

## Abstract

The Hidden History of Trinidad: Underground Culture in Trinidad, 1870-1970  
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This thesis proposes that extant Trinidadian historical narratives have failed to account for the social nihilism and anti-developmental trajectory of culture and society which characterize the nation today. There exists, I propose, a stratum of unexplored history, which describes a space and culture located in a place I call “underground” Trinidad.

The underground exists in all societies, and accounts of it exist for North America and the UK; however, various reasons, principally the desire of historians to “rehabilitate” historical actors, have paralyzed any inquiry which shows the enslaved, formerly enslaved, or the indentured worker as anything but a heroic struggler against various forms of oppression. This restriction denies the existence of a world which was not part of the mainstream, but which existed in parallel, and was largely unconcerned with it. The practices of the underground ranged from the socially proscribed (like traditional African religion and alternative sexuality) to criminal (like illegal gambling and prostitution), and the murderous (like uxoricide and ritual human sacrifice).

This thesis argues that from underground organizations, or secret societies (like Hindu Panths, African Bands, and White and Coloured Lodges) which can be identified and described in the nineteenth century, derived an ontology which was a result of Trinidad’s autocratic system of government and its ethnic heterogeneity, and which generated an *underground culture*—a

set of values, beliefs, and practices which motivated social, political and individual behaviour, which was counter to mainstream beliefs of integrity, personal morality, and social progress. The contours and ontology of this culture can be traced through key actors, literature and the historical accounts of critical events in the twentieth century: the Water Riots of 1903, the racial attacks in 1919, the Labour Riots of 1937, and the elections of 1956.

By the end of the thesis, a much clearer explanation of how recent history has led to the present state of affairs—of great wealth and massive underdevelopment, runaway crime, and social disintegration—would have been essayed.

Key words: Raymond Ramcharitar; Underground Culture; Hidden History; Secret Societies; Panths; Obeah; Freemasonry