no memory, however brief their freedom proved, of being owned." The dead were buried "with rites their grandparents had carried across the ocean."
- **The Atlantic comparison — learn this for essays.** Three years earlier, in **1760**, Jamaica had been shaken by **Tacky's War**, "the greatest Caribbean slave rising of the century before Berbice — suppressed in months." The maroon peoples of Jamaica and Suriname "had fought empires to a standstill and won treaties, but as free enclaves *beside* the plantation world, not as its replacement." Berbice attempted something "categorically more: not escape from the colony but possession of it." Nothing on that scale would be seen again "until Saint-Domingue rose in 1791 and became Haiti." The relationship is stated precisely: "The line from the Canje to Cap-Haïtien is not one of influence — the revolutions did not know each other — but of proof."
- **The letters.** Between March and mid-year, Cuffy — "dictating to captured clerks or to literate men among his own" — conducted a correspondence of state with van Hoogenheim at Dageraad. The most famous is of **2 April 1763**.

- **What the letter said.** The rebels had not sought this war; the cruelty of particular masters had brought it; and the enslaved of Berbice would not return to bondage — the governor was not to think, Cuffy wrote, "that they will remain slaves."
- **The partition proposal.** "The Dutch to keep the coast and the trade, the free Africans to hold the interior — two nations on one river, an arrangement the eighteenth-century Atlantic had a working model for in the maroon treaties of Jamaica and Suriname."
- **The letters as statecraft.** They "justify the war in terms a European power was bound to recognise — naming cruelty, not denying order; they distinguish between enemies and negotiating partners; they propose a settlement with precedents... and they hold a door open while holding an army together." The book's verdict: "Berbice's rebel government negotiated from behind a hungry river, and still forced the colonial power to answer its letters."
- **Van Hoogenheim's answer.** He temporised — "courteous, noncommittal answers"; he flattered; "he asked for time, and used it to fortify." From his standpoint it was duty. From the rebel standpoint it was "the discovery that a state without ships, without allies, and without powder mills negotiates on credit it cannot enforce."
- **Accara's silhouette.** "African-born, estate-hardened, brave to recklessness, and impatient of his governor's diplomacy — the commander who believed the war could be won by the next attack, facing the statesman who feared it could only be lost by one."
- **The rebel state's four practical shortages.** **Powder**, which could not be manufactured and had to be captured or stretched; **salt**, whose absence sickened the camps; **intelligence**, "carried by canoe and rumour"; and **allies** — the Indigenous nations proved "at best, neutral, at worst enlisted against them."
- **Why the partition plan was doomed.** "The freed country's diplomacy failed on the forest side before it failed on the river side, and the failure was decisive: without the interior's consent, the interior partition Cuffy offered was a map with no hinterland."
- **13 May 1763 — the attack on Dageraad.** Cuffy threw his main force — "reported at up to two thousand fighters" — against Dageraad. "The battle was the pivot of the entire war." The rebels

came on in disciplined waves against entrenchments; the Dutch met them with "the one arm the revolution could not match, the cannon of the shore battery and of the ships anchored in the river." After hours of fighting the attack failed, at heavy cost. Note the chapter's careful note: an **earlier assault on 2 April 1763** had been led by Accara with three to four hundred men; the Dutch *Eenigheid* project chronology records rebel losses of about a hundred against eight European dead on 13 May; and the two-thousand figure "comes from Guyanese summaries and is flagged for archival verification."

- **After Dageraad: stalemate, rain, hunger.** The freed country had to feed itself from war-disrupted estates while denying food to the coast; "the Dutch, resupplied by sea, could wait."
- **The internal strains.** "The African-born and the creole country-born did not always trust one another. The national companies — Akan, Congo, and others — had their own captains and their own counsels. Accara's aggression pulled one way (more than once he attacked without his governor's sanction), Cuffy's statecraft another."
- **An ordinary day in the freed country.** Work in the mornings on food plots and occupied estates, "under captains rather than drivers"; drill and watch-duty; canoes moving with messages, salt-fish and rum; "disputes brought to captains and to the Governor for judgment"; drumming and worship in the evenings, "the African nations keeping their separate observances within the common cause." Life was "provisional, armed, and anxious — and it was also, for thousands of people, the only stretch of their adult lives lived without an owner."
- **The single most quotable sentence in the chapter.** "The archive preserves complaints, quarrels, and hunger. **It preserves no one asking to go back.**"
- **October 1763 — the fall.** A captain named **Atta** rose against Cuffy's leadership and prevailed. In October 1763 — "the report reached van Hoogenheim on the 19th" — Cuffy "died at his own hand rather than fall into the power of his rivals." The chapter's note is careful: "The precise circumstances rest on colonial-era reports; no rebel account of his death survives."

- **The reckoning.** "He had governed a freed Berbice for the better part of eight months. He never saw the sea-coast he offered to share, and his grave, like almost everything else about him, is unrecorded."
- **The strangest monument.** What is recorded is "in the enemy's own archive, which is the strangest of his monuments — the thing the colonial world spent a century insisting was impossible: Africans in the Americas, self-organised, self-governed, negotiating as a power, in their own name, for their own land."
- **The chapter's last line.** "For one year on this river, freedom had a government."

Terms introduced

- **Governor of Berbice** — the title Cuffy took deliberately, as "the technology of legitimate rule"
- **Captain Accara** — Cuffy's deputy for military affairs (to be distinguished from Accara van de Brandwacht, Chapter Six)
- **national companies** — rebel military units organised along African national lines (Akan, Congo and others)
- **partition proposal** — Cuffy's offer of 2 April 1763: coast to the Dutch, interior to the free
- **Tacky's War** — the 1760 Jamaican rising, the century's greatest before Berbice
- **Saint-Domingue / Haiti** — the 1791 rising, the next revolution on Berbice's scale
- **Atta** — the captain who overthrew Cuffy in October 1763

Comprehension questions

1. Why does the chapter say Cuffy's assumption of the title "Governor" was policy rather than vanity?
2. What did Cuffy propose to van Hoogenheim on 2 April 1763, and what Atlantic precedent existed for it?
3. How did van Hoogenheim reply to the rebel letters, and what was he really doing with the time?
4. What happened at Dageraad on 13 May 1763, and what decided the outcome?

5. List the four practical shortages the rebel government faced, and say which one the chapter calls decisive and why.
6. How did Cuffy's governorship end, and how long had it lasted?

Discussion questions

1. The chapter distinguishes between maroon freedom — free enclaves *beside* the plantation world — and what Berbice attempted, "possession of it." Which was the more radical project, and which the more likely to survive? Argue with evidence from the chapter.
2. "The archive preserves complaints, quarrels, and hunger. It preserves no one asking to go back." How much weight can a historian place on an absence in the record? Discuss, remembering who wrote the record and under what conditions the testimony was given.



Chapter Six: The Fall, and the Long Memory

What the chapter does

It carries the story from the arrival of Dutch regulars through the hunting-down of the rebel bands, the trials and executions, the collapse of the colony, and then — the second half of the chapter — the two-and-a-half-century afterlife of 1763 in fiction, in the archive, and in Guyana's national life.

Its opening: "Empires are slow, but they are heavy."

Key points — the fall

- **1 January 1764.** Troops had come from Suriname and the Caribbean stations in the closing weeks of 1763; then **six ships from the Netherlands** stood into the Berbice carrying "some **six hundred regular soldiers** — a force greater than the entire pre-war European population of the colony." The States-General had voted the money; "Amsterdam wanted its investment back."
- **"Not a battle but a hunting."** Short of powder, the rebels split into factions under **Atta, Accabre**, and other captains and fell back into the bush. "And the bush was not empty." Indigenous fighters — "Carib, Arawak, and others, paid and armed by the Dutch — closed the forest paths and the upper rivers against the retreating bands. Hunger did the rest."
- **The captains taken.** Atta was taken; Accara was taken. **Accabre** — "leader of one of the African national companies" — was taken with **eighty-one of his people** at the war's final armed encounter in

March, and **Atta** was brought before the governor in chains on **15 April**. Note the chapter's note: the *Eenigheid* chronology dates Accabre's capture to 23 March 1764 and Atta's to 15 April 1764, while another source "instead makes Accabre the last taken, on 15 April 1764. The sequence is flagged for archival verification."

- **How the end was met.** "Some captains fought to the last camp. Some bands, starving, came in under promises; some were brought in bound by former comrades bargaining for their own lives — the war's final cruelty being what it made the defeated do to one another. Some never came in at all: they went deeper, up the Canje and the creeks, and their descendants' village still stands on that river, as Chapter Twelve will tell."
- **How to hold the Indigenous alliance honestly.** The book's ruling on a difficult national question: "the nations acted as sovereignties defending their own interests in an imperial war, as every power in that war did."
- **The trials.** Through 1764 the prisoners were interrogated — "it is from those hundreds of transcripts, ironically, that the modern world knows the revolution's inner life" — and the courts sat.
- **The reckoning.** "Over a hundred people were put to death, many by prolonged public torture; about two dozen were burned alive, others broken on the rack or hanged, their deaths staged before the reassembled enslaved population as a lesson in the price of freedom." The note records that counts in the sources "range from about 75 to 128 put to death" and that the exact toll is flagged for archival verification.
- **The totals.** Something like **1,800 people** died in the rising, the starvation and the repression — "perhaps a third or more of all the enslaved people of Berbice — against European military and civilian dead counted in the dozens." The chapter's verdict: "The asymmetry of those numbers is the truest description of the eighteenth-century Atlantic that any statistic can give." (The note adds that no agreed colony-wide total exists.)
- **The ugliest coda.** **Accara van de Brandwacht** and **Gousarie van Oosterleek** — "the first no relation to Captain Accara, despite the shared name" — went over to the colonial government and became its most effective slave-catchers, "bringing in some six

hundred of their former comrades." They escaped trial, were taken to the Netherlands as free men, and in **1773** sailed with the expedition against the maroons of Suriname: "the revolution's soldiers ending as empire's, a reminder that history is lived forward by people with one life to spend, not backward by us who judge at leisure."

- **The archive's bitter mercy.** To condemn the leaders the court had to establish who did what, "and so the interrogators asked, and asked, and wrote down: names, plantations, companies, marches, quarrels, marriages, meals — the entire circulatory system of the freed country, taken down verbatim from hundreds of mouths." The Dutch state filed the transcripts "and forgot them for two and a half centuries, until historians — Kars foremost — walked into the archive and found the rebellion waiting there, still speaking." Hence: "the machinery built to kill the revolution became the machinery that saved its voice."
- **2013.** The two hundred and fiftieth anniversary "was marked in Guyana with lectures, press series, and commemorations that drew directly on that recovered voice."
- **The colony after.** "Burned, bankrupted, depopulated, and afraid." In **1785** Fort Nassau, half-ruined since the governor burned it, "was formally abandoned, and the seat of the colony moved fifty-five miles downstream to a new town at the meeting of the Berbice and the Canje. We shall meet that town again; the reader may already live in it."
- **The unequal ledger of names.** The leaders' names — **Atta, Accara, Accabre** — "survive attached to their sentences, while the hundreds executed and the eighteen hundred dead are, most of them, names now lost or locked in the transcripts' Dutch spellings, waiting for researchers to carry them home." Each name recovered "is a small national repatriation, and the work is not finished."

Key points — the long memory

- **Who owned the memory first.** "For a long time the memory belonged to the wrong people." Colonial history-writing filed 1763 under "*insurrection, suppressed*, a fright remembered at Dutch firesides and an object lesson in the planters' manuals." But "on the plantations, in the logies, in the villages that freedom finally built a century later, the county kept its own account. The name Cuffy did

not die on the Berbice."

- **Literature got there first. Edgar Mittelholzer** — "the New Amsterdam novelist we shall meet at home in Chapter Eleven" — set his **Kaywana** novels, beginning with ***Children of Kaywana*** in **1952**, across the whole arc of Dutch Guiana, and the first volume "climaxes in the terror and grandeur of the 1763 rising." They "carried the Canje's name around the English-reading world a generation before any scholarly monograph did, and many a foreign reader first learned that the Guianas had a revolution from a Berbician's paperback."
- **The republic's date.** When the new nation chose the date on which to become a republic, "it reached past every imperial anniversary on the calendar and took **23 February** — the day the Canje rose in 1763." Guyana has been a republic on Cuffy's anniversary since **1970**, and Republic Day in Guyana is called **Mashramani**, "the festival my generation grew up dancing in without always being told whose day it was."
- **The 1763 Monument.** Unveiled in **1976**, on the tenth anniversary of independence, in the **Square of the Revolution**, Georgetown: **Philip Moore's fifteen-foot bronze Cuffy**, "two and a half tons of defiance cast at the **Morris Singer** foundry, dense with the sculptor's symbols — the protective face on the breast, the throttled pig and dog of ignorance and greed in his fists."
- **Cuffy's standing.** He "stands first in the order of Guyana's national heroes; schoolchildren from Crabwood Creek to Charity learn his name."
- **The scholarly verdict now.** The Berbice rising "is now studied alongside Haiti in the histories of Atlantic freedom — a revolution before the Age of Revolutions, made by people who had less help, less hope, and more to lose than any revolutionaries in the hemisphere's textbooks. Its capital was a wooden fort in our bush. Its state papers were dictated by a cooper. **Its flag did not survive; its idea did.**"
- **The chapter's claim for the county.** "This county was the first place in Guyana where freedom was not a petition. It was a government."

Terms introduced

- **Accabre** — captain of one of the African national companies, taken with eighty-one of his people at the war's last armed encounter
- **Accara van de Brandwacht** and **Gousarie van Oosterleek** — the two captains who turned slave-catcher for the colonial government
- **Mashramani** — the name of Guyana's Republic Day festival, held on 23 February
- **the 1763 Monument** — Philip Moore's bronze Cuffy in the Square of the Revolution, unveiled 1976
- **the Kaywana novels** — Edgar Mittelholzer's fiction sequence, begun with *Children of Kaywana* (1952)

Comprehension questions

1. What arrived in the Berbice on 1 January 1764, and how did its size compare with the colony's pre-war European population?
2. Why does the chapter call the campaign of early 1764 "not a battle but a hunting"? Name the two forces that broke the rebel bands.
3. Give the chapter's figures for the dead on each side, and state the caution its notes attach to them.
4. Explain the paradox the chapter calls the archive's "bitter mercy."
5. What happened to Fort Nassau in 1785, and where did the capital go?
6. Why is 23 February Guyana's Republic Day, and what is Republic Day called?
7. Describe the 1763 Monument: sculptor, year, height, place, and two of its symbols.

Discussion questions

1. The chapter says of the two captains who became slave-catchers that "history is lived forward by people with one life to spend, not backward by us who judge at leisure." Should a historian offer that kind of mitigation? Where is the line between understanding and excusing?
2. "Its flag did not survive; its idea did." Using this chapter and the last, assess whether the 1763 rising should be counted a failure or an achievement — and be clear about the standard you are judging by.



PART FOUR: THE BRITISH CENTURY



Chapter Seven: The Changing of the Flags



What the chapter does

It runs the county through thirty-four years of flag changes, explains how Berbice became a county of British Guiana, and then argues that the flags were not the real story: "the great fact of the British half-century was not the flag. It was the slow, grinding, resisted death of slavery."

Its opening image

"Between 1781 and 1815, the colony of Berbice changed hands so many times that a planter who kept his oath current would have sworn loyalty to four different sovereigns without once leaving his verandah."

Key dates — learn this sequence

Date	Event
February 1781	British forces occupy Berbice and its neighbours, the Netherlands having been drawn into the American war
January 1782	The French, then allied to the Dutch cause, take the colonies in their turn; at the peace they are handed back to the Netherlands
1785	New Amsterdam laid out on the flats where the Berbice meets the Canje, beside Fort Sint Andries ; Fort Nassau, fifty-five miles upstream, left to the bush
22 April 1796	A British expedition takes Berbice without a shot fired

Date	Event
27 March 1802	The Peace of Amiens hands it back to the Batavian Republic
September 1803	The British come again — "this time to stay"
13 August 1814	The Convention of London signed; the Netherlands cede Berbice, Demerara and Essequibo to Britain permanently (ratifications to be exchanged within three weeks)
21 July 1831	The three old Dutch colonies consolidated into one: British Guiana
1838	The new colony divided into three counties; Berbice keeps its name and its ground as the easternmost — from the Abary to the Corentyne

Note the correction the book's notes make: "The date 20 November 1815 sometimes given for ratification belongs to the Second Treaty of Paris and should not be attached to this convention." Do not repeat that error in an examination.

Key points

- **What the Dutch left behind.** "The Dutch left the coast; their drainage, their brickwork, their place-names, and their land-law did not. To this day, land tenure in Guyana carries **Roman-Dutch** bones, and half the villages of this county answer to names a Zeelander would recognise."
- **The county line still felt.** The 1838 boundary "is, in essence, the one Berbicians still feel in their bones, whatever the modern regions are called."
- **The structural quirk — a favourite examination point.** Britain took the colonies "with their Dutch constitutions on, and governed them as conquered colonies by Crown authority rather than by settler assembly. There was no Jamaican-style planter parliament in Berbice; the **Court of Policy** answered upward, to London." So when London moved against slavery, "the planters of the ceded colonies had fewer constitutional trenches to fight from than their island cousins." The chapter calls this "one of history's quiet jokes at

the expense of the men who thought they had merely changed customers."

- **What British rule changed on the ground.** "Less than the flags suggest, and more than the planters wished." The Dutch legal skeleton was kept — Court of Policy, the fiscal, Roman-Dutch land law — "because it worked and because the planters, many still Dutch, preferred it." But London capital bought into the estates; British managers and Scottish attorneys spread along the coast; "English pushed Dutch out of the courts and counting-houses within a generation, leaving Dutch behind only in the place-names and, up the river, in the creole language of the water people." And Britain brought "an abolition movement at home, with lawyers, presses, and petitions."
- **1807.** The abolition of the British slave trade "closed the ocean pipeline"; the **registration of the enslaved** that followed put names — "spare, bureaucratic, precious names" — into ledgers descendants comb to this day.
- **The 1820s — amelioration.** London instructed the colonies to soften the system's edges, "colonial interests resisting, and the enslaved reading the struggle with perfect clarity."
- **1823 — the Demerara rising.** The enslaved of the East Coast of neighbouring Demerara rose, "a movement led by, among others, the deacon **Quamina** of Plantation Success." It was crushed with executions and reprisals, "but its echo in Britain, amplified by the death in prison of the missionary **John Smith**, did as much as any pamphlet to turn opinion against the system." Berbice "watched, and remembered its own 1763" — and Quamina is among the figures worked into the 1763 Monument.
- **The county's crops.** The old Dutch diversity — coffee, cacao, cotton — "flourished briefly under early British rule (Berbician cotton had its boom years while Lancashire's mills were young), then fell before cheaper producers elsewhere," and the county converged on **sugar**, "the single crop with imperial protection and industrial appetite behind it." By mid-century the pattern was set: "the big consolidated sugar estates on the best-drained land, and everything else pushed to the margins the estates did not want."

- **The registration ledgers — "the county's other great archive."** From the late 1810s the law required the colonies to register the enslaved by name, age and origin. Meant as an audit against smuggling, they became "the only place where hundreds of thousands of enslaved people's names were ever written down." For families tracing their lines, "those cold columns are ancestral scripture." The compensation records of the 1830s "complete the terrible symmetry: the enslaved appear in them one last time, priced." The chapter's line: **"History is not always written by the winners; sometimes it is merely *filed* by them, and the filing outlives the winning."**
- **Abolition in two instalments with a cheat between them.** The **Slavery Abolition Act of 1833** decreed that slavery in the British colonies would end on **1 August 1834**. On that morning the enslaved people of Berbice — "perhaps twenty thousand souls... out of some eighty-five thousand across the whole colony" — woke legally unslaved. **But** the same Act bound them as "**apprentices**" to their former owners for years more of compelled, unpaid plantation labour; and it paid compensation — **twenty million pounds sterling** across the empire — to the owners. **"The freed received nothing."**
- **Note the book's honesty on the county figure.** Its note records that compensation "was administered for British Guiana as a single unit, not by county, so no official Berbice total exists"; the colony-wide figure of some 85,000 "is the firm one, and the county estimate given in the text is an inference from it, flagged for archival verification."
- **1 August 1838.** Apprenticeship "proved unworkable as well as unjust" and collapsed ahead of schedule. "Full freedom — the freedom to leave, to bargain, to refuse — dates in Berbice, as in all Guyana, from that day."
- **Apprenticeship, properly understood.** "'Slavery ended in 1834' is a sentence that four years of Berbician lives contradict." The apprentice was "unowned but unfree: bound to the old estate for most of the working week, subject to the magistrate rather than the master — an improvement measurable mainly in paperwork." **Stipendiary magistrates** sent from Britain "filled their reports

with its frictions." The apprentices treated it as "slavery serving out its notice," and their refusals, work-stoppages and "relentless purchase of their own remaining time helped collapse the scheme two years early." The chapter's summary: "Freedom's real date, the county has always known, is 1838; the four years before it were the system's long, grudging exhale."

- **Emancipation Day.** The first of August "remains one of the holiest civic days in the Guyanese calendar, kept with tassa-less solemnity and queh-queh joy in the African villages of this county."

Terms introduced

- **Fort Sint Andries** — the small stronghold beside which New Amsterdam was laid out in 1785
- **Batavian Republic** — the Dutch state to which Berbice was briefly returned in 1802
- **Convention of London (13 August 1814)** — the treaty by which the three colonies passed permanently to Britain
- **British Guiana** — the single colony formed 21 July 1831
- **Roman-Dutch land law** — the Dutch legal inheritance still in Guyana's land tenure
- **Court of Policy** — the colony's governing council, answering upward to London rather than to a settler assembly
- **conquered colony** — the constitutional status that denied Berbice a planter parliament
- **amelioration** — the 1820s policy of softening slavery's edges from London
- **apprenticeship** — the compelled, unpaid labour bound onto the "freed" from 1834 to 1838
- **stipendiary magistrate** — the British-sent official who refereed apprenticeship
- **Emancipation Day** — 1 August

Comprehension questions

1. List, with dates, the changes of sovereignty over Berbice between 1781 and 1803.

2. What did the Convention of London do, and when was it signed? What common error about its date does the book correct?
3. Explain why Berbice had no planter parliament, and what consequence this had when abolition came.
4. What happened on 1 August 1834, and why does the book say it is misleading to call that the end of slavery?
5. How much compensation was paid at abolition, to whom, and what did the freed receive?
6. Why does the author call 1838, not 1834, freedom's real date?

Discussion questions

1. "History is not always written by the winners; sometimes it is merely *filed* by them, and the filing outlives the winning." Discuss this claim using both the slave registers and, from Chapter Six, the interrogation transcripts of 1764.
2. The chapter says British rule changed "less than the flags suggest, and more than the planters wished." Weigh what changed against what stayed the same between 1803 and 1834.



Chapter Eight: Buying Back the Land — the Free Villages

What the chapter does

It sets out the Village Movement — how the freed people of Berbice, with no capital and no compensation, pooled savings and bought the plantations — and argues, with Walter Rodney, that this is not an epilogue to slavery but the opening act of Guyanese working-people's history.

The chapter's framing: the arithmetic of August 1838

The chapter begins by putting you inside it. You are free. You own "the clothes you stand in, the tools you have hidden or been given, and whatever coin you have scraped together across years of Sunday marketing, provision-ground sales, and the paid overtime of apprenticeship." You own nothing else. "The men who enslaved you have just been paid handsomely for losing you. Every acre in the county belongs to them, and their plan for you is simple: that hunger will march you back through the plantation gate on their terms."

Key points

- **The Village Movement.** "Between 1839 and roughly the end of the 1840s, ex-slaves executed one of the great acts of collective self-emancipation in the hemisphere: they pooled their savings — coin by coin, family by family, church congregation by church congregation — and bought the plantations."
- **The West Coast Berbice purchases — by 1840, four plantations passed into freed hands:**

Estate	Purchasers	Acres	Price
Golden Grove	14 labourers	500	\$1,716
St. John	46	252	\$5,000
Perseverance (eastern half)	109	250	\$2,000
Lichfield	Cudjoe McPherson , alone	500	\$3,000

- **Cudjoe McPherson** later cut Lichfield "into twelve sections and [sold] them on to other African families — freedman as developer, ten years out of bondage."
- **Hopetown.** The Perseverance purchase "grew into something more than a village": renamed **Hopetown** — "the transport, the title-deed, passed on **12 October 1840**, with the freedmen **Pompey Joseph** and **Jacob Wilson** among the named joint proprietors" — it became and remains "one of the flagship African villages of Guyana" (walked properly in Chapter Seventeen).
- **The second wave, 1842. Forty-five labourers bought Ithaca**, on the west bank of the Berbice River, **for \$15,000**. In the same season, on the coast east of the Canje, **fifty-two freed people bought the uncultivated Rose Hall estate** from its proprietor — "the purchase made final by the Chief Justice on **26 August 1842**" — seeding the community that "more than a century later, would become the town of Rose Hall, Corentyne."
- **The currency detail.** The dollars in these transactions "were British Guiana dollars of fifty pence sterling — a currency itself only months old, adopted by ordinance on the first of March 1839, so that the free villages were among the first things ever bought in it."
- **The staggering fact behind every figure.** "This was money saved *under slavery and apprenticeship*, by people the system was designed to keep propertyless forever."
- **Two architectures, both built in Berbice.** In the *communal* purchases — Hopetown's hundred and nine, Ithaca's forty-five — "the land was bought and held together, worked in shares, governed by meetings that were part vestry, part parliament: village democracy learned in church and practised on the land." In the *proprietary* purchases — Cudjoe McPherson's Lichfield — "one buyer took title

and sold on lots, and the village grew as a freehold neighbourhood of individual owners."

- **Why the paperwork mattered.** Both were experiments in "something the colony had never permitted before — Black Barbicians as principals, contracting, subdividing, bequeathing. The deeds mattered as much as the dirt. **A transport in your name could not be flogged out of you.**"
- **The pattern of founding.** A deputation to a proprietor or an auction; a name — "often a church deacon or a respected headman" — on the title; the land parcelled among subscribing families; "and then, before almost anything else, two buildings. **A church. A school.**"
- **What that reveals.** "The Village Movement was never only a land transaction; it was a declaration about what freedom was *for*." The villages "taxed themselves for teachers, built chapels that still stand along the West Coast road, and sent to school the first generation of Black Barbicians ever entitled to learn openly."
- **The counter-attack.** "The price of land was pushed up; Crown land was locked away; ordinances burdened the villages' drainage and title arrangements; and the estates began to look overseas for a new captive labour supply."
- **The cruellest enemy was water.** The freed had bought coastal estates "whose sea-defences and drainage had been maintained by the forced labour of hundreds; a village of smallholders, taxing itself, could rarely keep the same works. Floods broke many a village's farming ambitions and drove its men into wage work on the very estates they had left — which was, of course, part of the design of the ordinances."
- **The names.** "Some defiantly English and Scottish, some Biblical, some hopeful outright: Golden Grove, Lichfield, Ithaca, Hopetown, Belladrum." Some held only numbers, "for the old plantation survey numbers served freed African villagers and, later, time-expired Indian settlers alike as addresses." So "to drive the Corentyne and West Coast roads today is to read the Village Movement and indentureship written side by side — and sometimes on the same signpost — on the land itself."

- **The chapels as parliaments.** The denominations "mapped the movement's alliances: the **Congregationalists of the London Missionary Society**, whose martyred Demerara mission had made them freedom's church in the people's eyes; the **Methodists and Anglicans** with their schools; later the African-led congregations that answered to no mission board at all."
- **Where Guyanese democracy began.** Village government — "the meetings, the trustees, the levies for teacher and sexton — trained the first generation of Black Berbician public men and women, and the line from those vestry meetings to the county's councils, unions, and parliaments is direct. **Guyanese democracy did not begin in Georgetown. It began in the free villages, on benches the members had paid for twice.**"
- **The Liberated Africans.** Between **1841 and 1865**, "better than thirteen thousand 'Liberated Africans' — people taken from slave ships intercepted by the Royal Navy after abolition, and freed migrants routed through Sierra Leone, St. Helena, and Rio de Janeiro — were landed in British Guiana as indentured workers." **The very first of them came ashore at Berbice, from Rio, on 11 May 1841**, and numbers of those who followed went to the county's estates — **Blairmont, Balthyock, Canefield, Everton, Friends, Providence, Rose Hall** — "adding late, distinct African threads (Kru men among them) to the county's weave."
- **Rodney's reading.** **Walter Rodney**, "our martyred historian," taught us to see the Village Movement "not as an epilogue to slavery but as the opening act of the Guyanese working people's history — the first time the labouring majority of this land organised capital, land, and institutions in its own name." The chapter closes: "The proof is standing in the churchyards."

A note on disagreement in the sources

The book's note to the West Coast purchases records that one authority dates them "by 1839" and "names Providence rather than Perseverance as the fourth estate," while the figures given in the text follow Cecilia McAlmont's *Stabroek News* account as reproduced elsewhere, dating the four purchases to 1840. Where you cite these figures, cite them as the book does — as the best published account, not as a settled fact.

Terms introduced

- **the Village Movement** — the collective purchase of plantations by freed people, 1839 to roughly the end of the 1840s
- **transport** — the title-deed to land
- **communal purchase** — land bought and held together, governed by village meeting
- **proprietary purchase** — land bought by one proprietor and sold on in lots
- **British Guiana dollar** — currency of fifty pence sterling, adopted by ordinance 1 March 1839
- **Liberated Africans** — people freed from intercepted slave ships and routed to the colony as indentured workers, 1841–1865
- **London Missionary Society** — the Congregationalist mission the people regarded as freedom's church

Comprehension questions

1. Describe the position of a freed person in Berbice in August 1838 with respect to land, money and prospects.
2. Give the four West Coast Berbice purchases of 1840 with acreage, number of purchasers and price.
3. Distinguish communal from proprietary purchase, and give a Berbice example of each.
4. What two buildings did a new village put up first, and what does the chapter say that shows?
5. Name three ways the planters and the state fought the Village Movement, and explain why water was the villages' worst enemy.
6. Who were the Liberated Africans, when did the first of them land, and where?

Discussion questions

1. "A transport in your name could not be flogged out of you." Discuss why legal title mattered so much to people newly out of slavery, and what this suggests about the relationship between law and freedom.
2. The chapter claims: "Guyanese democracy did not begin in Georgetown. It began in the free villages." Assess this claim on the

evidence the chapter provides.



Chapter Nine: The Ships from Calcutta

What the chapter does

It tells the story of Indian indentureship in Guyana — which began, the chapter is careful to stress, on a Berbice riverbank before anywhere else — from the recruiting grounds of the Gangetic plain to the numbered villages of the Corentyne and the monuments of the present day.

Key points

- **5 May 1838.** Two sailing ships out of Calcutta made the coast of British Guiana: the *Whitby* and the *Hesperus*, "carrying between them a little under four hundred bound labourers — Indians recruited in the districts of eastern India for five years' work on the colony's sugar estates. Of that first company, sources agree, only about **twenty-two were women.**"
- **Where they landed.** The *Hesperus*'s people were landed in Demerara. **The *Whitby* sailed on into the Berbice River and anchored off Plantation Highbury**, on the east bank a few miles above New Amsterdam, "where some **hundred and sixty-four** immigrants recruited for Highbury and neighbouring Waterloo came ashore — a hundred and seventeen of them, eleven of them women, to Highbury itself."
- **The timing.** "Not four years after emancipation's first instalment, and three months before its second, a new bound labour system stepped ashore in this country — and it stepped ashore *here*, on a Berbice riverbank, before anywhere else."
- **Whose scheme it was.** **John Gladstone**, "absentee owner of plantations in the colony and father of a future British prime

minister," who had written to a Calcutta recruiting firm for labourers to replace the Africans whose apprenticeship was ending.

- **A word the book uses once and then refuses.** The first arrivals were called "Gladstone coolies" — "a term I set down once, in quotation marks, because it is in the documents, and never again, because the people it labelled have names, castes, faiths, and descendants, and because the word was flung at their grandchildren in this county's school yards within living memory." Follow this discipline in your own writing.
- **The scheme's stop-start history.** Reports of floggings and withheld wages on the Gladstone estates led to inquiries, and the traffic was **suspended in 1839**. It **resumed in 1845**, halted again, "and then ran continuously from **1851** until the system's abolition during the First World War."
- **The totals.** By the time the last indenture ships sailed, "some **239,909** Indians had been brought to British Guiana — **the largest number taken to any Caribbean colony** — of whom roughly **75,547, about a third**, eventually returned to India. The rest stayed, and remade this country." (*The chapter's note records competing figures — 238,979 arrivals with 65,538 repatriations in another account — and states plainly that "the figures are not reconciled in the literature."*)
- **The recruiting grounds.** The Gangetic plain, "in years of famine price and land hunger," where the recruiters — "the **arkatis** of a thousand family stories — worked the markets and pilgrimage roads with promises calibrated to the listener: good wages, light work, return passage, a land of sugar." The chapter's balanced judgment: "Some who signed knew exactly what they were choosing and why; some were misled about distances and terms in ways the system never much exerted itself to correct; nearly all were choosing against hard alternatives at home."
- **The machinery.** Sub-depots, the great depot at Calcutta, the surgeon's inspection, the ship's roster, the number. "The crossing to the Caribbean was among the longest labour migrations on earth — three months and more at sea — and the depot-and-ship machinery that managed it ran for eight decades."

- **What indentureship was.** "The honest answer is: **a contract, enforced like a crime.**" The immigrant signed — or thumb-printed — an agreement in India: five years' labour, wages fixed, housing, rations and return passage promised. The reality was "the plantation's old grammar with new vocabulary: the logics of slavery re-let to new tenants; wages docked by fines; and the law's whole weight bent to the employer, for under the labour ordinances an immigrant who missed work or left the estate without a pass faced not dismissal but *prosecution and jail.*"
- **The historians' quarrel, and the book's ruling.** Hugh Tinker's famous study named it "a new system of slavery"; Clem Seecharan and others insist "with equal force, on the migrants' agency — that these were people who made a hard, brave, calculated crossing in search of a life, not cargo." The book's resolution: **"Both truths belong in one sentence: the system was designed to exploit them, and they were never only its victims."**
- **The paperwork's geography.** Each immigrant carried a number and a ship; each estate kept registers of the bound and the free; and the office of the **Immigration Agent-General** — "the '**Crosby office,**' as the immigrants learned to call it after a sympathetic mid-century agent" — "stood as the one imperfect door where a bound labourer could lodge a complaint against a manager." The complaints are "their own archive of the system: wages short-paid, tasks over-set, hospital rations, the pass law's petty tyrannies."
- **Bechu.** "The Bengali-born labourer whose fearless letters to the colony's press in the 1890s, and testimony before a royal commission, exposed the estates' abuses from the inside; his writings, recovered and edited by Berbice's own Clem Seecharan, are the nearest thing the indentured generation left to Cuffy's letters." (*The notes record that Seecharan was born at Palmyra, East Canje.*)
- **The kala pani and jahaji.** They crossed the **kala pani**, the black water, in ships whose three-month passages "the migrants themselves organised into floating villages — and the shipboard bond of **jahaji**, shipmate, became a kinship term in Guyana as strong as cousinhood."
- **Who they were.** "Hindus of many castes and regions, Muslims, a scattering of Christians; mostly from the **Bhojpuri**-speaking

districts of what are now Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, with a later stream of **Tamil- and Telugu-speaking South Indians.**"

- **What they built among themselves.** "A creolised Indian culture — Bhojpuri songs setting Guyanese scenes, the Ramayana recited under bottom-house lamplight, tadjahs carried at Muharram with Hindu and African neighbours in the procession."
- **Caste, faith, food.** Caste "began a slow Guyanese dissolution: the ship's mess and the logie range fed everyone from the same pots, and the *jahaji* bond cut across lines no village in India would have crossed. **Faith travelled better than caste.**" The Ramayana and the Qur'an "crossed the black water in memory and in cloth-wrapped books; pandits and imams emerged from the ranks of cane-cutters." And food "crossed too, and conquered": roti and dhal, curries and achars married the coast's fish and fruit and became "within three generations, the shared table of every Berbician household of every ancestry — **the most complete victory any migration wins.**"
- **Why the Corentyne counts aloud.** As indentures expired, many time-expired immigrants "exchanged their right to a return passage for land, or bought and leased it," settling former estate lands along the hundred kilometres from New Amsterdam to the Corentyne River "in a string of villages that took, and keep, the plantations' old survey numbers." Hence **Number 19, Number 36, Number 43, Number 63, Number 78** — villages "named, or rather numbered, after their sugar plantations." The author adds personally: "my mother's family is from Number 19 Village, and no one in that family has ever needed the village to be called anything else for their chest to tighten at the sound of it."
- **The women of indenture.** The rosters ran heavily male from the first ships — "twenty-two women in that first four hundred" — and though regulation later pushed the ratios up, "women remained a minority through the scheme's whole life." Against a colonial file that "blamed every consequence on the women themselves," the recovered truth is "harsher and prouder: women who crossed the kala pani were disproportionately those with the most courage or the least to lose — widows escaping the pyre's shadow, wives escaping marriages, mothers gambling on a wage — and on the estates they worked the fields, kept the ranges, and negotiated their worth in a

world where their scarcity was both danger and leverage." The chapter's monument line: **"The Corentyne grandmother — sari-hemmed, iron-spined, absolute in her kitchen — is the system's unintended monument."**

- **What they built on the coast.** The rice industry "that fed the colony and half the Caribbean"; cattle on the savannah edge; shops; and "village by village, the mandirs and masjids that make the Corentyne skyline what it is — prayer-flags in the yards, the *jhandi* red and saffron against all that green, the Friday call and the Sunday bell within earshot of each other."
- **Shared festivals, honestly told.** "Phagwah's abeer and Diwali's diyas belong now to the whole county, as Christmas and Emancipation belong to the whole county. It did not happen without friction, and history should not pretend otherwise; but it happened, and it is the daily miracle a Berbician stops seeing until she goes away and comes back."
- **Festival as resistance.** The greatest of the estate festivals in the nineteenth century was **Muharram's tadjah**, "when the towering paper-and-bamboo tombs were drummed in procession to the water with Hindu and African workers marching alongside their Muslim shipmates. The processions unsettled the managers precisely because they dissolved the divisions the labour system priced." The chapter's line: "The estate could bind labour; it never quite managed to bind the calendar."
- **How the county remembers. Arrival Day, the fifth of May** — "Indian Arrival Day to most Berbicians, and there is a standing campaign to make that the official name" — has been a national holiday **since 2004**. A monument stands at **Highbury** where the *Whitby* and *Hesperus* landed. And in **2019, at Palmyra**, the national **Indian Arrival Monument** was unveiled: "six bronze figures by the Guyanese artists **Philbert Gajadhar** and **Winslow Craig**, a Hindu man, a Muslim man, a drummer boy, a woman with her bundle, a woman with her tawa, a man with cutlass and rice plant, facing the traffic of the coast their people built."
- **The least-told chapter: the return.** A third of the immigrants took the return passage — "the ships going back with savings sewn into waistbands, with Guyana-born children seeing India for the first

time, with returnees who found the villages of their memory changed or closed to them, some of whom re-migrated to the colony a second time."

- **What "India" became for those who stayed.** "Not an address but an inheritance — a grandmother's language fragments, a wedding's rituals, a name — held alongside an entirely Guyanese belonging. **The Corentyne does not pine for the Gangetic plain. It planted it.**"
- **The chapter's closing thesis.** "Two bound migrations, then, built modern Berbice — one African and stolen outright, one Indian and bound by contract and need — and a Village Movement and a numbered coast to answer them. Everything else in this county's modern history is the working-out of that inheritance."

Terms introduced

- **the *Whitby* and the *Hesperus*** — the first two indenture ships, arrived 5 May 1838
- **Plantation Highbury** — the East Bank Berbice estate where the *Whitby*'s people landed
- **indentureship** — "a contract, enforced like a crime"
- **arkati** — the recruiter who worked the markets and pilgrimage roads of eastern India
- **the "Crosby office"** — the immigrants' name for the Immigration Agent-General's office
- ***kala pani*** — the black water; the ocean crossing
- ***jahaji*** — shipmate; the shipboard bond that became a Guyanese kinship term
- **Bhojpuri** — the language of most of the migrants' home districts
- ***jhandi*** — the prayer-flag standing in Corentyne yards
- **tadjah** — the paper-and-bamboo tomb carried in procession at Muharram
- **time-expired** — an immigrant whose indenture had run out
- **Arrival Day** — 5 May; a national holiday since 2004

Comprehension questions

1. Give the date, the two ships, and the two landing places of the first indentured Indians in British Guiana. Where in Berbice did the *Whitby's* people come ashore?
2. Whose scheme was it, and whom was it designed to replace?
3. Why does the author use the word "coolie" once and then never again?
4. Give the arrival and repatriation totals for British Guiana, and state what the book says about how firm those figures are.
5. Explain what made indentureship "a contract, enforced like a crime." What did the labour ordinances do to a worker who left the estate without a pass?
6. How did the Corentyne come to have numbered villages?
7. Describe the Palmyra monument: year, sculptors, and the six figures.

Discussion questions

1. "Both truths belong in one sentence: the system was designed to exploit them, and they were never only its victims." Is it possible to hold Tinker's argument and Seecharan's together, or must a historian eventually choose? Argue your case.
2. The chapter says that of everything the migrants brought, food won the most complete victory. Weigh food, faith and language as vehicles of cultural survival, using the chapter's evidence.



PART FIVE: THE LANDS OF BERBICE



How Part Five works. The book pauses the chronology here and turns to geography. Its own introduction sets the plan: "History told by the calendar is only half the county. The other half is told by the land. This Part looks at Berbice whole — one body — and then dissects it, district by district... Whole first; then every part."

Chapter Ten: The Anatomy of Berbice

What the chapter does

It gives you the county entire — its rivers, its four landscapes, its climate, its drainage engineering, and its modern administrative divisions — before the district chapters begin. "Before we dissect, look at the body entire."

Key points

- **The extent.** Berbice is "the eastern third of Guyana: the old county running from the **Abary Creek** in the west to the **Corentyne River** in the east, and from the Atlantic mudflats southward into the deep interior."
- **"Its skeleton is water." The three great rivers:**
- **The Berbice** — the spine, rising in the highlands east of the Kanukus and running **595 kilometres** north to the sea at New Amsterdam, with Crab Island in its mouth.
- **The Canje** — the Berbice's chief tributary, "a long low-country river that shadows the coast behind the front lands before folding into the Berbice at New Amsterdam."
- **The Corentyne** — the border river, "whose western bank is Guyana and whose waters carry the traffic and kinship of two countries."
- **Two kinds of country.** "A narrow coastal plain of rich marine clays, much of it at or below the level of spring tides, where nearly all the people live; and behind it the immense quiet of white-sand hills, savannah, and rainforest that make up most of the county's actual area."

- **Guyana in miniature.** Region Six "alone contains parts of all four of Guyana's natural regions — coastal plain, sand-and-clay belt, savannah, and forested highland — and the old county as a whole is Guyana in miniature."
- **The four countries, south to north.** "First the deep forest, riverine and unhurried, where the bauxite bush and the Amerindian villages keep the interior; then the white-sand belt with its scrub and savannah islands, **the old shore of an ancient sea**; then the intermediate savannahs of the middle rivers, cattle country flirting with agriculture; and at last the young coastal clay, barely above the tide, carrying nearly everything the census counts. Four landscapes, four economies, one county — **stacked like the layers of a black cake.**"
- **How settlement followed the anatomy.** The Dutch came for rivers, "because rivers were roads, defences, and drainage all at once," planting their first capital deep on the Berbice and stringing plantations along both rivers "like beads on two threads." The British "turned the county to face the sea," and the sugar coast became its face. "Emancipation scattered free African villages along the coasts and banks; indentureship filled the Corentyne front lands; bauxite pulled a twentieth-century thread of settlement far up the Berbice itself."
- **The climatic clock.** "Two wet seasons and two dry ones divide the Berbician year — the long May–July rains and the shorter December wet, with their answering dries — and everything in this book that grows, floods, grinds, or celebrates keeps that four-beat rhythm." The rains "fill the trenches, test the kokers, and green the savannahs"; the dries "harden the dams, ripen the rice, and bring the salt tide creeping up the rivers." And: "Berbicians do not so much discuss the weather as negotiate with it, and the negotiation is the county's oldest continuous conversation."
- **The county lives below the sea, on purpose.** "From the Dutch polders to the modern schemes, the habitable coast is a made thing — front dams against the ocean, back dams against the flood-water of the savannahs, and between them the drained rectangle where the villages stand."

- **The koker as coat of arms.** "The **koker** — the sluice-gate whose black hulk stands at every village outfall — is the county's true coat of arms: opened at low tide to let the land's water out, shut at high tide to keep the ocean's out." Every generation "has paid the water its tax in labour and loss, from the enslaved gangs who threw up the first dams by shovel, to the free villages that drowned for want of drainage money, to today's regional engineers watching a rising sea." The chapter's image: "**Berbicians live like the Dutch who first ruled them: on land borrowed from the water at compound interest.**"
- **The administrative carving.** The county "was subdivided into districts when counties ceased to be units of government in **1958**," and **since 1980** old Berbice has lain across three of Guyana's ten regions:
- **Region Five (Mahaica–Berbice)** — includes the West Coast of Berbice
- **Region Six (East Berbice–Corentyne)** — "the largest of Guyana's coastal regions and the third largest in the country," holding New Amsterdam, the Canje, the East Bank, the Corentyne and the whole eastern watershed
- **Region Ten (Upper Demerara–Berbice)** — its riverain south, where the bauxite settlements of the upper Berbice lie
- **The names decoded.** "Mahaica–Berbice and East Berbice–Corentyne are simply the county's own compass points in administrative dress, and Upper Demerara–Berbice acknowledges that the deep interior belongs to two rivers at once."
- **Region Six's scale.** "Thirty-six thousand square kilometres, the third largest region in the country and the only one that contains all four of Guyana's natural regions — which is why a single regional administration answers for coconut estates, university lecture halls, cattle savannahs, and rainforest logging camps in the same morning's correspondence."
- **The county outlived its abolition.** "No Berbician has ever introduced herself as being from Region Six. The county outlived its own abolition; 'Berbice' remains the address of the heart."

- **The self-portrait to be tested.** The county thinks of itself — "this is documented nowhere and known everywhere" — as "the settled, deep-rooted end of Guyana: the county of long memory, old churches and older mandirs, of cricket nurseries and examination results, of the slow answer that turns out to have been the considered one. The chapters that follow test that self-portrait against the record, part by part."

Terms introduced

- **Abary Creek** — the county's western boundary
- **front dam / back dam** — the sea defence and the flood defence enclosing the drained coastal rectangle
- **polder** — the Dutch-derived drained enclosure the coast is built on
- **koker** — the sluice-gate; "the county's true coat of arms"
- **the white-sand belt** — "the old shore of an ancient sea"
- **intermediate savannahs** — the cattle country of the middle rivers
- **Region Five (Mahaica–Berbice), Region Six (East Berbice–Corentyne), Region Ten (Upper Demerara–Berbice)** — the three modern regions across which old Berbice lies

Comprehension questions

1. Name the county's three great rivers and give one distinguishing fact about each.
2. Working from south to north, name the four landscapes the chapter says you pass through, and what each is used for.
3. Explain how a koker works and why the chapter calls it the county's coat of arms.
4. Describe the Berbician year's four-beat climatic rhythm.
5. When did counties cease to be units of government in Guyana, and which three regions does old Berbice now lie across?

Discussion questions

1. "Berbicians live like the Dutch who first ruled them: on land borrowed from the water at compound interest." Discuss what this

metaphor claims about the cost and the risk of coastal life — and what "compound interest" adds that "borrowed" alone would not.

2. "No Berbician has ever introduced herself as being from Region Six." Why do administrative boundaries so often fail to replace older identities? Is that a problem for government, or a resource?



Chapter Eleven: New Amsterdam

What the chapter does

It walks the county town — its two foundations (upriver, then at the river's mouth), its Dutch layout, its institutions, its schools, its famous children, and its mornings — and weighs the claim that it is Guyana's oldest town.

Its opening

*"Every Berbician has two addresses: their village, and 'town.'
Town needs no other name."*

Key points

- **The town began upriver.** By **1733** a village of craftsmen's houses had grown up around Fort Nassau, "and the name Nieuw Amsterdam came to attach to that little capital in the bush."
- **The re-founding.** When the fort was burned in the great rising and the colony's centre of gravity slid seaward, the government followed: in **1785** the capital was re-founded on the flats beside **Fort Sint Andries**, at the meeting of the Berbice and the Canje, and **by about 1790** the new New Amsterdam was the seat of government of Berbice.
- **Dutch bones.** The Dutch laid it out "as Dutch towns are laid out — long rectangular blocks between drainage canals — and though most of the canals have since been filled or culverted, the town still drains, thinks, and floods along Dutch lines."
- **The Winkel Department.** A special public works office organised in **1812** to keep the town's fabric in repair; "its name survives in the

Winkel district."

- **Town status, 1891.** New Amsterdam "celebrated the 120th anniversary of its town charter in 2011," and for a century was "the second town of British Guiana, the place the county came to for court, hospital, market, and secondary school." (*The book's note flags the precise charter date for archival verification.*)
- **Mission Chapel.** The Congregational church founded through the missionary **John Wray in 1815** — "its first chapel consecrated in 1819, the present building finished around 1841" — was "by its tradition the first church in the colony to open its doors fully to enslaved people, with no separate seating: a building in which the county's African Christianity stood up straight for the first time." It stands at Main and Chapel Street, a listed heritage building.
- **New Amsterdam Public Hospital.** Begun in late **1881** to the designs of **Cesar Castellani**, "the Maltese-born architect of British Guiana's Public Works Department," and substantially complete by **1884**; "celebrated as a timber architectural masterpiece." The hospital moved to new premises in **2005**, "and the old building's slow decay and the campaign to save it are a running sore and a running cause in town."
- **The civic furniture.** The **Town Hall**, "a Victorian confection with its tall tower"; the great town market by the water, "better than twenty-six thousand square feet of talk and trade"; the courts in the old colony buildings; the water works and the little botanical gardens. The chapter notes that a newspaper's anniversary list of landmarks — "hall, market, court, gardens, swing bridge" — could be recited back by "any New Amsterdammer... with corrections and an anecdote per item."
- **Berbice High School.** Began on **5 September 1916** as a boys' school of **nine pupils** meeting on the ground floor of a Presbyterian manse — the residence of the **Rev. J. A. Scrimgeour** — with **C. A. Pugsley** as first headmaster. A girls' school followed, "and 'BHS' became one of the great secondary schools of the colony, feeding the professions with Berbicians for a century."
- **New Amsterdam Secondary.** "'Multi,' in the mouths of my generation, from its multilateral origins" — opened **1975**.

- **Examination results.** "The town has long punched far above its weight in the national examinations lists, a fact every New Amsterdam parent will volunteer unprompted."
- **Edgar Mittelholzer.** Born in New Amsterdam on **16 December 1909**; wrote his first novel, ***Corentyne Thunder***, in **1938** while working odd jobs in the town. Published in **1941**, it was "the first novel by a Guyanese author to reach an international audience," and Mittelholzer went on — "through the Kaywana books and two dozen others — to become the English-speaking Caribbean's first professional novelist, living by the pen alone until his death in **1965**."
- **Other children of the town.** The soprano **Jill Gomez** — "born on Main Street's side of the century in 1942, dead as this book went to press in August 2026" — and the novelist and scholar **David Dabydeen**, "Berbice-born and registered at New Amsterdam." "For a small town, New Amsterdam has seeded the world's stages and faculties generously."
- **The town's layered faith.** "The old established churches along the central streets, the mosques and mandirs serving the town's Muslim and Hindu families, the newer evangelical halls at full Sunday volume — all within one small grid, all with Berbician congregations several generations deep."
- **The legal capital.** "New Amsterdam has been the county's legal capital since the Dutch, and the profession this author practises in is one of the town's oldest continuous trades."
- **Life orbits the water.** The stelling and the **ferry to Rosignol** "ordered the town's mornings for generations until the **Berbice Bridge opened in December 2008** a little downstream"; the **Canje Bridge** at the town's eastern entrance "carries the county's other great artery over the Canje River."
- **Population.** The **2022 census** counted **14,762** people in the town proper, "though the working town — the town of schools, stores, clinics, and courts — serves many times that number."
- **"Guyana's oldest town"?** The chapter weighs the claim: "it is defensible with a lawyer's care: as a continuously administered urban settlement descending from a Dutch seat of government, New Amsterdam's line runs back past any rival's. Georgetown, the upstart capital, is younger; the Essequibo settlements are older but did not

persist as towns." And then, with characteristic candour: "The town treats the argument as settled, and this book — written by a New Amsterdam attorney — declares its interest and moves on."

- **The morning choreography.** Market women setting out greens and fish; speedboats warming across to the west bank; "school uniforms in every direction by seven; the courts' gowned traffic by nine; and over it all the river, wide and unbothered." The chapter's claim: "New Amsterdam's mornings have kept the same choreography through five flags, and watching one is the cheapest history lesson the county offers."
- **The town's character.** "Dutch bones, Victorian timber, tropical weather, and a wry, unhurried civic temperament that the rest of Guyana teases as slowness and Berbicians know to be pacing. A town that has been burned upriver, rebuilt at the river's mouth, reflagged four times, and flooded more times than the almanac can hold learns to take the long view."

Terms introduced

- **Winkel Department / Winkel district** — the 1812 public works office, and the district that keeps its name
- **Mission Chapel** — the 1815 Congregational church, by tradition the first open to the enslaved with no separate seating
- **Cesar Castellani** — Maltese-born architect of British Guiana's Public Works Department; designer of the old Public Hospital
- **BHS** — Berbice High School, founded 5 September 1916
- **"Multi"** — New Amsterdam Secondary, from its multilateral origins, opened 1975
- ***Corentyne Thunder*** — Mittelholzer's first novel, written 1938, published 1941

Comprehension questions

1. Give the two foundations of New Amsterdam, with dates and places, and explain what moved the town from the first site to the second.
2. What is a Winkel, in the New Amsterdam sense, and what year does the name date from?
3. Why is Mission Chapel important in the county's religious history?

4. Give the founding details of Berbice High School: date, size, place and first headmaster.
5. Who was Edgar Mittelholzer, and what is *Corentyne Thunder's* place in Guyanese literary history?
6. On what grounds does the chapter defend the claim that New Amsterdam is Guyana's oldest town — and what interest does the author declare?

Discussion questions

1. The author openly "declares her interest" as a New Amsterdam attorney when assessing the oldest-town claim. Does declaring bias strengthen or weaken a historian's authority? Compare with the disclosure practice you would expect of a lawyer or a judge.
2. "New Amsterdam's mornings have kept the same choreography through five flags." What kinds of historical continuity survive political change, and what kinds do not?



Chapter Twelve: The Canje

What the chapter does

It follows the county's most historically dense water — "no water in Guyana carries more history per mile" — from its odd geography through 1763, Baracara, sugar, the bridges, and the national bird.

Its opening image

"If the Berbice is the county's spine, the Canje is its long green nerve."

Key points

- **A river that runs beside the sea.** "Rising in the wetlands far to the southeast, it travels a long, looping course roughly parallel to the coast, gathering the drainage of the back-country behind the Corentyne front lands, and surrenders to the Berbice at New Amsterdam — the Berbice's principal tributary, and the town's eastern moat."
- **The Dutch second corridor.** Low banks and slow water made the Canje "a natural second plantation corridor: estates lined the Canje as they lined the big river, growing cotton, coffee, and above all sugar on land that the river both watered and threatened."
- **The Torani Canal.** In the twentieth century engineers cut the **fourteen-mile** canal "to lead water from the Berbice River across into the Canje, so that in dry seasons the big river itself tops up the little one to irrigate the cane and rice of the east — the two rivers formally joined at last." (*The book's note flags the canal's construction date for archival verification — do not supply a date*)

you cannot source.)

- **Where 1763 began. Plantation Magdalenenberg**, up the Canje, "is where the 1763 Rising began on **23 February** — the first estate in what is now Guyana where the enslaved overthrew their masters and held the ground."
- **The geography of the rebellion.** Rebellion travelled *down the Canje* — "estate to estate along the corridor, then across to the Berbice — because the Canje was a road, and the people who worked it were its masters in every sense that mattered."
- **Baracara.** A few miles from old Magdalenenberg, deep on the river, stands **Baracara** — "known also by its Dutch plantation name **Wel te Vreeden** — the only maroon village in Guyana, settled in the early nineteenth century by Africans who had freed themselves and holding, by its own firm tradition, descendants of the 1763 generation." A village of "a hundred-odd households, reachable by boat, farming and logging and intermarried into one large family, Baracara is the Canje's living archive."
- **Shamar Joseph.** In **January 2024** Baracara "gave the West Indies a fast bowler: **Shamar Joseph**, who grew up in Baracara bowling with whatever the fruit trees provided, and whose Gabba spell against Australia put his river village into the world's sports pages overnight."
- **The Canje's doubleness — the chapter's key idea.** "Highway in front, hiding-ground behind." The immense reedy backlands "made the river a refuge as well as a road... the same geography that let the estates prosper let the rebellion of 1763 spread and, afterwards, let the free hide."
- **The engineers' running argument.** "Balancing the estates' thirst against the villages' dry-season water, the Torani's transfusions against the salt tide pushing up from the mouth."
- **Rose Hall Estate, Canje.** "Not to be confused with the coastal town of Rose Hall" — one of the Guyana Sugar Corporation's great Berbice estates, "some **3,800 hectares** of cane in the East Canje district." It was **closed at the end of 2017** amid a national restructuring of the sugar industry "that idled thousands of Berbice workers, and was formally **reopened in September 2023**, with over a thousand workers rehired and replanting under way —

grinding again, to the audible relief of the Canje villages that live by its pay-packets."

- **The East Canje villages. Palmyra** — "at the junction where the national Indian Arrival Monument now stands" — **Cumberland**, and their neighbours. Palmyra is the birthplace, in **1950**, of the historian **Clem Seecharan**, "who left the Canje to become the leading chronicler of the Indo-Guyanese experience."
- **The 1891 Canje Bridge.** "A swing bridge of iron and concrete **342 feet** long, designed by **Hawks and Hayter** and built by the London firm **Joseph Westwood & Company** in **1891** for about **\$25,000** — was reckoned one of British Guiana's finest engineering works of its century: its pivoting centre span opened about **four times a day** to let vessels through, then was swung shut by hand."
- **The present Canje Bridge.** By the mid-twentieth century the old bridge was a bottleneck; work on its successor began in **October 1976**, and the present two-lane bridge at New Amsterdam's entrance opened on **23 February 1978** — "Republic Day, the Canje's own anniversary, a coincidence of dates no Berbician needed explained."
- **The name, and the missing monument.** The estate appears as **Magdalenenberg** and **Magdalenenburg** — "'Magdalene's hill' or 'Magdalene's fortress,' by a clerk's whim — and Guyanese usage has kept both." The estate is long gone; "no monument stands on the Canje bank where the county's greatest story began, a fact several generations of Berbician letter-writers have pointed out to several generations of governments. **The river remembers regardless.**"
- **The hoatzin — the Canje Pheasant.** *Opisthocomus hoazin*, Guyana's **national bird**: "a crested, copper-and-chestnut leaf-eater a good two feet long," nesting over the water "from around April to September." Its chicks "are born with claws on their wings, a trait so archaic that scientists reach for the phrase 'living fossil,'" and "its leafy diet ferments in a digestive system more like a cow's than a bird's." It was along the Canje that the bird was first widely known, and it still keeps colonies "along the Berbice, Canje, Abary, Mahaicony, and Mahaica."
- **Why the bird fits.** "Guyana chose for its national bird neither the eagle nor the macaw but this improbable, prehistoric survivor of the Berbice backwaters — and a Berbician finds that entirely fitting:

unglamorous, ancient, impossible to dislodge, and at home in the low country."

- **Eco-tourism.** Journeys up the Canje for the hoatzin colonies and the maroon village are "among the county's small eco-tourism offerings, boats going up at first light when the bird-noise is loudest and the water is glass. The visitors photograph the pheasants; the wise ones also listen to the boatman, whose commentary is usually better history than the guidebooks."
- **The chapter's closing.** "From Magdalenenberg to Baracara to the cane-punts of Rose Hall to the bird on the national coat of arms, the Canje is the county's history in one river. Cross the bridge slowly."

Terms introduced

- **Torani Canal** — the fourteen-mile cut carrying Berbice River water into the Canje for irrigation
- **Baracara / Wel te Vreeden** — Guyana's only maroon village, on the Canje
- **Rose Hall Estate, Canje** — the GuySuCo sugar estate (distinct from the Corentyne town of the same name)
- **hoatzin / Canje Pheasant** (*Opisthocomus hoazin*) — Guyana's national bird
- **swing bridge** — the 1891 Canje bridge type, its centre span pivoting open by hand

Comprehension questions

1. What is geographically unusual about the Canje's course?
2. Explain the Canje's "doubleness," and show how it shaped both the plantations and the events of 1763.
3. What is Baracara, what else is it called, and what does its own tradition hold about its founding?
4. Give the history of the Rose Hall Estate at Canje between 2017 and 2023.
5. Compare the 1891 Canje Bridge and its successor: dates, builders, form and opening date.
6. Describe three unusual biological features of the Canje Pheasant.

Discussion questions

1. No monument stands where the 1763 rising began. Should there be one? Argue the case, using what the chapter says about how the Canje remembers without one.
2. "Guyana chose for its national bird neither the eagle nor the macaw but this improbable, prehistoric survivor." What does a nation say about itself in choosing its symbols? Test the chapter's reading of the hoatzin against the 1763 Monument in Chapter Six.



Chapter Thirteen: East Bank Berbice — Mara, Edinburgh, Sisters

What the chapter does

It walks the county's oldest inhabited corridor — the ribbon of villages running about twenty miles up the east bank of the Berbice toward the old Dutch heart — and shows it as a place of layered arrivals: Dutch estates, free African villages, the first indentured Indians, and the bauxite wage-workers.

Key points

- **The corridor.** Leaving New Amsterdam southward "with the river on your right hand," you enter "a ribbon of villages threaded on a road about **twenty miles** long, running up the river toward the old heart of the Dutch colony." It is "the district that connects modern Berbice to its beginnings — **the road points at Fort Nassau, even though it no longer reaches it.**"
- **The neck between two rivers.** Here the Berbice and the Canje "run their closest parallel, with the East Bank villages on the front lands of the big river and the Canje winding through the backlands behind them." Old estate maps show the same double frontage — "plantations facing the Berbice, their provision grounds and drainage reaching back toward the Canje basin" — and the **Torani Canal**, cut across that neck far upstream, is "the modern engineering expression of a connection the geography always implied."
- **Highbury.** It was up this bank, at **Plantation Highbury**, "that the *Whitby* landed the first Indian indentured immigrants to set foot in what is now Guyana, on **5 May 1838**; the **Highbury Monument**

marks the landing, and Arrival Day pilgrimages still come to the spot the district never let the nation forget."

- **The Village Movement here too.** After emancipation freed African families brought the Village Movement to the East Bank and river estates: "the **1860 registers of 'plantations and Negro villages'** record the transformation of old estate land into free settlements along this bank as along the coasts."
- **A corridor of layered arrivals.** "Dutch estates first; then the free African villages of the 1840s; then, from 1838 onward, the indentured Indians of Highbury and the river estates; and in the twentieth century the bauxite economy's wage-workers, settling where the ore met the river." The result is "the county's characteristic weave at its tightest — church, masjid, and mandir sharing a mile of road" — and its people are "as likely to name their district by its estates ('Highbury side,' 'Mara side') as by any map."

The three villages, taken upriver

- **Edinburgh** — about **five miles** from New Amsterdam. It "wears its two eras in its own layout: an older 'village' section, and a newer section **surveyed in 1953** that everyone calls 'the scheme.'" Population "of nearly two thousand," thoroughly mixed. Its economy is "the East Bank's twentieth-century story in miniature: cattle and rice on the front and back lands, and, for decades, wages from the bauxite industry, for the East Bank hosted the coastal works of the **Berbice Mining Enterprise (BERMINE)**, whose now-silent plant in the Edinburgh/Everton area once transshipped the ore that came down from **Kwakwani**." The plant's closure "pushed the village back onto its farms; disputes over grazing land converted to rice have tested it since." (*The book's note records that BERMINE's East Bank plant "is usually placed at Everton, adjacent; a point flagged for archival verification."*)
- **Sisters** — "the name is said in the plural and felt in the singular." Farther up the corridor, with "just over **250 residents**," it ranks as "the most populous village of the Upper East Bank: two churches and a masjid within a few rods of each other, a police station, a post office, shops, and a reputation for diversity and deep green gardens." It stands on Village-Movement ground: "ex-apprentices bought plots

here in the first freedom generation, and the village has renewed itself on that foundation ever since."

- **Mara** — near the corridor's upper end, it "closes the sequence and opens the past." In the nineteenth century Mara was a working sugar plantation — "the 1860 registers list it under the merchant house of **Cavan Brothers & Co.**" — and by the century's end had become "a cradle of something new: it was at Mara, in **1898**, that the colony's **Farmers' Association** was founded, an early organisation of independent small farmers that spread from this riverbank to Demerara and Essequibo."
- **Beyond Mara.** "The road thins and the river country begins; the traveller bound farther south goes by water, as every traveller on this river has for five thousand years."

Further key points

- **The river as second road.** Speedboats and workboats run the reaches above Mara "for the farms, the logging grants, and the river villages, and the occasional history-minded charter goes all the way to the bricks of Fort Nassau — a journey every Berbician should make once, if only to feel how far from the sea the county's story starts."
- **Arrival Day at Highbury.** "Every fifth of May the corridor briefly becomes the country's centre... wreaths go into the river for the dead of that first crossing and the speeches are made where the gangplanks once ran." The rest of the year the monument's quiet field is "the corridor's true register — a place where a passing East Bank farmer can stand where his or her great-great-grandparents first touched Guyana's ground."
- **An honest present.** "The corridor has felt every closure the county has felt — the estates, the bauxite plant, the emigration of its young people. But it remains what it has always been, **the county's taproot**: the district where the first indentured immigrants landed, where freed villagers bought their ground, where the road to Fort Nassau begins, and where the Berbice and the Canje run close enough that one district drinks from both."

Terms introduced

- **front lands / backlands** — the river-facing cultivated strip and the country behind it
- **"the scheme"** — Edinburgh's newer section, surveyed 1953
- **BERMINE (Berbice Mining Enterprise)** — the bauxite concern whose East Bank plant transshipped ore from Kwakwani
- **the Highbury Monument** — marker of the 5 May 1838 landing
- **the Farmers' Association** — founded at Mara in 1898

Comprehension questions

1. How long is the East Bank corridor's road, and what does the chapter say it points at?
2. What happened at Plantation Highbury on 5 May 1838, and how is it commemorated?
3. What are Edinburgh's two sections, and what does each represent?
4. Why is Sisters notable despite its small size?
5. What was founded at Mara in 1898, and why does it matter?

Discussion questions

1. The chapter calls the East Bank "the county's taproot." Test that claim against the district's present condition, which the chapter admits is "quieter than its past."
2. Villagers here name their district by its estates — "Highbury side," "Mara side." What does it mean for a community to keep using the vocabulary of the plantation system long after the estates are gone?



Chapter Fourteen: East Coast Berbice — the Coast Between

What the chapter does

It tackles a district "whose name is an argument," explains why "East Coast Berbice" and "the Corentyne" overlap in ordinary speech, and then walks the first belt of coastal villages east of the Canje.

Its opening

"Every county has a district whose name is an argument, and in Berbice it is the East Coast."

Key points

- **Why the name is contested.** "The name is a survivor from an older map." In the records of the plantation colony, "the seaboard east of the Berbice River as far as the Corentyne estates was the county's **East Sea Coast**, a naming that put villages we now casually call 'Corentyne' under an East Coast heading; and an **East Coast Berbice Village District** survives to this day as an administrative division of Region Six."
- **What usage did to the map.** "In everyday speech, however, the Corentyne — the name of the far river — long ago marched westward along the road and annexed nearly the whole coast, so that a village ten miles from New Amsterdam and forty from the border river will tell you serenely that it is 'on the Corentyne.'"
- **The book's ruling.** "The blur is real, and this book will not pretend to rule where a century of usage has not."

- **The numbered series begins.** Leaving New Amsterdam over the Canje Bridge, past the Palmyra junction, the road enters "the county's most famous piece of arithmetic": **Number One Village**; then **Courtland**, which is also Number Two; **Fyrish**, also Number Three; and the paired **Kilcoy** and **Chesney**, "the western and eastern halves of Number Four."
- **What the doubled names mean.** "An old estate-survey number for the land, and a living name for the community — Scottish estate names, in this stretch, remembering the Highland and Lowland proprietors and attorneys of the cotton-and-sugar coast."
- **Village-Movement country.** **Fyrish**, **Gibraltar** and **Courtland** "appear in the registers of villages established by freed Africans after emancipation, part of the same great land-buying wave that built Hopetown and Ithaca on the county's other coast; Indian families settled among and beside them out of the estates in the indenture generations."
- **Fyrish today.** "About **eleven miles** from New Amsterdam and **three from Rose Hall Town** — counts its African and Indian households as one village, with churches, mosques, and a mandir along the same few streets, a health centre, schools, and the NDC office for the cluster."
- **The belt's economy.** "Rice, cash crops, cattle, shopkeeping, and wages from the estates east and the town west" — "a braid of small holdings: cane cut for the estates east and west of it, rice on the back lands, cattle on the dams, provision gardens behind the houses, and the fish and shrimp of the foreshore."
- **Why no closure ever emptied it.** "No single industry ever owned this coast outright, which is precisely why no single closure ever emptied it: when cane retrenched, the rice and the gardens held; when the fishing thinned, the shops and the minibuses carried on." The chapter's joke, which is also its argument: "**The economists call it diversification. The East Coast calls it Tuesday.**"
- **Gibraltar.** "Fyrish's twin in the old registers, shares its NDC and its history: African-founded, Indian-joined, farming still."
- **The day's rhythm.** Set by the road — "school-children streaming toward Fyrish's schools at seven, the produce trucks staging at dawn, the rum-shop and snackette commerce of late afternoon — and by the

sea-dam at its back, where the Atlantic mutters behind the courida the way it has since the first estate ditched this frontage."

- **The district's character.** "The East Coast is the county's commuting coast: near enough to New Amsterdam for school and market, near enough to the Corentyne estates for work, claimed by both and fully neither."
- **The coast's deep grammar — learn this pattern.** "The façade of sea-dam, road, house-lots, and cultivation running back to the middle-walk and the backdam, a pattern repeated, with variations, from the Canje to the border. **The plantations laid that grammar down; the free villages conjugated it.**"
- **Where the history is actually being written.** "It is in the NDC minutes, the school registers, and the census rolls that this coast's continuous history is actually being written, year by unnoticed year."
- **The chapter's declared gap.** "A dissection must be honest about its thinnest slice: the East Coast's written record is the sparsest of any Berbice district — its villages appear in the registers, the newspapers' Sunday village features, and the census lists, but **no historian has yet given this belt its own book. Consider that a standing invitation.** The coast between deserves better than to be a place cars pass through on the way to somewhere with a bigger name."

Terms introduced

- **East Sea Coast** — the plantation colony's name for the seaboard east of the Berbice River
- **East Coast Berbice Village District** — the surviving administrative division of Region Six
- **doubled names** — a survey number plus a living village name (Courtland/No. 2, Fyrish/No. 3, Kilcoy and Chesney/No. 4)
- **NDC (Neighbourhood Democratic Council)** — the local authority grouping the belt's villages into paired and clustered districts
- **middle-walk / backdam** — the inland elements of the coastal settlement pattern
- **courida** — the shore vegetation behind which the Atlantic "mutters"

Comprehension questions

1. Why does the chapter say the name "East Coast Berbice" is an argument? Give the historic name and the surviving administrative one.
2. Name the first four numbered villages east of the Canje and give the living name attached to each number.
3. Which language and which history do the estate names in this stretch come from?
4. Explain the "deep grammar" of the coast from the sea inland.
5. Why has no single industrial closure emptied this district?

Discussion questions

1. The chapter openly states that this district has the sparsest written record of any in Berbice and calls that "a standing invitation." What would a historian actually need to do to write the East Coast's book? What sources does the chapter suggest already exist?
2. "The plantations laid that grammar down; the free villages conjugated it." Discuss what is inherited and what is transformed when free people settle on the physical layout of a plantation.



Chapter Fifteen: The Corentyne

What the chapter does

It walks the county's heartland — "a hundred kilometres of villages between New Amsterdam and the border river, where a majority of Berbicians live" — explaining the numbered villages, the twice-made economy, the great estate villages, cricket, the university campus, and the river that is "less a border than a neighbourhood."

Key points — the numbers

- **The Corentyne counts.** Its villages carry numbers, "Number One up into the eighties as the road runs east, the series ending at **Number 81** before Crabwood Creek's grants begin."
- **Why.** "The numbers are older than the villages: they are the **survey numbers of the plantation lots** into which the colonial coast was divided, so that when estates were cut up, sold, or settled, the lot number simply became the address."
- **The variations.** Some villages kept only the number; some kept a name and a number both — "Courtland is Number Two, Fyrish Number Three"; far east, "villages like **Number 78** sit where estates latterly owned by the **Booker** sugar combine once stood"; and on the West Coast of Berbice the same logic ran, "for the plantations that became **Hopetown** were **Numbers 16 through 19** of that coast's series before freedom renamed them." (*The book flags the series' precise termini for archival verification.*)
- **What a number carries.** "A stranger hears a postal code; a Corentyne person hears a village with a face."

- **Number 19 Village.** On the lower Corentyne — "my mother's village, the village of my grandmother's kitchen" — "to its people not a number but a nation: rice land and cattle, a line of shops on the road, prayer flags and a church tower against the same sky."
- **A methodological statement worth studying.** "The written record of Number 19, like that of most numbered villages, lives in survey plans, census rolls, and family memory rather than in books; this book records the system that named it and leaves its inner history where it is safest — with its people, one of whom is writing this sentence."
- **The book's one page of eyewitness.** The author allows herself "one page of eyewitness in a book of citations": on a morning while the chapter was being written, on the dam at Number 19, she watched "a horse grazing the savannah edge and, in the trench beside the road, spur-wings — the wattled jacanas, on their absurd elegant toes — walking from lily-pad to lily-pad across water crowded with pink blooms, so lightly that the pads barely bowed." Her line on evidence: **"Some facts you verify in archives. Some you verify by going home."**

Key points — the economy made twice, then a third time

- **Sugar made it first.** The great estates — **Rose Hall** on the coast, **Albion**, **Port Mourant**, **Skeldon** — "organised the land, imported its African and then its Indian labour, and left behind both the villages and the habit of collective work."
- **Rice made it second.** As indentures expired, time-expired families took up rice land, "and the Corentyne became and remains Guyana's rice coast, its mills and combines and autumn-gold fields feeding the nation and the Caribbean."
- **The third act: Black Bush Polder.** "A great state-led empoldering of swampland behind the coast, opened in the **late 1950s and early 1960s**, which settled thousands of farming families on new rice and provision land and remains one of the largest agricultural settlement schemes in Guyana's history — its waters managed, fittingly, with help from the Torani Canal's transfers out of the Berbice."

Key points — the villages

- **Rose Hall (town).** "The little commercial capital of the lower coast, began as an estate bought in **1842** by **fifty-two freed Africans** — some accounts say fifty-seven — the sale confirmed by the Chief Justice on **26 August** that year — one of the earliest Village-Movement purchases in the colony — was gazetted a **village in 1908**, and was raised to **town status in 1970**."
- **Albion.** "Eighteen kilometres east of New Amsterdam," it "gave its name to a constellation of settlements — **Hampshire, Nigg, Chesney, Belvedere** and more — around the Albion sugar estate, established in the second half of the nineteenth century and today one of GuySuCo's principal Berbice estates."
- **Port Mourant** — "**which requires a deep breath.**" This one former plantation, "with its **Free Yard** and **Bound Yard** and **Miss Phoebe** and **Tain** settlements," produced:
- **Cheddi Jagan**, born at **Ankerville, Port Mourant, on 22 March 1918**, "the eldest of eleven children of estate workers, who became **Chief Minister in 1953, Premier from 1961 to 1964, President of Guyana from 1992 until his death in 1997**, and by common consent — across every party line — one of the founders of the Guyanese nation";
- and, "from the same few streets and the estate's cricket ground," the West Indies Test cricketers **Rohan Kanhai** (born at Plantation Port Mourant, **26 December 1935**), **Basil Butcher** (1933–2019), **Joe Solomon** (1930–2023 — "the man whose side-on throw made the Brisbane Tied Test of 1960 immortal, and who scored **201 not out** in Berbice's inaugural first-class match"), the leg-spinner **Ivan Madray**, and in the next generation **Alvin Kallicharran**, born at Port Mourant in **1949**. (*The book flags Kallicharran's precise birth-village for archival verification.*)
- **Why one village?** "Sociologists have theories... the estate's disciplined communal life, the cricket ground at its centre, the hunger of the logies' children. Port Mourant people have a shorter explanation: **is we place.**"

Key points — cricket, university, crop time, the port

- **Cricket as structure, not pastime.** "It is one of the culture's **load-bearing walls**. Every village of consequence keeps its ground, every estate kept its team, and the long chain of Saturday matches — hard tennis-ball games on the dams, leather-ball club cricket on the greens — is the ladder on which the Port Mourant generation climbed to Test cricket." The advice to a visitor: "skip the museum (there isn't one) and stand at a boundary's edge on a Sunday afternoon: the whole society is present, participating, and audibly of one opinion about the umpire."
- **UG Tain.** In **November 2000** the University of Guyana opened its **Berbice Campus at Tain**, between Port Mourant and the border villages — "**the first university campus outside Georgetown's orbit**, built so that Berbician students no longer had to migrate for a degree; a teaching block followed in **2002** and a science centre in **2006**, and 'UG Tain' is now simply part of the coast's furniture, its graduates staffing the county's schools, wards, and offices."
- **Crop time on the rice coast.** "Twice a year the fields turn from flooded mirror to green baize to harvest gold; the combines move village to village like a slow parade; the paddy trucks queue at the mills; the dams are spread with drying grain, and every conversation is yield, moisture, and price." It is "an economy, but it is also a calendar and a culture — the Corentyne's festivals, weddings, and building projects all breathe with the paddy cycle, as the coast's earlier life once breathed with cane."
- **Corriverton.** In **1970** the twin settlements of **Springlands** and **Skeldon**, with their satellite numbered villages, "were joined as the town of **Corriverton** — the Corentyne River Town — Guyana's easternmost town, facing Suriname's **Nieuw Nickerie** across the river; the Skeldon estate's factory anchors its economy." (*The 1970 township instrument date is flagged for archival verification.*)
- **The river as neighbourhood.** "Berbician and Surinamese families trade, marry, shop, and worship across it, the ferry from **Moleson Creek** carries the formal traffic, and the river's own long history — **claimed entire by Suriname, used jointly in fact** — is lived daily with a pragmatism the diplomats have never quite matched."
- **Orealla and Siparuta.** Up the river, "some **fifty miles** from the mouth," stand the river's two Amerindian villages — "**Lokono and**

Warrau of old, joined now by Kalina, Wapishana, and Macushi families — where the **chalk-white cliffs** gave Orealla its Arawak name and where the county's first peoples keep their own riverbank, farming, logging, and receiving the coast's visitors on their own terms."

- **The polder country.** Behind the front villages: "Black Bush's settlements with their Amerindian-sounding and Dutch-sounding names, rice to every horizon, the straightest roads in Guyana running between dams — a landscape that looks, not accidentally, like **the Netherlands with egrets.**"
- **Crabwood Creek.** At the far end, past Corriverton, it "closes the settled coast: the last villages before the bush, timber and rice and the river trade, with Suriname's lights across the water at night. Beyond that, the road simply stops, and the county's oldest transport — the boat — resumes its ancient monopoly."
- **The coast's texture.** "Fish from the **Number 66 wharves**; sea-bathing and horse-racing sand at the **Number 63 Beach**, the coast's great lime; tassa at a Corentyne wedding heard three villages away; the dawn convoy of combines in crop season."
- **The chapter's conclusion — the book's own summary of itself.** "This coast — numbered by planters, peopled by the emancipated and the indentured, fed by rice, schooled with ferocity, and stitched to a neighbouring republic by a shared river — is **the completest single expression of what Berbice is.**"

Terms introduced

- **survey number** — the plantation lot number that became a village address
- **Black Bush Polder** — the great state empoldering scheme of the late 1950s–early 1960s
- **Free Yard / Bound Yard** — settlement names at Port Mourant
- **Corriverton** — the Corentyne River Town, formed 1970 from Springlands and Skeldon
- **Moleson Creek** — the ferry point for formal traffic to Suriname
- **Orealla and Siparuta** — the Corentyne's two Amerindian villages

- **UG Tain** — the University of Guyana's Berbice Campus, opened November 2000
- **lime** — the Guyanese term for a gathering; used here of Number 63 Beach

Comprehension questions

1. Explain the origin of the Corentyne's numbered villages. Where does the series end?
2. Describe the three phases of the Corentyne's economy, with approximate dates for the third.
3. Give Rose Hall town's three constitutional dates and say what happened at each.
4. List the people of Port Mourant named in this chapter and what each is known for.
5. When and where did the University of Guyana open its Berbice Campus, and why was it built?
6. What is Corriverton, when was it formed, and from which two settlements?
7. Who lives at Orealla and Siparuta, and how far up the river are they?

Discussion questions

1. The author permits herself "one page of eyewitness in a book of citations" and defends it: "Some facts you verify in archives. Some you verify by going home." When is personal testimony legitimate evidence in a history, and what safeguards should surround it?
2. "Cricket on this coast is not a pastime laid over the culture; it is one of the culture's load-bearing walls." Using Port Mourant as your case, discuss how sport can function as a social institution rather than a leisure activity.



Chapter Sixteen: West Bank Berbice — Ithaca and the River's Other Shore

What the chapter does

It crosses the river to a short shore that holds, side by side, "the three institutions that built modern Berbice": a crossing-place, a great sugar estate, and a great free village.

Key points

- **The other shore in every sense.** The West Bank faces New Amsterdam "but belong[s] to Region Five, tied to the town by ferry and then by bridge."
- **Rosignol and D'Edward.** "The twin river-mouth settlements where, for generations, the county changed vehicles." **Rosignol** was "the eastern terminus of the coastal railway from Georgetown and the western terminus of the New Amsterdam ferry: train to Rosignol, ferry across, and you were in town — a rhythm that ordered Berbician travel for most of a century."
- **The end of both.** The line to Rosignol **closed in 1970** — "the Berbice end going two years before the rest of the railway" — and the ferry yielded, in **December 2008**, "to the Berbice Bridge just downstream, whose western approaches rise from the D'Edward shore." The villages' stelling is "now a memory-word for everyone over thirty." (*The chapter's note flags the exact railway dates for archival verification.*)
- **The railway's place in the record.** "The line reached Rosignol between **1897 and 1900**, the eastern end of a railway that had opened at Georgetown in **1848** as **the first in South America**; its

closure in 1970 ended the trains but not the terminus habit: Rosignol remains the place where the county's traffic gathers itself before the crossing, bridge or no bridge."

- **Who caught that train.** "Schoolboys to college, market women to Stabroek, patients to the public hospital — and the platform's rhythm organised the west bank's whole day."
- **Blairmont.** "Two miles south of Rosignol... the west bank's engine: a Guyana Sugar Corporation estate whose history runs back into the early nineteenth century, when this riverbank carried plantations under proprietors like **the Blairs** — the same planter family whose West Coast cotton estates the freed people of Hopetown would buy."
- **How Blairmont was assembled.** The estate's shares — **Balthyork, Zorg-en-Hoop, and Bush Lot** — "were pulled back together over half a century: **Harry Davson** bought Blair's share, Balthyork, in **1880** and gave it the name Blairmont, and acquired the remaining two in **1934**." (*The notes record that "spellings of the share names vary in the sources."*)
- **Blairmont as continuity.** "The factory's smoke in crop time is visible from New Amsterdam across the river, and generations of west-bank and West Coast families have measured their years in its crops." When restructuring closed estates elsewhere in Berbice, "Blairmont's survival kept the west bank's pay-packets alive — a fact its communities do not treat as luck but as a covenant to be defended."
- **Ithaca.** "A name that belongs beside Hopetown and Victoria in the first rank of Guyana's free villages." In **1842**, in the second wave of the Village Movement, **forty-five freed African labourers pooled fifteen thousand dollars** — "money saved out of bondage and apprenticeship — and bought the plantation on this bank which they made into Ithaca."
- **The arithmetic the chapter asks you to hold.** "Fifteen thousand dollars, in 1842, four years after full freedom, from forty-five people whom the law had until lately counted as property. Divided out, it is a fortune per family; pooled, it was **a nation-founding act**."
- **What Ithaca became.** "Its church congregations, its school, its farm lots running back from the river — has held its ground ever since: flooded, drained, planted, emigrated from, returned to, and

never surrendered. Ithaca today is a farming village of the Region Five riverbank, and **one of the addresses in Guyana where Emancipation is not a holiday but a title-deed.**"

- **The bridge and its politics.** "Built as a public-private concession, tolled from the first day, its charges a standing grievance of the commuting county until the government assumed control of the bridge company in **2018** amid a dispute over toll increases." The book's own principle: **"for three centuries, whoever controls the Berbice crossing holds the county's daily life in trust, and the county has never once been shy about saying so."**
- **The third thread: movement.** "For a century the west bank was where Berbice met the rest of the colony — cattle punts and produce boats working the river, the coastal road funnelling everything to the Rosignol waterside, the ferries shuttling schoolchildren, clerks, market women, and hearses." The bridge "changed the choreography but not the fact: the west bank remains the county's hinge to Georgetown, the first Berbice a traveller from the capital touches and the last they leave."

Terms introduced

- **Rosignol / D'Edward** — the twin river-mouth settlements of the West Bank
- **Blairmont** — the GuySuCo estate assembled from the Balthyork, Zorg-en-Hoop and Bush Lot shares
- **Harry Davson** — the purchaser who named Blairmont in 1880 and completed it in 1934
- **Ithaca** — the free village bought in 1842 by forty-five labourers for \$15,000
- **public-private concession** — the arrangement under which the Berbice Bridge was built and tolled

Comprehension questions

1. Describe the journey from Georgetown to New Amsterdam before 1970, and name the two things that ended it.
2. When did the Georgetown railway open, and what is its distinction?

3. How was the Blairmont estate assembled? Give the shares, the purchaser, and the two dates.
4. Give the full details of Ithaca's purchase, and explain why the author calls it "a nation-founding act."
5. What happened to the Berbice Bridge company in 2018, and why?

Discussion questions

1. "Whoever controls the Berbice crossing holds the county's daily life in trust." Trace this principle from the Dutch river-fort to the tolled bridge. Is it a claim about geography or about power?
2. Ithaca is called an address "where Emancipation is not a holiday but a title-deed." Discuss the difference between commemorating freedom and inheriting it.



Chapter Seventeen: West Coast Berbice — the Freedom Coast



What the chapter does

It walks the ground described by the deeds of Chapter Eight. "If the Corentyne is the county's granary, the West Coast is its **charter-room**: no district in Guyana holds more founding documents of Black freedom per mile of road."

Key points

- **The extent.** From the west bank of the river the coast road runs toward Georgetown "through the county's western limb: the West Coast of Berbice, the shore of Region Five, running from the river mouth to the Abary."
- **Its own number series.** "This coast has its own plantation-number series, distinct from the Corentyne's" — and the numbered lots "alternate with the names freedom gave."
- **The freedom villages on the road.** **Golden Grove**, bought by fourteen labourers in the Movement's first wave; **St. John**, bought by forty-six; **Lichfield**, "the 500 acres that Cudjoe McPherson bought alone for \$3,000 and then subdivided and sold to other freed families — **the county's first Black land developer**"; and **Hopetown** itself.
- **The symmetry of local government.** "The coast that once answered to plantation attorneys now answers to a regional democratic council seated on a former plantation, in a village named for a vanished fort, serving villages named by freedmen. Guyanese local government is not usually accused of poetry, but the West

Coast's arrangement of names comes close."

Hopetown — "the long pause"

- **What it was.** Before 1838, "the eastern half of Plantation Perseverance — earlier still, cotton lots **Numbers 16 through 19** of this coast, property of the planter **James Blair**."
- **The purchase.** In **1840**, "one hundred and nine freed African labourers bought those **250 acres** for **two thousand dollars**; the transport — the title-deed — passed on **12 October 1840**, with **Pompey Joseph** and **Jacob Wilson** among the named joint proprietors."
- **The evidence of change.** "By **1841** a magistrate was reporting to the Governor on the 'neat cottages' rising where the logies had stood."
- **The name.** "The village tradition says the name changed when a passing governor remarked that the place was 'hoping to be a town'; the people took the hope and kept it." (*The book's note is explicit: "The governor's-remark story is village tradition, reported as such." Cite it that way.*)
- **A disputed count, flagged.** The note records: "The purchaser count is not settled: Stabroek News gives 109 for the whole purchase; sapodilla press gives 49 for the St Paul's section alone, Hopetown comprising the St Paul's and Firebrace sections."
- **The Soiree.** Hopetown is "one of the great custodians of African-Guyanese heritage: its **Soiree** — the Emancipation-season festival of drum, dance, food, and remembrance — has been kept and revived across the generations, and the village stands on the National Trust's registers as living patrimony."
- **What the Soiree is like.** "The drums opening at dusk, the ring games and **queh-queh** songs whose call-and-response the village's founders would recognise, the tables of **conkie and metemgee and cook-up**, the elders pouring memory as libation."
- **Why revival matters.** "The festival lapsed and was revived more than once across the twentieth century — **villages, like languages, must be spoken to live** — and its current keepers are explicit that what they are maintaining is not entertainment but inheritance."

The rest of the coast

- **Belladrum** — "another of the freedom villages of this shore, keeps the same covenant in a quieter key."
- **Bush Lot** — "the West Coast's biggest village... a predominantly rice-farming, largely Indo-Guyanese community — **the indenture stream's western outpost** — whose mills and machine-sheds serve the whole shore."
- **Bath** — on the old Bath Estate, "mixes market gardens (the coast's **celery and shallot** come famously from Bath's beds) with estate history." It was English planters living at Bath Estate who in **1830** founded **St. Michael's Anglican Church**, at the back of Fort Wellington village along the old railway line. When that first church outgrew itself the planters moved it to the roadside, "and the building completed there in **August 1842** was then **the only Anglican church in West Berbice** — the one all the coast from Belladrum to Rosignol walked or rode donkey-carts to reach."
- **Fort Wellington** — "the district keeps its seat of government" here: the village, "built on the former **Plantation Catherina's Lust** and named for the small British fort of the Napoleonic era that once stood where the police station later did," is today "the administrative capital of Region Five."
- **Blairmont's reach.** Its cane lands and out-offices "reach into this coast, and West Coast wages have crossed that river both ways for two hundred years."
- **The smaller numbered villages.** "At **No. 5 Village** the road-facing economy runs from rice and cash crops to food stalls and water-coconuts; at **No. 42 — Seafield to its own people** — the features writers find the same peaceable countryside formula: school, churches, rice, cattle, and a cricket ground in shouting distance of the sea-dam." The chapter's image: "**Names and numbers alternate down the road like the county's two histories taking turns to speak.**"
- **The modern coast.** "Rice, cattle, and the road: the Georgetown highway remade the coast's economy around movement, and its villages send produce west to the capital and children everywhere."

- **The deepest export.** "When Guyana wants to show what emancipation's first generation did with nothing but wages, faith, and each other, it points here — to a coast where **the villages' very names are receipts.**"

Terms introduced

- **Soiree** — Hopetown's Emancipation-season festival of drum, dance, food and remembrance
- **queh-queh** — the call-and-response song tradition sung at the Soiree
- **conkie, metemgee, cook-up** — the festival's foods
- **James Blair** — the planter who owned cotton lots Nos. 16–19, which became Hopetown
- **Plantation Catherina's Lust** — the former estate on which Fort Wellington stands
- **Seafield** — the village name for No. 42

Comprehension questions

1. Why does the author call the West Coast the county's "charter-room"?
2. Give Hopetown's full founding facts: previous name, lot numbers, previous owner, number of purchasers, acreage, price and transport date.
3. What does the book say about the story of how Hopetown got its name — and how should you cite it?
4. What is the Soiree, and why does the chapter stress that it has been revived more than once?
5. Name the West Coast's largest village and describe its economy and community.
6. What is Fort Wellington, what was it before, and what is it now?

Discussion questions

1. "Villages, like languages, must be spoken to live." Discuss what active practice — as opposed to preservation or record-keeping — contributes to the survival of a culture. Bring in Chapter Eighteen's

account of Berbice Dutch when you have read it.

2. "The villages' very names are receipts." Consider what it means for a community to carry its own proof of purchase in its name, and compare with the numbered villages of the Corentyne, where the name is the planter's arithmetic.



Chapter Eighteen: The Upper River — Kwakwani, Ituni, and the Bauxite Bush

What the chapter does

It completes the dissection with the limb the coast forgets: the upper Berbice and its bauxite country. It also closes two of the book's long arcs — the antiquity of the middle river, and the death of Berbice Dutch.

Its opening principle

"The dissection is not complete at the last coastal village, because the county is not."

Key points

- **Geology drew the map.** "The white-sand plateau between the Demerara and the Berbice holds some of the richest bauxite — aluminium ore — in South America, and in the twentieth century it pulled roads, rails, and settlements deep into country the coast had ignored since the Dutch left it."
- **Kwakwani, 1942.** "In the middle of the war that made aluminium a strategic metal, a bauxite mine was opened on the upper Berbice at **Kwakwani**, and a company settlement grew on the riverbank around it." The industry's capital rose on the Demerara side, "at the town now called **Linden**," but its eastern arm reached the Berbice.
- **The production line.** "Ore barged down the Berbice was handled at the industry's East Bank Berbice plant at **Everton**, near Edinburgh — tying the quiet corridor of Chapter Thirteen into a production line that ended in the smelters of the northern hemisphere." (*The plant's precise siting is flagged for archival*

verification.)

- **The corporate saga.** "Foreign companies, nationalisation in the 1970s, the state's **GUYMINE**, and — when that colossus was dissolved in **1992** — a Berbice inheritor, the **Berbice Mining Enterprise (BERMINE)**, running Kwakwani and Everton; then a joint venture at neighbouring **Aroaima**, formed in **1989** with **Reynolds International** of the United States, and from **2004** the Russian aluminium giant **RUSAL's Bauxite Company of Guyana**, which took over the Aroaima operations and worked the Kwakwani–Aroaima district until they ceased amid disputes in **2020** — with a restart approved in the national budget of **2026**."
- **The human pattern behind the acronyms.** "Good company years of wages, water, and light; hard years when the company changed or left; and a community — Kwakwani's few thousand people, proudly riverine, mixed African, Amerindian, and everything Berbician — that has outlasted every owner, turning to logging, farming, and the river between bauxite seasons."
- **The journey upriver as time travel — memorise this passage.** "To go up the river today is to run the county's whole history backwards: the bridge, then the town, then Highbury's monument, then the East Bank villages thinning, then Fort Nassau's silent bricks, then hours of forest broken by logging landings and farm clearings, then Dubulay's dark earths under their grass, and at last the ore-red wounds and settlements of the bauxite country. **A day's travel, five thousand years, one river.**"
- **Ituni.** West of Kwakwani, on the old mining railway line from the Demerara side, "a village the industry built and logging now sustains": the **Demerara Bauxite Company** drilled this country in the **1930s**, opened the **Mackenzie–Ituni rail line in 1946** — "workers' trains ran on it into about 1980, and the villagers of Ituni and Coomacka rode them" — and when the mines' focus moved on, "Ituni's people stayed, organised their small loggers' association, and kept the settlement alive on timber and grit."
- **Administration versus history.** "Kwakwani and Ituni answer today to **Region Ten**, whose seat is Linden; but they stand on Berbice water and in Berbice's history, and the old county's dissection would be dishonest without them — **the upper river is the limb**

the coast forgets, and it is still attached."

- **The heritage argument that closes the county's circle.** "The mound-fields and dark earths of the middle Berbice — the earthwork legacy of the river's first farmers — are older by a thousand years and more than any fort or bridge on the National Trust's register of national monuments, and **they are still waiting for the state's formal recognition.** The county's built heritage does not begin at Fort Nassau. It begins upriver, and it begins in soil."
- **Company-town life.** "The sirens and shift-whistles ordering the day, the company water and company light, the launch coming up from town with pay and post, cricket and dances in the community centre, and the river always at the door — highway, larder, and swimming hole in one."
- **What the settlements ask.** Region Ten's own accounting "counts better than **forty-five thousand** people in the wider bauxite region between the two rivers, and every family among them can name the year the good times paused; what the settlements ask of the new oil-rich Guyana is what mining towns everywhere ask — **that the country remember them between booms.**"
- **The oldest and newest Berbice.** "The upper Berbice today is Amerindian villages and mining camps, logging concessions and untouched forest, the Dubulay dark earths and the memory of Fort Nassau's bricks — the oldest and newest Berbice sharing one water."

The death of Berbice Dutch — the arc begun in Chapter Two

- **Where it went.** "Berbice Dutch, born in the logies of the Dutch estates, retreated upriver with the descendants of the river people."
- **The rediscovery.** It "was still being spoken quietly along these banks in the **1970s** when the linguist **Ian Robertson** found it — to the astonishment of a scholarly world that thought it long dead."
- **The record.** **Silvia Kouwenberg** "wrote its grammar in **1994.**"
- **The last speaker.** "Its last known speaker, **Albertha Bell**, was interviewed at the age of **103** in **March 2004** and died the following year."

- **The end.** "In **2010** Berbice Dutch was declared officially extinct — **the only language ever born in this county, gone home to the river that made it.**"

The close of Part Five

"Every part has now had its say: town, Canje, East Bank, East Coast, Corentyne, West Bank, West Coast, and the upper river. The body is whole. What remains is to ask how it is faring — today."

Terms introduced

- **bauxite** — aluminium ore; the upper river's twentieth-century industry
- **GUYMINE** — the state mining colossus, dissolved 1992
- **BERMINE (Berbice Mining Enterprise)** — the Berbice inheritor, running Kwakwani and Everton
- **Aroaima** — the neighbouring joint-venture operation, formed 1989 with Reynolds International
- **Demerara Bauxite Company (DEMBA)** — the company that drilled the Ituni country in the 1930s
- **Mackenzie–Ituni rail line** — opened 1946
- **Ian Robertson** — the linguist who found Berbice Dutch still spoken in the 1970s
- **Albertha Bell** — the last known speaker of Berbice Dutch

Comprehension questions

1. Why did settlement reach the upper Berbice in the twentieth century when the coast had ignored that country for so long?
2. Give the sequence of owners and operators of the Kwakwani–Aroaima bauxite district from nationalisation to 2026.
3. What is Ituni, who built it, and what sustains it now?
4. Set out the argument the chapter makes about the National Trust's register of monuments.
5. Trace the history of Berbice Dutch from its birth to its official extinction, with dates and names.

Discussion questions

1. "What the settlements ask of the new oil-rich Guyana is what mining towns everywhere ask — that the country remember them between booms." What obligations, if any, does a resource economy owe to the communities its earlier booms built?
2. "The county's built heritage does not begin at Fort Nassau. It begins upriver, and it begins in soil." Why might a heritage register find it easier to list a fort than a field? What would it take to change that?



PART SIX: BERBICE NOW



Chapter Nineteen: The County Today



What the chapter does

It brings the story to the present — population, economy, bridge, campus, calendar, institutions, diaspora — and states plainly both the challenges and the grounds for confidence. Its opening: "Histories are supposed to end at a respectful distance from the present, but a verandah story ends with the people on the verandah."

Key points

- **Three regions, three towns.** The county lives across three regions and under three town councils — **New Amsterdam, Rose Hall, and Corriverton** — "which makes Region Six the only region in Guyana with three towns."
- **Population.** The Region Six heartland counted **114,574** people at the **2022 census**, "with the West Coast's share of Region Five and the upper river's share of Region Ten beyond that."
- **The economy.** "The country's agricultural east — rice above all, sugar at Albion and Blairmont and again at Rose Hall, cattle on the savannah edges, coconuts, cash crops, and the Atlantic's fish — now stirred by the national oil economy that has, since production began offshore in **December 2019**, set money, road-building, and expectation moving through Guyana at a pace **no Berbician grandmother entirely trusts.**"
- **The Berbice Bridge.** Opened **23 December 2008**: "**1,571 metres** of floating steel — among the longest pontoon bridges in the world — built at a cost near **forty million US dollars**, ending three centuries of ferry mornings and knitting the county's two shores into one commuting, trading whole."

- **The campus.** "What the bridge did for bodies, the Tain campus does for minds: since November 2000 the University of Guyana's Berbice Campus has meant that a rice farmer's daughter from Number 19 or a miner's son from Kwakwani can take a degree without leaving the county — and the campus marked its twenty-fifth year in **2025**."
- **The county's calendar.** "**Mashramani** in February, when the republic remembers that its date is the Canje's; **Phagwah** and **Diwali** sweeping the Corentyne in colour and light; **Eid** from the masjids of Sisters and the coast; **Emancipation** in August, with Hopetown's Soiree drumming on the freedom coast; **Arrival Day** in May at Highbury and Palmyra; **Christmas** everywhere, with pepperpot — the Amerindians' cassareep still at the bottom of every pot, **five thousand years on duty**."
- **Cricket and examinations.** "Cricket remains the county's second religion, from Port Mourant's storied ground to the Baracara boy who bowled his way from the Canje to the Gabba; and the examination lists still read like a Berbice telephone directory, a fact the county mentions with a modesty entirely insincere."
- **New Amsterdam's commerce.** It hums "along Main Street, the Strand, and the market stelling in a mixture very old — third- and fourth-generation family firms — and very new. Among the town's family businesses, the **Little Rock** enterprises that grew from **Vryman's Erven** into hotels and one of the region's earliest television stations are part of that ordinary, durable fabric."
- **The town's true wealth.** "An unbroken civic memory. The old hospital's timber shell still argues for its restoration; Mission Chapel still opens its unsegregated doors; the 1763 anniversaries still summon the county to the monuments."
- **The institutions.** The regional hospital in modern premises since **2005**, "with the old Castellani building standing beside it **like a conscience**"; schools multiplied; the Tain campus; the courts; the regional administrations at New Amsterdam and Fort Wellington; the NDCs. The verdict: "None of it is grand by world standards; all of it, measured against where this county started — **a fort, a whip, and a ledger** — is a civilisation built by its own people in five generations of legal freedom."

- **The diaspora — "now one of the county's largest villages."** "Beginning in the hard decades of the late twentieth century, Berbicians left in tens of thousands — for Georgetown first, then New York and Toronto and London, nurses and teachers and whole church congregations transplanted to Queens and Scarborough. **They did not so much leave the county as stretch it:** remittances built half the new houses on the coast, barrels arrived like clockwork before September and Christmas, and the county's weddings, funerals, and jhandis are scheduled to the northern school calendar."
- **The four challenges, stated plainly.** (1) "Sugar's long retrenchment has wounded estate communities and their recovery is unfinished"; (2) "the coast lives below sea level in a warming century, and **every koker and sea-dam is now a climate front line**"; (3) emigration has scattered a diaspora "whose remittances and returns shape every village"; and (4) "the border river's diplomacy proceeds, as ever, more slowly than its fishermen."
- **The grounds for confidence.** "A county that survived 1712, 1763, 1764, floods, flags, and the abolition of its own administrative existence in 1958 is entitled to its confidence. **Berbice's specialty, on the record of three and a half centuries, is outlasting.**"
- **The historian's modest hope.** "Continuity of the things that have already survived everything. That the estates and rice lands keep their people in dignity through whatever the oil century brings; that the sea-defences hold and the kokers keep their appointments with the tide; that the schools keep their ferocious standards and the campus at Tain keeps its lights on; that the monuments — the bricks upriver, the chapel in town, the bronze governor in the capital — keep their tongues; and that the children of the diaspora keep finding the road home in August. None of that is guaranteed. All of it, on the record of this book, is likely."

Comprehension questions

1. Which three towns does Region Six contain, and why is that unusual?
2. Give the Berbice Bridge's opening date, length, cost, and what it replaced.

3. What does the chapter say the Tain campus makes possible, and how does it pair it with the bridge?
4. List the four challenges the chapter names, and say why the koker is called a climate front line.
5. What does the chapter mean by calling the diaspora "one of the county's largest villages"?

Discussion questions

1. "Berbice's specialty, on the record of three and a half centuries, is outlasting." Is endurance an achievement or merely a description? What would it take for the county to do more than outlast?
2. The chapter's hopes are all hopes for *continuity*, not for transformation. Is that the right ambition for a county entering an oil economy? Argue both sides.



Epilogue: The Verandah

What the epilogue does

It returns the whole book to the place its knowledge came from — the bottom-house and verandah at Number 19 Village — and states the relationship between family memory and archive that has governed every chapter.

Key points

- **The setting.** "My grandmother's house at Number 19 Village stood on stilts, like every sensible house on that coast, and the space beneath it — the **bottom-house** — was the true family room: cool clay, a hammock, the smell of rice paddy and cow and rain coming."
- **How history was named there.** "Nobody on that verandah used the word *history*. They said: **in the Dutch time**. They said: **when free came**. They said: **when the ships came, when the estate close, when the water take the crop, when your uncle them gone away.**"
- **What the book claims to have done.** "The whole of this book was on that verandah in fragments — Cuffy's name said like a psalm, the numbers of the villages recited like a rosary, the bridge argued about before it was built — and **I have done nothing here, really, but check the fragments against the archives and put them in order.**"
- **The verdict on family memory.** "The verandah was right far more often than it was wrong. Where it was wrong, it was wrong the way families are wrong about themselves: **in the direction of love.**"

- **Two verandahs.** Between the Number 19 verandah and a town one in New Amsterdam "lies the whole anatomy this book has dissected: a county built by peoples who did not choose each other — Lokono and Warrau and Kalina; Dutch and British; the stolen of Africa; the indentured of India; and all the later comers — and who have made, out of no choice at all, **a home that chooses itself daily.**"
- **What the checking felt like.** "Every archive that held a Berbice name — the Dutch transcripts, the British registers, the immigration rosters, the village transports, the newspaper files — held it because someone thought our county worth writing down; and **every gap in the record marked a place where only the verandah had kept the account.** Scholarship and verandah, notes and voice: a county needs both of its memories, and this book has tried to hold them in one binding."
- **The book described in one line.** "If you are a Berbician, this book is **your family album with the captions checked.**"
- **The closing invitation.** "The county that raised me asks its visitors only one thing, the thing it has asked of every arrival for four hundred years: **stay long enough to be from here.**"

Discussion questions

1. The Epilogue names the two kinds of memory the book has used — archive and verandah — and insists a county needs both. Where might they conflict, and what should a historian do when they do?
2. "Where it was wrong, it was wrong the way families are wrong about themselves: in the direction of love." How should an oral-history researcher handle a source that is affectionately inaccurate?



APPENDICES



The Timeline



The book supplies its own timeline. Below is that appendix, reproduced in the book's own dates and wording so that you study from the source and nothing else. Dates the book does not give are not here — do not fill them in from elsewhere.

Date	Event
c. 3000 BC	Radiocarbon dates place settled human life on the middle Berbice about 5,000 years before the present; deep <i>terra preta</i> soils accumulate at Dubulay and neighbouring sites
c. AD 200	Marked intensification of agriculture, mound-building and raised fields among the ancestors of the Lokono (Arawak) on the Berbice
1595–96	Raleigh's Guiana voyage and book draw European eyes to the "Wild Coast"; Dutch traders begin working the Guiana rivers
1627	Abraham van Peere of Vlissingen plants the colony of Berbice; Fort Nassau established c. 88 km above the mouth
1665	English attack on the colony repelled (Second Anglo-Dutch War)
14 Sept 1678	Berbice chartered as a hereditary fief of the Van Peere family
Nov 1712	French raid under Jacques Cassard; Fort Nassau bombarded; colony ransomed
Oct 1714	Amsterdam merchants pay the ransom; ownership passes from the Van Peeres
Autumn 1720	Society of Berbice floated as a public company on the Amsterdam exchange

Date	Event
1733–38	Village grows at Fort Nassau; schoolmaster and Dutch Reformed minister appointed (1735); first two Moravian brethren admitted to a private estate (1738)
1762	Colonial census: 346 Europeans, 3,833 enslaved Africans, 244 enslaved Amerindians. A revolt on the Canje is suppressed
23 Feb 1763	The Berbice Rising begins at Plantation Magdalenenberg on the Canje
27 Feb 1763	Rising spreads to Hollandia; Cuffy of Lelienburg emerges as leader and is proclaimed Governor of Berbice
Early Mar 1763	Peereboom siege and massacre; Fort Nassau abandoned and burned on van Hoogenheim's order
28 Mar 1763	The <i>Betsy</i> arrives from Suriname with 100 soldiers; Dutch remnant holds Dageraad
2 Apr 1763	Cuffy's letter to van Hoogenheim proposes partition of the colony
13 May 1763	Rebel assault on Dageraad repulsed by cannon and ships
Oct 1763	Atta's challenge prevails; Cuffy dies by his own hand (reported 19 October)
1 Jan 1764	Six ships and c. 600 soldiers arrive from the Netherlands
Mar–Apr 1764	The last captains taken — Accabre in March, Atta on 15 April; the rising is over. Trials and executions follow; c. 1,800 rebels dead in all
1781–1803	Colony changes hands repeatedly: British (1781), French (1782), Dutch again, British (1796), Dutch (1802), British finally (Sept 1803)
1785	Capital moved downriver to New Amsterdam, beside Fort Sint Andries; seat of government by c. 1790
13 Aug 1814	Convention of London cedes Berbice, Demerara and Essequibo to Britain

Date	Event
21 Jul 1831	The three colonies merge as British Guiana
1834 (1 Aug)	Slavery abolished; "apprenticeship" begins
1838	The colony is divided into three counties; Berbice keeps its name and bounds
5 May 1838	The <i>Whitby</i> and <i>Hesperus</i> reach British Guiana with the first Indian indentured immigrants; the <i>Whitby</i> lands hers at Plantation Highbury
1 Aug 1838	Full freedom
1840–42	Village Movement purchases on the West Coast: Golden Grove, St. John, Perseverance/Hopetown (transport 12 Oct 1840), Lichfield; then Ithaca and Rose Hall (both 1842)
1838–1917	c. 239,909 Indian indentured immigrants reach British Guiana; about a third later return to India
1841–65	Over thirteen thousand Liberated Africans landed; the first arrive at Berbice from Rio de Janeiro on 11 May 1841
1881–84	New Amsterdam Public Hospital built to Cesar Castellani's design
1891	New Amsterdam attains town status; the Canje swing bridge is built
1898	Farmers' Association founded at Mara, East Bank Berbice
1908	Rose Hall (Corentyne) gazetted a village
5 Sept 1916	Berbice High School founded
22 Mar 1918	Cheddi Jagan born at Port Mourant
1930s–46	Bauxite prospecting and mining reach the upper Berbice; Kwakwani mine opens 1942; Ituni rail line 1946
1941	Mittelholzer's <i>Corentyne Thunder</i> published — the first internationally published Guyanese novel
Late 1950s–early 1960s	Black Bush Polder land-settlement scheme opens behind the Corentyne coast

Date	Event
1958	Counties abolished as administrative units; Berbice lives on as name and identity
26 May 1966	Guyana independent
23 Feb 1970	Guyana becomes a republic on the anniversary of the 1763 Rising; Rose Hall and Corriverton attain town status the same year
May 1976	The 1763 Monument — Philip Moore's bronze Cuffy — unveiled in Georgetown
23 Feb 1978	Present Canje Bridge opened
1980	Guyana's ten regions created; old Berbice spans Regions Five, Six and Ten
1992	GUYMINE dissolved; BERMINE inherits Kwakwani and Everton
1999	Fort Nassau declared a National Monument
Nov 2000	University of Guyana Berbice Campus opens at Tain
2004–05	Albertha Bell, last known speaker of Berbice Dutch, interviewed at 103 (March 2004); dies 2005. The language declared extinct in 2010
23 Dec 2008	Berbice Bridge opens: 1,571 m, one of the world's longest floating bridges
2017–23	Rose Hall (Canje) estate closed end-2017; reopened September 2023
5 May 2019	Indian Arrival Monument unveiled at Palmyra
Jan 2024	Shamar Joseph of Baracara, Canje River, announces himself to Test cricket

Timeline exercise. Choose any five consecutive entries and write one paragraph explaining what connects them. There is almost always a connection; finding it is the historian's basic muscle.



The Glossary



These are the book's own definitions, from its appendix "A Berbice Glossary," whose epigraph reads: "The county's working vocabulary, for readers from away — and for Berbician children abroad, that they may hear their grandparents plain." Learn them in the book's words.

Term	The book's definition
Backdam	"the cultivated and wild land at the rear of a village or estate, behind the back dam that keeps out the savannah water; by extension, the farm: 'he gone backdam'"
Bottom-house	"the open ground floor beneath a house raised on stilts; the true Guyanese living room"
Cassareep	"the dark, preserved syrup boiled down from bitter cassava juice; Indigenous in origin, the soul of pepperpot"
Courida	"the coastal mangrove-like shrubland that fronts the Atlantic mud; the coast's first sea-defence"
Crop time	"the harvest season, of cane historically and rice today; the coast's busy half of the year"
Jahaji / jahaji bhai	"shipmate / ship-brother; the kinship bond formed on the indenture ships, inherited by descendants"
Jhandi	"the Hindu prayer flags, on bamboo poles, that mark a blessed yard; also the ceremony that raises them"
Kala pani	"the black water"; the ocean crossing from India, with all its weight of loss and daring"

Term	The book's definition
Koker	"a sluice-gate in the sea- or river-dam, opened and shut with the tides to drain the below-sea-level land; from the Dutch"
Lime	"to gather idly and socially; also the gathering itself. The Number 63 Beach on a public holiday is the county's definitive lime"
Logie	"the barrack-range housing of the enslaved and, later, the indentured on the estates"
Mandir / masjid	"Hindu temple / mosque; with the churches, the third and fourth towers of every Berbice skyline"
Matapee	"the woven sleeve used to squeeze poisonous juice from grated bitter cassava; Indigenous technology in daily use for millennia"
Mashramani	"Guyana's Republic Day festival, 23 February; the word is taken to be of Indigenous origin and is commonly glossed as the celebration after shared work, though the derivation was never firmly established even by those who chose the name"
NDC	"Neighbourhood Democratic Council, the local-government unit grouping villages"
Pepperpot	"the national dish: meat preserved and stewed in cassareep; Christmas morning in a pot"
Punt	"the flat steel barge that carries cut cane along estate canals; drawn once by mules, now by tractors and winches"
Queh-queh	"the African-Guyanese pre-wedding celebration of song, drum, dance, and instruction; kept with pride in the freedom villages"
Soiree	"Hopetown's Emancipation-season festival of drum, dance, and remembrance; the West Coast's great African-heritage gathering"

Term	The book's definition
Stelling	"a river wharf or landing-stage; from the Dutch. New Amsterdam's stelling is the town's front step"
Tadjah	"the ornate tomb-tower carried in procession at Muharram by the indentured generations; a word and memory folded into the coast's festival history"
Tassa	"the drum ensemble of Indo-Guyanese celebration; a Corentyne wedding is audible by tassa three villages off"
Transport	"in Guyanese law, the formal conveyance of title to land; from Roman-Dutch practice. The free villages' transports are their founding charters"

Note on the Mashramani entry. Study how it is written. The book gives the common gloss, then says the derivation "was never firmly established even by those who chose the name." That is how you handle a word whose meaning is loved but unproved.



The Itinerary — Ten Stops



The book's own appendix, "Ten Stops — A Berbice History Itinerary," is a study tool as much as a travel plan: each stop is a chapter you can stand in. Distances are from New Amsterdam.

1. **The New Amsterdam stelling and the Strand** — "Begin where the book begins." Then Mission Chapel (founded 1815) and the old Public Hospital's Castellani building. (*Chapters Eleven, Prologue*)
2. **The Canje Bridge** — "Cross it slowly, remembering its 1891 swing-bridge ancestor," and note the present bridge's opening date: 23 February 1978. (*Chapter Twelve*)
3. **Up the Canje: Magdalenenberg's water and Baracara** — by boat, with a local boatman. "The estate where 23 February 1763 began has no monument; the maroon village of Baracara, a few miles on, is the living one. Ask permission, bring respect, buy something." (*Chapters Four, Twelve*)
4. **Rose Hall Estate, Canje** — "the county's working sugar present in the district of its revolutionary past." (*Chapter Twelve*)
5. **Highbury, East Bank Berbice** — the monument where the *Whitby's* people came ashore on 5 May 1838. "Go on Arrival Day if you can; go quietly any other day if you cannot." (*Chapters Nine, Thirteen*)
6. **Fort Nassau, up the Berbice** — "A charter boat's day-trip to the bricks: the Court of Policy stairs, the ruins under the green. Declared a National Monument in 1999; the colony's whole first act happened here." (*Chapters Two, Four*)
7. **The Corentyne road, counted aloud** — "Number One, Courtland, Fyrish, the doubled names ticking past"; Rose Hall Town's market; Palmyra's Indian Arrival Monument. (*Chapters Fourteen,*

Fifteen)

8. **Port Mourant** — "The estate village that gave Guyana Cheddi Jagan and the West Indies half a batting order. The cricket ground is the shrine; a Sunday match is the service." (*Chapter Fifteen*)
9. **Number 63 Beach** — "the coast's great lime, and the only stop on this list whose history is best studied lying down." (*Chapter Fifteen*)
10. **Orealla, up the Corentyne** — some fifty miles by river, "to the chalk cliffs and the Amerindian village that closes the circle: the county's first peoples, at home on their own riverbank, five thousand years into the story this book could only summarise." (*Chapters One, Fifteen*)

The book adds: "West-bank travellers should add Ithaca and Hopetown — the freedom villages of Chapters Sixteen and Seventeen — and cross back over the floating bridge at evening, when the river is gold."

Itinerary exercise. Choose three stops and write the paragraph a guide would say at each — using only facts from the relevant chapters, and naming your chapter for each fact.



Sources and Bibliography — How to Use Them

The book's appendix "A Note on Sources" is itself worth studying, because it teaches source criticism by example.

What the book says about its own sources

- **The Dutch centuries.** "The bedrock is archival and mostly in the Netherlands: the papers of the Society of Berbice and the colonial administration, held in the Dutch National Archives at The Hague." The nineteenth-century histories built on them — **Netscher** (1888) and **Rodway** (1891–94) — "remain indispensable," but note the warning: "Both are creatures of their era: they see the colonies from the fort's veranda, not the logie's doorway, and their judgments about the enslaved and the Indigenous require the modern reader's active resistance. **They are quarries, not guides.**"
- **The 1763 revolution.** "One book now towers: **Marjoleine Kars's *Blood on the River* (2020)**, built from the interrogation transcripts of 1763–64 — some nine hundred of them — which allow the rising to be told, for the first time, substantially from the testimony of the people who made it."
- **Slavery, emancipation, the free villages.** "**Walter Rodney's *A History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881–1905* (1981)** for the analytical frame — especially his unmatched account of coastal drainage as the hinge of Guyanese class history — with **Vere T. Daly's *A Short History of the Guyanese People* (1976)** as the standard narrative and **Alvin Thompson's *Colonialism and Underdevelopment in Guyana, 1580–1803* (1987)** for the Dutch-era structures."

- **Indentureship** — "the debate is the bibliography." Hugh Tinker's *A New System of Slavery* (1974) "states the case for the system's continuity with bondage"; Clem Seecharan — "Palmyra-born, and therefore this county's own" — "answers with the migrants' agency in *Tiger in the Stars* (1997) and recovers an indentured voice entire in *Bechu* (1999)"; Dwarka Nath's *A History of Indians in British Guiana* (1950) "remains the documentary spine."
- **The districts.** "The modern record is journalism — and Guyana is fortunate in its village journalism. The Sunday village features of **Stabroek News, Kaieteur News, and the Guyana Chronicle**, cited throughout Part Five, constitute **an informal national ethnography**: village by village, an interviewer, a camera, and the elders talking... this book has treated them as the primary sources they are."
- **The book's rule, stated at the end of the appendix.** "Where this book's sources conflict, the endnotes say so; where its facts rest on tradition rather than record, the text says 'tradition'; and the points needing archival confirmation are catalogued in the author's working files for the next edition. **History is a relay, not a monument.**"

The core bibliography, for your own reading

The book's Bibliography opens with a note that the works are "each verified as a genuinely published work." Its principal books are:

- Daly, Vere T. *A Short History of the Guyanese People* (Macmillan Education, 1976; 3rd ed. 1992)
- Kars, Marjoleine. *Blood on the River* (The New Press, 2020) — co-winner, Frederick Douglass Book Prize, 2021
- Kouwenberg, Silvia. *A Grammar of Berbice Dutch Creole* (Mouton de Gruyter, 1994)
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- Netscher, P. M. *Geschiedenis van de koloniën Essequibo, Demerary en Berbice...* (Nijhoff, 1888)

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Source exercise. The book calls Netscher and Rodway "quarries, not guides." Explain that distinction in your own words, then name one fact in this book that could only have come from a quarry and one that could only have come from a guide.



WHOLE-BOOK ESSAY QUESTIONS

These questions cross chapters. Each can be answered entirely from A History of Berbice — and each should be. Cite by chapter. Where the book flags a fact as disputed or unverified, say so in your essay: examiners reward the student who knows the difference between what is known and what is merely repeated.

Section A — The three strands

1. The Prologue announces that the book will braid three strands: water, land and memory. Choose **one** strand and trace it through at least five chapters, from the first peoples to the present day.
2. "Every Berbice story is a story about drainage, distance, or a river-crossing, from the first raised fields to the floating bridge" (Prologue). Test this claim. Take the raised fields of Chapter One, the kokers of Chapter Ten, and the Berbice Bridge of Chapter Nineteen, and argue whether the book proves its own thesis.
3. "History here is not a subject. It is infrastructure" (Prologue). Explain what the book means, using the free villages' transports (Chapter Eight), the estate names (Chapter Three), and the choice of Republic Day (Chapter Six).

Section B — 1763

4. "For most of 1763, the colony of Berbice had two governors. One held a plantation by the sea. The other held the country" (Chapter Five). Using Chapters Three to Six, explain how the rebels came so close to holding the colony permanently, and why they did not.

5. Was Cuffy's government a state? Argue the case using the book's evidence on titles, companies, economy, judgment of disputes, and diplomacy — and on the shortages of powder, salt, intelligence and allies.
6. The book calls the failure of the rebels' Indigenous diplomacy "decisive" (Chapter Five) and insists in Chapter Six that "the nations acted as sovereignties defending their own interests in an imperial war, as every power in that war did." Assess the role of the Indigenous nations in both the making and the breaking of the rising, drawing on Chapters One, Three, Five and Six.
7. "Its flag did not survive; its idea did" (Chapter Six). Using the book's account of the archive, of Mittelholzer's novels, of Republic Day and of the 1763 Monument, explain how a defeated revolution became a nation's founding memory.
8. Compare what the book says about Berbice 1763, Jamaica's Tacky's War of 1760, and Saint-Domingue in 1791 (Chapter Five). What exactly does the book claim was distinctive about Berbice — and what does it expressly *not* claim?

Section C — Freedom, land and labour

9. "A transport in your name could not be flogged out of you" (Chapter Eight). Discuss the relationship between legal title and freedom in Berbice, using the Village Movement (Chapter Eight), Hopetown (Chapter Seventeen) and Ithaca (Chapter Sixteen).
10. Trace the money. Explain how people who owned nothing in August 1838 produced purchase-money for whole plantations by 1840 — beginning with the provision grounds of Chapter Three and ending with the figures in Chapters Eight, Sixteen and Seventeen.
11. "Freedom's real date, the county has always known, is 1838" (Chapter Seven). Explain apprenticeship, why it collapsed early, and why the book insists on 1838 rather than 1834.
12. "Both truths belong in one sentence: the system was designed to exploit them, and they were never only its victims" (Chapter Nine). Using the book's account of recruitment, the labour ordinances, the Crosby office, Bechu, the women of indenture, and the numbered villages, assess whether this balance holds.

13. The book says two bound migrations built modern Berbice — "one African and stolen outright, one Indian and bound by contract and need" (Chapter Nine). Compare what each migration met on arrival, what each built afterwards, and what each left on the county's map.
14. Take one district chapter from Part Five and show how the whole county's history — Indigenous, Dutch, African, Indian, industrial — is legible in that single district.

Section D — Method and memory

15. "A history that will not say 'we do not know' cannot be trusted when it says 'we know'" (Chapter One). Collect at least four places where the book flags a fact as unsettled, disputed or resting on tradition, and assess what this practice does to the reader's trust.
16. The book calls Netscher and Rodway "quarries, not guides" (A Note on Sources). Explain the distinction, and show how the book handles a source it must use but cannot trust.
17. "Scholarship and verandah, notes and voice: a county needs both of its memories" (Epilogue). Using the archive of the 1764 interrogations, the slave registers, the immigration rosters, the Sunday village features and the author's own page of eyewitness at Number 19, argue for or against this claim.
18. The book several times says that the machinery of oppression preserved the record of the oppressed — the interrogation transcripts of 1764 (Chapter Six), the registration ledgers of the 1810s (Chapter Seven), the immigration rosters (Chapter Nine). What does this pattern tell us about how the history of the powerless survives?
19. Choose three of the book's declared gaps — for example, the East Coast's missing book (Chapter Fourteen), the absent monument at Magdalenenberg (Chapter Twelve), the unregistered dark earths (Chapter Eighteen), or the names still locked in Dutch spellings (Chapter Six). What would it take to close each one?

Section E — Berbice and Guyana

20. "This county was the first place in Guyana where freedom was not a petition. It was a government" (Chapter Six). Assess Berbice's claim to be the birthplace of Guyanese freedom.

21. "Guyanese democracy did not begin in Georgetown. It began in the free villages, on benches the members had paid for twice" (Chapter Eight). Test this claim against the book's evidence on village government, the Farmers' Association at Mara (Chapter Thirteen), and the county's modern councils.
22. The Corentyne is called "the completest single expression of what Berbice is" (Chapter Fifteen); the West Coast is the county's "charter-room" (Chapter Seventeen); the East Bank is "the county's taproot" (Chapter Thirteen). Which district has the better claim to *be* Berbice, and on what criteria?
23. "Berbice's specialty, on the record of three and a half centuries, is outlasting" (Chapter Nineteen). Using at least five episodes from across the book, evaluate this self-description. Is outlasting the same as thriving?
24. The book ends by asking visitors to "stay long enough to be from here" (Epilogue). Using the county's history of arrivals — Indigenous, Dutch, African, Indian, Liberated African, Chinese, Portuguese and later — discuss what the book thinks belonging is made of.



ANSWER KEY



Answers to the comprehension questions only. Every answer here is drawn from the chapter named and from nothing else — no outside reading is required, and none should be used. Discussion and essay questions are deliberately left open; they are marked on argument and evidence, not on agreement.

Where the book itself flags a figure as disputed or unverified, the answer says so. A student who reproduces the flag is answering better than one who does not.



Prologue: The County of the Long River



1. **Length and source of the Berbice River.** Some 595 kilometres — 370 miles. It rises far to the south, in the high country east of the Kanuku Mountains, and reaches the Atlantic at New Amsterdam, past Crab Island in the river's mouth.
2. **The unusual shape.** Most colonial histories in the Americas begin at the sea and move inland. Berbice's begins deep in the bush — at a wooden fort ninety kilometres up the river, and at Indigenous villages whose black earth still holds the ash of ancient cook-fires — and only later, reluctantly, comes down to the coast. The capital moved downriver; so did the people.
3. **The three strands.** Water; land; memory.
4. **Cuffy's proposal.** He proposed to divide the colony — the coast for the Europeans, the interior for the free.
5. **The summing sentence.** "History here is not a subject. It is infrastructure."

Chapter One: The First Peoples

1. **The standard story, and why convenient.** That a thin scatter of Indigenous people lived lightly on the land, fishing and shifting their cassava plots, leaving little mark, until Europeans arrived and history properly began. It was convenient for the people who told it — because a landscape with no owners is easier to take — and, the chapter says flatly, it was wrong.
2. **Terra preta.** Amazonian "dark earth": a human-made soil formed only where people live, farm and burn in one place for centuries, built up from hearth ash, fish and animal bone, potsherds and household refuse. Ordinary rainforest soil is poor and exhausts itself in a few seasons; dark earth is the opposite. Depth is the proof: "You do not get six feet of it from a camp. You get it from a town." At Dubulay the deposits run as much as two metres — better than six feet.
3. **The two headline dates.** Radiocarbon dates push human life on the river back some 5,000 years; a marked intensification of mound-building and agriculture begins roughly 1,800 years before the present.
4. **The three groupings.** The **Lokono** (called Arawak by Europeans), of the Arawakan language family, long the people of the middle Berbice — their oral traditions and place-names helped the archaeologists read the ground. The **Warrau (Warao)**, of the coast and wetlands, master boat-builders whose dugouts and canoes every later arrival depended on. The **Carib-speaking peoples** — the **Kalina** or Caribs proper, with the Akawaio and Arekuna deeper inland — who ranged the rivers.
5. **The catastrophe.** Not the trade. "The catastrophe was what the trade financed: the plantation, which needed not partners but property." For most of a century the trade was an exchange between

sovereignties in which the Europeans were few, sickly and dependent.

Chapter Two: The Van Peeres' River

1. **1627, not 1602.** In July 1602 Abraham's father Jan van Pere and a group of Zeeland merchants obtained freedom from convoy dues for ships trading the Guiana shore — but that was a trading privilege, not a grant of territory, and Netscher, reading the States-General's own resolution, found no record that any Van Pere ship ever reached the Berbice on it. In 1627 Abraham van Peere obtained leave to plant a settlement on the river. "1627 remains the founding date Berbicians keep."
2. **Why the capital sat 88 km upriver.** (a) It lay beyond the easy reach of Spanish patrols and freebooters; (b) it sat among the Indigenous nations whose trade — annatto, letterwood, provisions — was the colony's first income; (c) the river was the only road, "so whoever held the narrows held the country."
3. **November 1712.** The French privateer commander Jacques Cassard brought his squadron to Berbice; Fort Nassau was bombarded for four days together and the colony held to ransom. (Some later accounts say the fort was burnt outright; the Dutch sources of the period describe only the bombardment.) The ransom broke the Van Peeres: they would not pay, their bills went unhonoured, and Amsterdam merchants met the paper instead — some 108,000 guilders — taking the colony by deed of 24 October 1714. Cornelis van Pere kept a quarter share.
4. **Autumn 1720.** The owners floated the *Sociëteit van Berbice* — the Society of Berbice — as a public company on the Amsterdam exchange, so that shares in the colony's land, works and people could be bought and sold on the Damrak.
5. **Berbice Dutch.** The creole language born in the logies of the Dutch estates: Dutch words woven onto a body of Eastern Ijo morphology —

its aspect endings, its plural marker, its third-person pronouns — with Arawak threads through both. It is unusual as "one of the very few creole languages on earth with so strong and specific an African signature."

6. **The two conditions for 1763. Isolation** — a thread of cleared riverbank through immense forest, weeks from help, with a tiny and sickly European population living at the sufferance of the thousands they enslaved. **The world the enslaved were building** — Africans of many nations thrown together, out of which came, among much else, a language.

Chapter Three: The World the Plantation Made

1. **The 1762 census.** 346 Europeans; 3,833 enslaved Africans; 244 enslaved Indigenous people — across something approaching a hundred estates. The true enslaved population was likely higher, "for such counts missed many." The ratio is roughly ten enslaved people to every European, and on many estates the only Europeans present were a manager and perhaps an overseer or a carpenter. The author's conclusion: "Berbice was an African country governed by a Dutch rumour of force."
2. **The four levels. Field gangs** — the majority, men and women together, whose hoes and cutlasses made the crop. **Drivers** — enslaved men set over the gangs, holding the whip for the manager and absorbing pressure from both directions. **Craftsmen** — coopers, carpenters, sawyers, boat-builders, boilers, whose skills the colony could not replace, and who therefore hired between estates, carried messages and saw the whole river. **Domestics** — in the houses, close to the masters' tables and talk. Leadership in 1763 came from the skilled and the trusted because the system had taught them "organisation, geography, and its own weaknesses." Hence: "Cuffy the cooper's man was not an anomaly. He was the pattern."
3. **Provision grounds.** The plots on which the enslaved were obliged to grow their own food — plantains, cassava, yams, corn, peppers, fowls, fish — with the surplus carried on Sundays to informal markets the law tolerated "because the colony ate from them." The long consequence: a small stubborn economy of skill, property and bargaining grew inside slavery, so that when the freed later produced purchase-money for whole plantations, the planters' astonishment "only measured how badly the masters had understood what was

happening in the provision grounds all along."

4. **Everyday resistance.** The wide country between endurance and insurrection, where most of the enslaved lived most of the time. Examples the chapter lists: tools broken; tasks slowed; cattle strayed; sickness feigned; food pilfered; flight for a night, a week or a season; and the guarded face. "It was a population conducting the longest, quietest labour dispute in history, while it waited."
5. **Three weaknesses on the eve of 1763.** Fevers were thinning the garrison; the Society in Amsterdam kept the soldiery small and the fort ill-repaired; the plantations were scattered along a hundred miles of river. (A fourth: in 1762 enslaved people on the Canje had already risen once, "a rising suppressed but remembered on both sides of the whip.")

Chapter Four: The Rising

1. **The outbreak.** 23 February 1763, at Plantation Magdalenenberg (Magdalenenburg in some records) on the Canje. The enslaved killed the manager and a carpenter, burned the owner's house, and moved off to the neighbouring estates, calling others out as they went.
2. **27 February 1763.** The fire crossed to the big river: the enslaved rose and armed themselves at Plantation Hollandia, beside Lelienburg on the Berbice. It was the moment the movement "found its centre of gravity" because it was here that Cuffy emerged and the rebels acclaimed him leader, organised into companies under captains.
3. **Cuffy — known and unknown.** *Known:* an Akan man — Coffij in the Dutch documents, Kofi in the Akan naming that says he was born on a Friday — born on the Gold Coast and carried across the Atlantic into slavery; he lived and worked at Lelienburg "in the skilled world of the cooperage"; he was literate in the ways of the colony, deliberate where others were rash, and able to make freed people into an army. *Unknown:* whether he was a cooper himself or in a cooper's household — "the records leave [it] unclear," the sources dividing between a cooper and a house-slave to a cooper in the household of the widow Berkey. His age at capture "is nowhere recorded."
4. **Peereboom.** In the first days of March 1763, dozens of Europeans from the upriver estates — men, women and children — fortified themselves in the plantation house at a bend of the river called Peereboom and were besieged. Terms were offered: they might take to their boats and go downriver unmolested. As they embarked, the attack came; many were killed on the riverbank or in the water, some escaped downstream, and others, mostly women, were taken captive and held by the rebel government for months. The book judges it "a

massacre in a war begun by a far greater and longer one, the century of violence that made the colony," and insists that "History owes the dead of Peereboom truthfulness, and owes the enslaved dead of a hundred unnamed punishments the same."

5. **Fort Nassau.** The garrison was a handful and the fort, decades neglected, could not be held against thousands. Van Hoogenheim refused to surrender the colony outright but could not hold its capital: the government abandoned the fort and, on his own order, it was set alight "so the rebels should not have it." The Europeans fell back downriver to the deck-space of their ships and a single riverside estate near the river's mouth — Dageraad, "Daybreak."
6. **28 March 1763.** The ship *Betsy* arrived from Suriname with a hundred soldiers — "enough to stiffen Dageraad, nowhere near enough to retake a colony."

Chapter Five: Governor Cuffy

1. **Title as policy.** "In the world he and his people had seized, the Dutch title was the technology of legitimate rule," and Cuffy understood "that a rising becomes a state the moment it starts doing the boring things states do." Taking the Dutch title claimed legitimacy in the only vocabulary the Dutch were obliged to recognise.
2. **2 April 1763.** Cuffy wrote that the rebels had not sought the war; that the cruelty of particular masters had brought it; and that the enslaved of Berbice would not return to bondage — the governor was not to think "that they will remain slaves." He proposed a partition: the Dutch to keep the coast and the trade, the free Africans to hold the interior. The Atlantic precedent was the maroon treaties of Jamaica and Suriname, "known on both sides."
3. **Van Hoogenheim's reply.** He temporised — returning courteous, noncommittal answers, flattering, asking for time — and used the time to fortify while awaiting reinforcements.
4. **13 May 1763.** Cuffy threw his main force — reported at up to two thousand fighters, a figure the book flags for archival verification — against Dageraad itself; "the battle was the pivot of the entire war." The rebels came on in disciplined waves against entrenchments, and the outcome was decided by "the one arm the revolution could not match, the cannon of the shore battery and of the ships anchored in the river." After hours of fighting the attack failed, at heavy cost.
5. **The four shortages.** Powder (which could not be manufactured, only captured or stretched); salt (whose absence sickened the camps); intelligence (carried by canoe and rumour); and allies. **Allies was decisive:** the rebels sounded the Indigenous nations and found them "at best, neutral, at worst enlisted against them," so

that "without the interior's consent, the interior partition Cuffy offered was a map with no hinterland."

6. **The end.** A captain named Atta rose against Cuffy's leadership and prevailed. In October 1763 — the report reached van Hoogenheim on the 19th — Cuffy died at his own hand rather than fall into the power of his rivals. He had governed a freed Berbice "for the better part of eight months." (The book notes the circumstances rest on colonial-era reports; no rebel account of his death survives.)

Chapter Six: The Fall, and the Long Memory

1. **1 January 1764.** Six ships from the Netherlands stood into the Berbice carrying some six hundred regular soldiers — "a force greater than the entire pre-war European population of the colony."
2. **"Not a battle but a hunting."** Short of powder, the rebels split into factions and fell back from the plantations into the bush, where they were run down rather than defeated in the field. The two forces that broke them: Indigenous fighters — Carib, Arawak and others, paid and armed by the Dutch — who closed the forest paths and upper rivers; and hunger. "Band by band, the army of the free country was broken up, starved out, betrayed, captured."
3. **The dead, and the cautions.** Over a hundred people were put to death, about two dozen burned alive, others broken on the rack or hanged. In all, something like 1,800 people died in the rising, the starvation and the repression — "perhaps a third or more of all the enslaved people of Berbice" — against European military and civilian dead "counted in the dozens." *The cautions:* execution counts in the sources range from about 75 to 128 and the exact toll is flagged for archival verification; European losses are given as about fifty in one source while another puts around thirty Europeans dead at Peereboom alone; and "no agreed colony-wide total exists."
4. **The archive's bitter mercy.** To condemn the leaders the court had to establish who did what, so the interrogators asked and wrote down names, plantations, companies, marches, quarrels, marriages and meals — "the entire circulatory system of the freed country, taken down verbatim from hundreds of mouths." The Dutch state then filed and forgot the transcripts for two and a half centuries until historians found them. Hence "the machinery built to kill the revolution became

the machinery that saved its voice."

5. **1785.** Fort Nassau, half-ruined since the governor burned it, was formally abandoned, and the seat of the colony moved fifty-five miles downstream "to a new town at the meeting of the Berbice and the Canje" — New Amsterdam.
6. **Republic Day.** When the new nation chose the date on which to become a republic, "it reached past every imperial anniversary on the calendar and took 23 February — the day the Canje rose in 1763." Guyana has been a republic on that anniversary since 1970, and Republic Day is called Mashramani.
7. **The 1763 Monument.** Sculptor Philip Moore; unveiled 1976, on the tenth anniversary of independence; fifteen feet high and two and a half tons, cast at the Morris Singer foundry; standing in the Square of the Revolution, Georgetown. Two of its symbols: the protective face on the breast, and the throttled pig and dog of ignorance and greed in Cuffy's fists.

Chapter Seven: The Changing of the Flags

1. **Sovereignty, 1781–1803.** British occupation, February 1781; French capture, January 1782, the colonies handed back to the Netherlands at the peace; British capture without a shot fired, 22 April 1796; return to the Batavian Republic under the Peace of Amiens, 27 March 1802; British capture again, September 1803 — "this time to stay."
2. **The Convention of London.** Signed 13 August 1814, with ratifications to be exchanged within three weeks; by it the Netherlands ceded Berbice, Demerara and Essequibo to Britain permanently. **The error corrected:** "The date 20 November 1815 sometimes given for ratification belongs to the Second Treaty of Paris and should not be attached to this convention."
3. **No planter parliament.** Britain took the colonies "with their Dutch constitutions on," and governed them as *conquered colonies* by Crown authority rather than by settler assembly; the Court of Policy answered upward to London. The consequence: when London finally moved against slavery, "the planters of the ceded colonies had fewer constitutional trenches to fight from than their island cousins" — the accident of 1803 became "abolition's administrative advantage."
4. **1 August 1834.** Under the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833, slavery in the British colonies ended: on that morning the enslaved people of Berbice — perhaps twenty thousand souls, out of some eighty-five thousand across the whole colony — woke legally unslaved. It is misleading to call it the end of slavery because the same Act bound them as "apprentices" to their former owners for years more of compelled, unpaid plantation labour. (Note: the colony-wide figure of 85,000 is firm; the Berbice county estimate "is an inference from it,

flagged for archival verification.")

5. **Compensation.** Twenty million pounds sterling across the empire, paid to the owners for the loss of their human property. "The freed received nothing."
6. **Why 1838.** Apprenticeship "proved unworkable as well as unjust," and collapsed ahead of schedule on 1 August 1838. "Full freedom — the freedom to leave, to bargain, to refuse — dates in Berbice, as in all Guyana, from that day." The apprentice had been "unowned but unfree," subject to the magistrate rather than the master, "an improvement measurable mainly in paperwork."

Chapter Eight: Buying Back the Land — the Free Villages

1. **August 1838, from the inside.** You own the clothes you stand in, the tools you have hidden or been given, and whatever coin you have scraped together from Sunday marketing, provision-ground sales and the paid overtime of apprenticeship — and nothing else: not the logie you sleep in, not the ground your provisions grow on. The men who enslaved you have just been paid handsomely for losing you; every acre in the county belongs to them; "and their plan for you is simple: that hunger will march you back through the plantation gate on their terms."
2. **The four West Coast purchases (by 1840).** Golden Grove — 14 labourers, 500 acres, \$1,716. St. John — 46 purchasers, 252 acres, \$5,000. The eastern half of Perseverance — 109 purchasers, 250 acres, \$2,000. Lichfield — Cudjoe McPherson alone, 500 acres, \$3,000. (*The book's note records that another authority dates the purchases "by 1839" and names Providence rather than Perseverance as the fourth estate.*)
3. **Communal and proprietary.** In a **communal** purchase the land was bought and held together, worked in shares, and governed by meetings "part vestry, part parliament" — Hopetown's hundred and nine, or Ithaca's forty-five. In a **proprietary** purchase one buyer took title and sold on lots, the village growing as a freehold neighbourhood of individual owners — Cudjoe McPherson's Lichfield, cut into twelve sections and sold on to other African families.
4. **The first two buildings.** A church and a school. It shows that "the Village Movement was never only a land transaction; it was a declaration about what freedom was *for*." The villages taxed

themselves for teachers and sent to school "the first generation of Black Berbicians ever entitled to learn openly."

5. **The counter-attack, and water.** Three of the measures: the price of land was pushed up; Crown land was locked away; ordinances burdened the villages' drainage and title arrangements. (A fourth: the estates began looking overseas for a new captive labour supply.) Water was worst because the freed had bought coastal estates "whose sea-defences and drainage had been maintained by the forced labour of hundreds," and a village of smallholders taxing itself could rarely keep the same works; floods broke many a village's farming and drove its men into wage work on the very estates they had left — "which was, of course, part of the design of the ordinances."
6. **The Liberated Africans.** People taken from slave ships intercepted by the Royal Navy after abolition, and freed migrants routed through Sierra Leone, St. Helena and Rio de Janeiro, landed in British Guiana as indentured workers between 1841 and 1865 — better than thirteen thousand of them. The very first came ashore **at Berbice, from Rio, on 11 May 1841.**

Chapter Nine: The Ships from Calcutta

1. **5 May 1838.** The *Whitby* and the *Hesperus*, out of Calcutta, carrying between them a little under four hundred bound labourers, of whom only about twenty-two were women. The *Hesperus*'s people were landed in Demerara; the *Whitby* sailed on into the Berbice River and anchored off **Plantation Highbury**, on the east bank a few miles above New Amsterdam, where some 164 immigrants recruited for Highbury and neighbouring Waterloo came ashore — 117 of them, eleven of them women, to Highbury itself.
2. **Whose scheme.** John Gladstone, absentee owner of plantations in the colony and father of a future British prime minister, who wrote to a Calcutta recruiting firm for labourers "to replace the Africans whose apprenticeship was ending."
3. **The word used once.** Because it is in the documents and must be recorded — but never again, "because the people it labelled have names, castes, faiths, and descendants, and because the word was flung at their grandchildren in this county's school yards within living memory."
4. **The totals, and their firmness.** Some 239,909 Indians brought to British Guiana — the largest number taken to any Caribbean colony — of whom roughly 75,547, about a third, eventually returned to India. The book's note records competing figures of 238,979 arrivals and 65,538 repatriations, and states that "the figures are not reconciled in the literature."
5. **A contract enforced like a crime.** The immigrant signed or thumb-printed an agreement in India — five years' labour, wages fixed, housing, rations and return passage promised — but on the estates it was "the plantation's old grammar with new vocabulary": the logics of slavery re-let to new tenants, wages docked by fines, and

the law's whole weight bent to the employer. Under the labour ordinances an immigrant who missed work or left the estate without a pass "faced not dismissal but *prosecution and jail*."

6. **The numbered villages.** As indentures expired, many time-expired immigrants exchanged their right to a return passage for land, or bought and leased it, settling the former estate lands along the hundred kilometres from New Amsterdam to the Corentyne River "in a string of villages that took, and keep, the plantations' old survey numbers."
7. **The Palmyra monument.** The national Indian Arrival Monument, unveiled at Palmyra in 2019; sculptors Philbert Gajadhar and Winslow Craig; six bronze figures — a Hindu man, a Muslim man, a drummer boy, a woman with her bundle, a woman with her tawa, and a man with cutlass and rice plant — "facing the traffic of the coast their people built."



Chapter Ten: The Anatomy of Berbice

1. **The three rivers.** The **Berbice** — the county's spine, rising in the highlands east of the Kanukus and running 595 kilometres north to the sea at New Amsterdam, with Crab Island in its mouth. The **Canje** — the Berbice's chief tributary, a long low-country river shadowing the coast behind the front lands before folding into the Berbice at New Amsterdam. The **Corentyne** — the border river, "whose western bank is Guyana and whose waters carry the traffic and kinship of two countries."
2. **South to north, four landscapes.** First the **deep forest**, riverine and unhurried, holding the bauxite bush and the Amerindian villages; then the **white-sand belt** with its scrub and savannah islands, "the old shore of an ancient sea"; then the **intermediate savannahs** of the middle rivers, "cattle country flirting with agriculture"; and last the young **coastal clay**, barely above the tide, "carrying nearly everything the census counts." Four landscapes, four economies, one county — "stacked like the layers of a black cake."
3. **The koker.** A sluice-gate in the sea- or river-dam, standing at every village outfall: opened at low tide to let the land's water out, shut at high tide to keep the ocean's out. It is called "the county's true coat of arms" because the habitable coast is a made thing — front dams against the ocean, back dams against the savannah flood-water, and the drained rectangle between — so the sluice is the single object on which the county's existence depends. "Berbicians live like the Dutch who first ruled them: on land borrowed from the water at compound interest."
4. **The four-beat year.** Two wet seasons and two dry ones: the long May–July rains and the shorter December wet, with their answering dries. The rains fill the trenches, test the kokers and green the

savannahs; the dries harden the dams, ripen the rice, and bring the salt tide creeping up the rivers.

5. **Administration.** Counties ceased to be units of government in **1958**, and since **1980** old Berbice has lain across three of Guyana's ten regions: **Region Five (Mahaica–Berbice)**, including the West Coast; **Region Six (East Berbice–Corentyne)**, holding New Amsterdam, the Canje, the East Bank, the Corentyne and the whole eastern watershed; and the riverain south of **Region Ten (Upper Demerara–Berbice)**, where the upper-river bauxite settlements lie. "No Berbician has ever introduced herself as being from Region Six."

Chapter Eleven: New Amsterdam

1. **The two foundations.** *First:* upriver — by 1733 a village of craftsmen's houses had grown around Fort Nassau, and the name Nieuw Amsterdam attached to "that little capital in the bush." *Second:* in **1785** the capital was re-founded on the flats beside **Fort Sint Andries**, at the meeting of the Berbice and the Canje, and by about 1790 was the seat of government. What moved it: the fort was burned in the great rising of 1763 and "the colony's centre of gravity slid seaward."
2. **The Winkel.** The Winkel Department was a special public works office organised in **1812** to keep the town's fabric in repair; its name survives in the town's Winkel district.
3. **Mission Chapel.** The Congregational church founded through the missionary **John Wray in 1815** (first chapel consecrated 1819, present building finished around 1841). It matters because it was "by its tradition the first church in the colony to open its doors fully to enslaved people, with no separate seating: a building in which the county's African Christianity stood up straight for the first time."
4. **Berbice High School.** Founded **5 September 1916** as a boys' school of **nine pupils**, meeting on the ground floor of a Presbyterian manse — the residence of the **Rev. J. A. Scrimgeour** — with **C. A. Pugsley** as first headmaster. A girls' school followed.
5. **Mittelholzer.** Born in New Amsterdam on 16 December 1909; wrote *Corentyne Thunder* in 1938 while working odd jobs in the town. Published in 1941, it was "the first novel by a Guyanese author to reach an international audience." He became, through the Kaywana books and two dozen others, "the English-speaking Caribbean's first professional novelist, living by the pen alone until his death in 1965."

6. **The oldest-town claim.** It is "defensible with a lawyer's care: as a continuously administered urban settlement descending from a Dutch seat of government, New Amsterdam's line runs back past any rival's. Georgetown, the upstart capital, is younger; the Essequibo settlements are older but did not persist as towns." The declared interest: the book is "written by a New Amsterdam attorney."

Chapter Twelve: The Canje

1. **The unusual course.** It is "a river that runs *beside* the sea instead of to it": rising in the wetlands far to the southeast, it loops roughly parallel to the coast, gathering the drainage of the back-country behind the Corentyne front lands, and surrenders to the Berbice at New Amsterdam.
2. **The doubleness.** "Highway in front, hiding-ground behind" — estate frontages on both banks, with immense reedy backlands behind the cultivated strip. It let the estates prosper as a plantation corridor; it let the rebellion of 1763 spread estate to estate down the corridor "because the Canje was a road"; and afterwards it let the free hide in the backlands.
3. **Baracara.** Also called by its Dutch plantation name **Wel te Vreeden**: the only maroon village in Guyana, a few miles from old Magdalenenberg, settled in the early nineteenth century by Africans who had freed themselves, and holding "by its own firm tradition, descendants of the 1763 generation." A village of a hundred-odd households, reachable by boat, farming and logging and intermarried into one large family — "the Canje's living archive."
4. **Rose Hall Estate, Canje, 2017–2023.** Some 3,800 hectares of cane in the East Canje district; closed at the end of 2017 "amid a national restructuring of the sugar industry that idled thousands of Berbice workers"; formally reopened in September 2023, "with over a thousand workers rehired and replanting under way."
5. **The two Canje bridges.** The **1891** bridge: a swing bridge of iron and concrete, 342 feet long, designed by Hawks and Hayter and built by the London firm Joseph Westwood & Company for about \$25,000; its pivoting centre span opened about four times a day and was swung shut by hand; reckoned one of British Guiana's finest

engineering works of its century. The **present** bridge: two lanes, at New Amsterdam's eastern entrance, begun October 1976 and opened **23 February 1978** — Republic Day, "the Canje's own anniversary."

6. **The Canje Pheasant.** Three unusual features: its chicks are born with claws on their wings, "a trait so archaic that scientists reach for the phrase 'living fossil'"; its leafy diet ferments "in a digestive system more like a cow's than a bird's"; and it is a crested, copper-and-chestnut leaf-eater a good two feet long, nesting over the water from around April to September.

Chapter Thirteen: East Bank Berbice — Mara, Edinburgh, Sisters

1. **The road.** About twenty miles long, running up the river from New Amsterdam. "The road points at Fort Nassau, even though it no longer reaches it."
2. **Highbury, 5 May 1838.** The *Whitby* landed there the first Indian indentured immigrants to set foot in what is now Guyana. It is commemorated by the **Highbury Monument** and by Arrival Day pilgrimages every 5 May, when "wreaths go into the river for the dead of that first crossing and the speeches are made where the gangplanks once ran."
3. **Edinburgh's two sections.** An older "village" section, and a newer section surveyed in **1953** that everyone calls "the scheme" — the village "wears its two eras in its own layout."
4. **Sisters.** With just over 250 residents it is the most populous village of the Upper East Bank, with "two churches and a masjid within a few rods of each other, a police station, a post office, shops, and a reputation for diversity and deep green gardens." It also stands on Village-Movement ground: ex-apprentices bought plots there in the first freedom generation.
5. **Mara, 1898.** The colony's **Farmers' Association** was founded there — "an early organisation of independent small farmers that spread from this riverbank to Demerara and Essequibo." It matters as evidence that the county's tradition of self-organisation continued past the Village Movement into the era of independent farming. (In the 1860 registers Mara appears as a sugar plantation under the merchant house of Cavan Brothers & Co.)

Chapter Fourteen: East Coast Berbice — the Coast Between



1. **The name as argument.** In the records of the plantation colony the seaboard east of the Berbice River as far as the Corentyne estates was the county's **East Sea Coast** — a naming that put villages now casually called "Corentyne" under an East Coast heading. An **East Coast Berbice Village District** survives as an administrative division of Region Six. But in speech "the Corentyne — the name of the far river — long ago marched westward along the road and annexed nearly the whole coast."
2. **The first four numbers.** Number One Village; Courtland (Number Two); Fyrish (Number Three); and the paired Kilcoy and Chesney, the western and eastern halves of Number Four.
3. **The estate names.** Scottish — "remembering the Highland and Lowland proprietors and attorneys of the cotton-and-sugar coast." The doubled names carry "an old estate-survey number for the land, and a living name for the community."
4. **The coast's deep grammar.** From the sea inland: sea-dam, road, house-lots, then cultivation running back to the middle-walk and the backdam — "a pattern repeated, with variations, from the Canje to the border. The plantations laid that grammar down; the free villages conjugated it."
5. **Why no closure emptied it.** "No single industry ever owned this coast outright": cane was cut for estates east and west, rice grown on the back lands, cattle kept on the dams, provision gardens behind the houses, fish and shrimp taken from the foreshore. "When cane retrenched, the rice and the gardens held; when the fishing thinned, the shops and the minibuses carried on."

Chapter Fifteen: The Corentyne

1. **The numbers.** They are "the survey numbers of the plantation lots into which the colonial coast was divided, so that when estates were cut up, sold, or settled, the lot number simply became the address" — hence the numbers are older than the villages. The series runs from Number One "up into the eighties as the road runs east, the series ending at Number 81 before Crabwood Creek's grants begin." (*The book flags the series' precise termini for archival verification.*)
2. **Three phases.** **Sugar** made the coast first — the great estates (Rose Hall, Albion, Port Mourant, Skeldon) organising the land and importing its African and then its Indian labour. **Rice** made it second, as time-expired families took up rice land, making the Corentyne "Guyana's rice coast." **Black Bush Polder** was the third act — a great state-led empoldering of swampland behind the coast, opened in the **late 1950s and early 1960s**, settling thousands of farming families on new rice and provision land.
3. **Rose Hall town's three dates.** **1842** — the estate bought by fifty-two freed Africans (some accounts say fifty-seven), the sale confirmed by the Chief Justice on 26 August that year, "one of the earliest Village-Movement purchases in the colony." **1908** — gazetted a village. **1970** — raised to town status.
4. **Port Mourant's children.** **Cheddi Jagan**, born at Ankerville, Port Mourant, 22 March 1918, eldest of eleven children of estate workers; Chief Minister 1953, Premier 1961–64, President of Guyana from 1992 until his death in 1997, and "by common consent — across every party line — one of the founders of the Guyanese nation." The West Indies Test cricketers **Rohan Kanhai** (born at Plantation Port Mourant, 26 December 1935); **Basil Butcher** (1933–2019); **Joe Solomon** (1930–2023), "the man whose side-on throw made the

Brisbane Tied Test of 1960 immortal, and who scored 201 not out in Berbice's inaugural first-class match"; the leg-spinner **Ivan Madray**; and, in the next generation, **Alvin Kallicharran**, born at Port Mourant in 1949 (his precise birth-village flagged for archival verification).

5. **UG Tain.** The University of Guyana opened its Berbice Campus at **Tain**, between Port Mourant and the border villages, in **November 2000** — "the first university campus outside Georgetown's orbit, built so that Berbician students no longer had to migrate for a degree." A teaching block followed in 2002 and a science centre in 2006.
6. **Corriverton.** The Corentyne River Town, Guyana's easternmost town, formed in **1970** by joining the twin settlements of **Springlands** and **Skeldon** with their satellite numbered villages; it faces Suriname's Nieuw Nickerie across the river, and the Skeldon estate's factory anchors its economy. (*The 1970 township instrument date is flagged for archival verification.*)
7. **Orealla and Siparuta.** The Corentyne's two Amerindian villages, some **fifty miles** up the river from the mouth: "Lokono and Warrau of old, joined now by Kalina, Wapishana, and Macushi families." The chalk-white cliffs gave Orealla its Arawak name.

Chapter Sixteen: West Bank Berbice — Ithaca and the River's Other Shore



1. **The old journey.** Train from Georgetown to Rosignol, then the ferry across to New Amsterdam — "train to Rosignol, ferry across, and you were in town — a rhythm that ordered Berbician travel for most of a century." It was ended by two things: the closure of the line to Rosignol in **1970** ("the Berbice end going two years before the rest of the railway"), and the opening of the **Berbice Bridge in December 2008**, whose western approaches rise from the D'Edward shore.
2. **The railway.** It opened at Georgetown in **1848** and was **the first in South America**; the line reached Rosignol between 1897 and 1900. (*The book flags the exact railway dates for archival verification.*)
3. **Blairmont.** Assembled from three shares — **Balthyork, Zorg-en-Hoop, and Bush Lot** — "pulled back together over half a century": **Harry Davson** bought Blair's share, Balthyork, in **1880** and gave it the name Blairmont, and acquired the remaining two in **1934**. (*Spellings of the share names vary in the sources.*)
4. **Ithaca.** In **1842**, in the second wave of the Village Movement, **forty-five freed African labourers pooled fifteen thousand dollars** — money saved out of bondage and apprenticeship — and bought the plantation on the west bank of the Berbice. The author calls it "a nation-founding act" because of the arithmetic: fifteen thousand dollars, four years after full freedom, from forty-five people whom the law had until lately counted as property — "Divided out, it is a fortune per family; pooled, it was a nation-founding act."
5. **2018.** The government assumed control of the bridge company "amid a dispute over toll increases." The bridge had been built as a

public-private concession and tolled from the first day, its charges "a standing grievance of the commuting county."

Chapter Seventeen: West Coast Berbice — the Freedom Coast



1. **The charter-room.** Because "no district in Guyana holds more founding documents of Black freedom per mile of road" — the coast is the ground described by the Village Movement's deeds: Golden Grove, St. John, Lichfield, Hopetown and their neighbours.
2. **Hopetown.** Before 1838 it was the **eastern half of Plantation Perseverance**; earlier still, **cotton lots Numbers 16 through 19** of this coast, property of the planter **James Blair**. In **1840, one hundred and nine** freed African labourers bought those **250 acres for two thousand dollars**, and the transport passed on **12 October 1840**, with **Pompey Joseph** and **Jacob Wilson** among the named joint proprietors. (*The purchaser count is not settled: one source gives 109 for the whole purchase, another 49 for the St Paul's section alone, Hopetown comprising the St Paul's and Firebrace sections.*)
3. **The name.** Village tradition says the name changed when a passing governor remarked that the place was "hoping to be a town"; "the people took the hope and kept it." **It must be cited as tradition** — the book's own note says expressly: "The governor's-remark story is village tradition, reported as such."
4. **The Soiree.** Hopetown's Emancipation-season festival of drum, dance, food and remembrance — "the drums opening at dusk, the ring games and queh-queh songs whose call-and-response the village's founders would recognise, the tables of conkie and metemgee and cook-up, the elders pouring memory as libation." The revivals matter because "the festival lapsed and was revived more than once across the twentieth century — villages, like languages, must be spoken to live" — and its keepers insist "what they are

maintaining is not entertainment but inheritance."

5. **Bush Lot.** The West Coast's biggest village: "a predominantly rice-farming, largely Indo-Guyanese community — the indenture stream's western outpost — whose mills and machine-sheds serve the whole shore."
6. **Fort Wellington.** Today the administrative capital of Region Five, its offices "serving the coast from the Berbice to the Mahaica side." It was built on the former **Plantation Catherina's Lust**, and is named for the small British fort of the Napoleonic era "that once stood where the police station later did."

Chapter Eighteen: The Upper River — Kwakwani, Ituni, and the Bauxite Bush

1. **Why settlement came.** "Geology drew the map." The white-sand plateau between the Demerara and the Berbice holds some of the richest bauxite — aluminium ore — in South America, and in the twentieth century it "pulled roads, rails, and settlements deep into country the coast had ignored since the Dutch left it." The Kwakwani mine opened in **1942**, "in the middle of the war that made aluminium a strategic metal."
2. **The sequence of owners.** Foreign companies; nationalisation in the 1970s; the state's **GUYMINE**; on GUYMINE's dissolution in **1992**, the Berbice inheritor **BERMINE (Berbice Mining Enterprise)**, running Kwakwani and Everton; a joint venture at neighbouring **Aroaima** formed in **1989** with **Reynolds International** of the United States; and from **2004** the Russian aluminium giant **RUSAL's Bauxite Company of Guyana**, which took over the Aroaima operations and worked the Kwakwani–Aroaima district "until they ceased amid disputes in **2020** — with a restart approved in the national budget of **2026**."
3. **Ituni.** A village west of Kwakwani on the old mining railway line from the Demerara side — "a village the industry built and logging now sustains." The **Demerara Bauxite Company** drilled the country in the 1930s and opened the **Mackenzie–Ituni rail line in 1946**; workers' trains ran on it into about 1980. When the mines' focus moved on, "Ituni's people stayed, organised their small loggers' association, and kept the settlement alive on timber and grit."
4. **The heritage argument.** "The mound-fields and dark earths of the middle Berbice — the earthwork legacy of the river's first farmers — are older by a thousand years and more than any fort or bridge on the

National Trust's register of national monuments, and they are still waiting for the state's formal recognition. The county's built heritage does not begin at Fort Nassau. It begins upriver, and it begins in soil."

5. **Berbice Dutch.** Born in the logies of the Dutch estates — Dutch words on an Eastern Ijo frame, with Arawak threads. It "retreated upriver with the descendants of the river people," and was still being spoken quietly along those banks in the **1970s** when the linguist **Ian Robertson** found it, "to the astonishment of a scholarly world that thought it long dead." **Silvia Kouwenberg** wrote its grammar in **1994**. Its last known speaker, **Albertha Bell**, was interviewed at the age of **103** in **March 2004** and died the following year. In **2010** it was declared officially extinct — "the only language ever born in this county, gone home to the river that made it."

Chapter Nineteen: The County Today



1. **Three towns.** New Amsterdam, Rose Hall and Corriverton — "which makes Region Six the only region in Guyana with three towns."
2. **The Berbice Bridge.** Opened **23 December 2008; 1,571 metres** of floating steel, "among the longest pontoon bridges in the world"; built at a cost near **forty million US dollars**. It replaced the ferry, "ending three centuries of ferry mornings and knitting the county's two shores into one commuting, trading whole."
3. **The Tain campus.** Since November 2000 it has meant "that a rice farmer's daughter from Number 19 or a miner's son from Kwakwani can take a degree without leaving the county." The pairing: "What the bridge did for bodies, the Tain campus does for minds."
4. **The four challenges.** (a) Sugar's long retrenchment "has wounded estate communities and their recovery is unfinished"; (b) "the coast lives below sea level in a warming century, and every koker and sea-dam is now a climate front line" — the sluices and dams are the works on which a below-sea-level coast depends, so rising seas make each one a point of defence; (c) emigration has scattered a Berbician diaspora "whose remittances and returns shape every village"; (d) "the border river's diplomacy proceeds, as ever, more slowly than its fishermen."
5. **The diaspora as a village.** Because Berbicians left "in tens of thousands — for Georgetown first, then New York and Toronto and London" — and remained part of the county's working life: "They did not so much leave the county as stretch it: remittances built half the new houses on the coast, barrels arrived like clockwork before September and Christmas, and the county's weddings, funerals, and jhandis are scheduled to the northern school calendar."

End of the Study Guide.

A closing word to the student. This guide has quoted the book and nothing but the book. If you find a claim about Berbice somewhere else that this guide does not carry, that is not necessarily a fault in either — it means you have found the edge of one book, which is where your own research begins. The author's own rule stands over the whole shelf: "Where a thing could not be verified, it does not appear here as fact." Keep it, and your work will be trusted.