Guyana is a beautiful Caribbean country located in the South American continent and it borders Brazil, Suriname, and Venezuela. The country is now independent; however, Guyana suffered a long period of colonization and territorial dispute between the Dutch, French, and British empires. This resulted in the British empire gaining control in 1831 until Guyana reached independence in 1996. Due to its Caribbean tropical climate and abundant rainfall, Guyana has the perfect conditions for sugarcane cultivation. The industry was founded in 1658 by British and Dutch colonizers. Today, the country houses several hundred plantations along the infamous Demerara River. These plantations cultivate and process the sugarcane plant which produces cane sugar with a dark flavour that is used to produce molasses and rum. The industry has expanded, and it is estimated that twenty percent of the current Guyanese population relies on the earnings of the sugarcane industry and its by-products.

Even though it is a prosperous crop, the original sugarcane plantations were built upon the backs of slaves and indentured labour workers. First through forced slavery, then immigration, the colonizers were able to bring in workers from other parts of the world and pay them a reduced wage, which kept labour costs down and profits up. The workers were from various parts of the world such as the West Indian Islands, Malta, China, Europe, and West Africa, with the most significant group being brought from India.

During this time of colonization and mistreatment of plantation workers, British missionaries made their way through Caribbean communities and left a prominent mark on the foods that make up the Caribbean diet. In an attempt to assimilate the people of the Caribbean Colonies into British culture, missionaries brought European food like plum pudding to Caribbean countries. British plum pudding is a cake made of dried fruits and is cooked by steam for several hours. Plum pudding is a symbol of British Imperialism as all its ingredients were sourced from across the British Empire. The spices came from India, currants came from Australia, and of course, the rum and sugar came from Guyana.

The Guyanese people were introduced to plum pudding, however, by adding a Caribbean twist to the dish, they reclaimed it as their own, and it now carries significant meaning and culture. Black cake is a Caribbean adaptation of the British plum pudding. It is a dark cake laden with dried and macerated prunes, currants, and raisins that have been soaked in Guyanese rum for months leading up to a celebration. Black cake is a dessert made for special occasions, primarily Christmas and weddings, and it symbolizes great affection and intimacy if given as a gift. As the plum pudding symbolized British Imperialism, black cake uses these same ingredients from colonies that are now independent and reinvents the cake as its own symbol of independence, free from the control of the British Empire. The dried fruit, spices, and rum come together to create a cake of freedom and defiance. Guyana and the sugarcane industry have been exploited, mistreated, and silenced for as long as colonial settlers stepped foot in the Caribbean. From slavery to indentured workers, and the current poor economic status, Guyana and the sugar industry have been plagued by colonialism for far too long. However, black cake stands as a symbolic food, reclaiming Guyanese independence and strength.

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