

Living Conditions

Introduction:

Poor living conditions persisted into the 20th century. In the town areas, the majority of the housing facilities for the masses could best be described as overcrowded unhygienic tenement yards. They were poorly constructed hovels without much inside plumbing. The tenants shared one standpipe in the yard. From this they collected water for washing and cooking. There was one central bathroom. It was often divided in two, one part was the shower and the other compartment was the toilet.

The roofs were often made from corrugated and even rusty zinc. They leaked when it rained because the landlord's emphasis was not on repairs but collection of rent. Because the demand for housing was so high, a number of persons were afraid to complain too loudly. The landlord's would merely give them notice and rent the place to someone else forcing them to find another place. This was not an easy task especially if you had children.

In the rural areas most of the houses were constructed by the owner with the help of other villagers. A number of persons inherited land from their families who had acquired it through the free village movement the century before. It would not be uncommon to see thatch houses, nor outside bathroom and kitchen as described in the health conditions. Many of the houses were made of bamboo walls and or wattle and daub. (mud) They usually had dirt floors. The houses usually had a large room which was called the hall (living room). The verandah was a must. It afforded one the pleasure of looking out on the horizon and calling to one's neighbor.



A shanty town in Jamaica

In British Guiana and Trinidad a large majority of the population were descendants of immigrants. They still lived in the long unsanitary barracks that were provided for them as part of their contract.