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The Society For Caribbean Studies Annual Conference Papers
edited by Sandra Courtman
Vol.4 2003 ISSN 1471-2024
<http://www.sconline.freeserve.co.uk/olvol4.html>

Respectability¹ on Trial: Notions of Womanhood in Two Jamaican Trials in the Interwar Years

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Abstract

Thus far the working and reproductive lives of Jamaican women of African descent in the post-1865 period have received little scholarly attention. Even less work has been done on the ideologies of womanhood that these women were exposed to. This paper goes some way towards filling this gap in the historiography. It examines the use of the concept 'female respectability' in two trials that took place in Jamaica in the Interwar years. In September 1926, Louise Walker, a twenty-one year old girl, was put on trial for the murder of her boyfriend Stedman Case. She was eventually convicted of manslaughter and given a seven-year prison sentence. In 1932 Muriel Hatchett appeared in the Supreme Court to recover damages against the dentist Dr. E. H. Evans for the loss of the service of her daughter Irma Duncan, whom he had allegedly raped. As both the lawyers and the female witnesses in these trials were Afro-Jamaican, an analysis of their use of the concept 'female respectability', which is based on the verbatim court reports in *The Daily Gleaner*, will enhance our understanding of the construction of notions of womanhood in the Afro-Jamaican community. The paper will show that individual Afro-Jamaicans understood the place and role of Afro-Jamaican women very differently, depending on their social and cultural context.

I

In the Victorian era, the concept female respectability was commonly evoked by the middle classes in Britain to judge initially the behaviour of women in their own class and later on also that of women of the working classes. It was a norm of womanhood that stressed domesticity, that is the idea that a woman's place is in the home where she has to look after her family's physical and emotional needs, and sexual restraint. By the turn of

the century, the concept had found its way into the working class community, where it was reworked in such a way that rather different attributes were emphasised, such as thrift and household management skills.²

This paper demonstrates that by the Interwar years the concept of female respectability had also become firmly established in the Anglophone Caribbean and that it was used to judge not only the behaviour of white women but also of black women. It explores the use of the concept in two trials - the Louise Walker trial of 1926 and the Supreme Court case of Hatchett versus Evans in 1932 - which roused much public interest.³ It will demonstrate that the trials were steeped in a language of female respectability and that they articulated not one but multiple definitions of the concept. These multiple definitions, it will be argued, suggest that the concept of female respectability at the time intersected in various and rather complex ways with markers of difference, such as gender, class and locality.

As both the lawyers and the key female witnesses in each trial were Afro-Jamaican, an analysis of these trials will go some way towards answering the question how the Afro-Jamaican community defined the place and the role of Afro-Jamaican women in the Interwar years. This is a question which gender historians have thus far ignored. They have concentrated largely on the period of slavery and post-emancipation and have argued that Afro-Caribbean women actively tried to live up to the above-mentioned metropolitan middle-class ideal of female respectability. The number of women withdrawing from plantation labour and the increase in the birth rates in the two decades following emancipation have usually been cited as evidence to sustain this claim.⁴ This paper suggests that Afro-Caribbean women displayed a rather ambivalent attitude towards the metropolitan ideal; while they embraced some elements, they strongly rejected others. It furthermore suggests that elite Afro-Caribbean men did not, as some scholars have suggested, urge lower-class Afro-Jamaican women to adopt the metropolitan, middle-class ideal. It will be shown that they did expect lower-class women to live up to a norm of female respectability but that this norm was one that mirrored only to some extent that of the metropolitan, middle-class society.

After an outline of the circumstances of each case and how they came to trial, the paper will examine the definitions of female respectability used by the lawyers in both trials and then move on to describe how the female witnesses understood the term. It will finish with a conclusion that sets out some areas for further study. Its main source of information are the accounts of the court hearings in *The Daily Gleaner*, the island's biggest selling newspaper. Contrary to the official transcripts of the trials, the newspaper accounts contain verbatim witness statements.⁵ They also include the lawyers' addresses and the judges' verdicts. The accounts are relatively neutral in that they say very little about the appearance and demeanour of female witnesses and the lawyers. This is not to say that they are without problems. The witness statements are not free self-styled accounts. They were structured by the directions of the questions, which in turn were largely determined by the rules of evidence and the practices of the court. In spite of their problems, the accounts are a most useful source for historians exploring the construction of Afro-Jamaican womanhood because there are relatively few sources in which non-elite Afro-Jamaican women voice their ideas about the place and role of Afro-Jamaican women.

II

In 1921, when she was sixteen, Louise Walker, like so many other rural girls at the time, made her way to Kingston.⁶ She moved in with her mother who had come down from Newcastle, a small town north of Kingston, a few years earlier. In September 1924, she began a sexual relationship with Stedman Case, who worked as a chauffeur for the solicitor Edward Vincent Clarke. He soon persuaded her to move out of her mother's house and in with his mother. This arrangement did not last long and Louise moved in first with Stedman's sister Jennie, then with his sister Jane before finally sharing a room with Elsie Viera in Beeston Street in central Kingston.

Several nights a week, Stedman stayed with Ethel Lipman, the mother of his three children. Initially, Louise did not get on with Ethel but gradually she accepted her presence in Stedman's life and even looked after Ethel's children when she was ill. What Louise could not accept, however, was Stedman's affairs with other women, in particular Nellie Bray. She did not leave him, however, because he owed her twenty pounds.⁷ Louise worked as a cook and general servant for Hwee Sam, who owned a wholesale provision store and rented out rooms. It was not so much her wages of nine shillings a week but the lodger's tips, which amounted to one or two pounds a week, that had enabled Louise to lend Stedman the money.

On Saturday 5 June 1926, Nellie Bray came up to Louise's room to see Stedman. After Nellie left, the two had a quarrel in which Louise told him that the relationship was over, that she wanted her twenty pounds back and that if he refused, she would go to his employer. Stedman there upon drew a revolver and threatened to shoot her if she went to Mr. Clarke. Early next morning, Louise went up to the Clarke residence and told Stedman once more that she wanted the money back. When he reached for his revolver, she took out a knife and killed him. As there had been very few cases in Jamaica of a woman killing a lover, the case aroused a lot of publicity in June and also drew 'hundreds of people' to the Home Circuit Court on Monday 27 September.⁸ The well-known lawyer Norman Manley defended Louise, while F.C. Wells-Durant acted as the Crown's prosecutor. The latter argued that it was a crime of jealousy; Louise had wanted to marry Stedman rather than share him with Ethel and other women. Manley, on the other hand, presented the loan as the main motive for the murder and argued that Louise had acted out of self-defence because Stedman had drawn a revolver. On Wednesday afternoon, the jury found Louise guilty of manslaughter and the next day, the judge sentenced her to seven years of penal servitude.⁹

In May 1928, Irma Duncan, a twenty-year old girl from Linstead, visited the dentist Dr. Egbert Hugh Evans for the first time in a clinic he held on a weekly basis at the Luxor Hotel.¹⁰ She visited him again in May 1929 when she was suffering from an abscessed tooth. During one of her visits in May she was raped. She continued to see Evans, however, because the work on her teeth was not yet finished. She was raped a second time on 12 September and discovered in December that she was pregnant. In January 1930, she visited Evans in his Kingston clinic and informed him about the pregnancy. He offered her six shillings for an abortion. A month later, her mother Muriel Hatchett and her aunt Kathleen wrote letters to Evans and paid him visits in order to persuade him to provide a more satisfactory compensation for the harm he had done to Irma. Evans eventually wrote a letter in February stating that he would arrange for an abortion. He, however, never followed this up and Irma gave birth to a girl in June.

Shortly before the birth, Muriel hired the solicitor Aston Simpson, who tried to make Evans acknowledge his paternity and pay for the various costs incurred in the pregnancy. Evans initially made no attempt to deny his paternity. Only in November 1931, did he file a defence in which he stated that had never had sex with Irma. A month later, he corrected himself and stated that he had slept with her for the first time in December 1929 and could thus not be the father of the child. As the various attempts by Muriel's solicitor failed to have effect, the case was brought to the Supreme Court, where it opened on 7 June 1932.¹¹ Norman Manley represented Muriel, while J.A.G. Smith, KC, defended Dr. Evans.¹² It was not a criminal proceeding but a civil action for 'seduction' and 'loss of service', that is the aim was not to prosecute Evans for the rape but to decide whether he had to pay Muriel for the costs incurred in the pregnancy and the loss of income that she had suffered from Irma's pregnancy; Irma assisted Muriel in her dressmaking business, for which she received two shillings a week. Mainly on the basis of two letters written by Dr. Evans to a local physician in which he persuaded the latter to carry out the abortion and to use his influence as a justice of the peace to effect a settlement, a special jury decided on 4 July that Evans was the father of Irma's child; that there existed a master-and-servant relationship between Muriel and Irma; and that therefore Muriel was entitled to 21 pounds to cover the medical costs and 200 pounds to compensate for 'wounded feelings, loss of honour and hurt done'.

This outcome illustrates that for Muriel the trial was largely a means to restore her own and her daughter's respectability. Respectability was also at the heart of the Louise Walker trial. Her lawyer presented her as a respectable girl in order to get a verdict of not guilty or manslaughter.¹³ It is not surprising therefore that the lawyers' questions in both trials were steeped in a language of respectability. Manley, for instance, asked a witness 'what sort of a girl' Louise was in the workplace, while Smith asked Dr. Clark, the local physician and Justice of the Peace, whether Irma 'had a reputation for being of a loose immoral character'. If we look at the questions and also at the opening and closing addresses of the lawyers in more detail, we see that different attributes of female respectability were mentioned in each trial:

Louise Walker 1926	Hatchett versus Evans 1932
Emotional self-control	Sexual purity
Thrift	Good household management skills
Marriage	Good mothering skills
Sexual purity	Marriage
	Church membership

Table 1: Attributes of female respectability mentioned by the lawyers, in order of importance. Source: *The Daily Gleaner*, 26 September-1 October 1926 and *The Daily Gleaner*, 8 June, 14-15 June and 5 July 1932.

These differences can largely be attributed to the nature of the cases: physical assault versus sexual assault. Hence, a strong emphasis on sexual purity in Hatchett versus Evans and on emotional self control in the Louise Walker trial. The differences also suggest, however, that female respectability was a polysemic concept, that is the values that the lawyers pointed out as important markers of female respectability depended on the social and cultural background of the woman in question. Thus, in their opinion, a rural, relatively well-off girl like Irma had to be sexually pure in order to be called respectable, while a lower-class, city girl like Louise could still qualify for respectability in spite of not being sexually innocent.¹⁴ This is not to say, however, that sexual purity did not play a

role in the Louise Walker trial. In fact, both Manley and Wells-Durant tried to assess whether Louise was faithful to Stedman. They asked her what she did for the lodgers to make such a sum in tips. Smith, for instance, asked her whether she got the money from 'simply waiting on the Chinese' or something else. Neither of the men, however, questioned the fact that Louise's sexual relation with Stedman took place outside of wedlock. As the norm of female respectability in their own middle or upper-class society strongly emphasised sexual purity before marriage, this shows us how intricately the concept of female respectability was linked to class.

As mentioned, Manley tried to represent Louise as a respectable girl. He first of all, emphasised her desire to marry Stedman. Secondly, he pointed out that she was capable of keeping her emotions under control, that is the anger she felt towards her rivals - Ethel and Nellie - did not lead to verbal or physical attacks.¹⁵ He not only emphasised the fact that gradually Louise and Ethel had become friends but also mentioned how self-controlled Louise's response had been to Nellie's appearance on her doorstep on the night before the murder. Rather than shouting at the girl, she had calmly told Nellie that she would go to her father. To further emphasise Louise's self-restraint, Manley ascertained that she had not followed the threat up. Thirdly, Manley highlighted her thriftiness. Contrary to many domestic servants, Louise did not spend her wages on clothes, tram rides, dances and other frivolities. She bought the bare necessities and saved the rest. Finally and linked to the foregoing, Manley tried to convince the jury that Louise was not a 'material girl'. Her aim on that Sunday morning was not to get the twenty pounds back but to get a 'satisfactory explanation' from Stedman as to where it had gone.

Wells-Durant tried to call Manley's portrayal of Louise as a respectable girl into question. By asking Louise whether she had been 'angry' finding Nellie on her doorstep and what she would have told Nellie's father, he tried to convince the jury that she was not as self-controlled as Manley made out. Louise's answer, however, did little to undermine Manley's claim. She mentioned that had indeed felt angry and that she would simply have told Nellie's father that his daughter 'troubled her'. Equally unsuccessful was Wells-Durant's attempt to weaken Louise's thriftiness. He mentioned that she had not put her money in a savings bank but in unlocked trunk in her room and that she had lent money without asking for a receipt. What we see then, is that both lawyers not only used the same markers of female respectability, but also attached the same importance to them.

As indicated, Muriel's respectability was as much on trial as her daughter's. Manley portrayed Muriel as an excellent household manager and a caring mother. In his opening address, he mentioned that after the death of Irma's father, Isaac Duncan, in 1921, Muriel had supported herself and her daughter with dressmaking, which brought in five pounds a month. She also managed the home where she lived with her elderly mother and sister. While her mother paid for the cook and two servants, Muriel paid for food and other necessities.¹⁶ She was also responsible for the servants and carried out some domestic chores herself. As for her mothering abilities, Manley mentioned that Muriel had brought Irma up 'with the strictest care' and emphasised that although she was not 'wealthy', she had allowed her daughter to have expensive dental surgery done and listed the various efforts that she had undertaken to make Evans financially compensate for the harm done to Irma. To enhance the veracity of his portrayal, Manley asked some of his witnesses to elaborate on Muriel's reputation. Dr. Clark told the jury, for instance, that Irma's family were 'very decent respectable people' and held 'some position in the Wesleyan Church'.

For Smith, Muriel was far from the paragon of female respectability. His questions regarding her marital status - an issue which Manley completely glossed over- suggest that he considered it essential for women of Muriel's class not just to marry the father of their children and live with him but to marry him before the birth of the first child.¹⁷ He asked Muriel, for instance, whether Irma was Isaac's only child and where the two of them had lived since Irma's birth. Muriel answered that Isaac had fathered children with other women before Irma's birth and that after the birth, he had continued to live in his place. Smith also argued that Muriel was not a very caring mother. She had first of all failed to notice Irma's pregnancy. Secondly, she lacked an intimate bond with her daughter, as it was not Irma but a friend who had informed her about the pregnancy. And finally, she had not sufficiently protected her daughter's sexual purity. He questioned, for example, the fact that Muriel had allowed Irma to go to Kingston on her own.

As Smith had to prevent Dr. Evans from paying damages, he was of course more interested in Irma than Muriel's respectability. He presented Irma as a 'spree girl', that is the local term for a girl of loose moral character. He emphasised that she had not actively resisted Evans's attempts at intercourse and argued that her decision not to tell her mother first that she was raped and second that she was pregnant was 'behaviour inconsistent with a well-behaved and proper girl'. The most important way, however, in which Smith tried to compromise Irma's sexual reputation was to ask her and several of his witnesses, about her relations with the opposite sex, especially the young men who worked for the Public Works Department and lodged at Miss Dora Forth's guesthouse, a place that Irma frequently visited.¹⁸ He asked Irma, for instance, whether she had had intercourse with Robert Ferguson. Irma negated all his questions. Some witnesses, however, contradicted her answers. Ferguson, for instance, told the jury that in 1927 and 1928 he regularly had had sex with Irma.

Such contradictory evidence did not make it easy for Manley to uphold the image he had presented of Irma in his opening address as a sexually innocent girl whose social life centred more on the church than boys. He tried to convince the jury that the aim of Irma's visits to the guesthouse had been purely social and that the guesthouse, which Smith had almost described as a brothel, was a most decent place. He, for instance, got Dr. Clarke to describe the place and its landlady as 'very respectable' and made Harold Andrade, one of the Public Works Department boys, to retract his statement that Irma had had sex in the guesthouse with his colleague Jimmy Campbell.

III

If we look at the attributes of female respectability mentioned by the female witnesses, we see that the women did not regard self-restraint and thrift as important markers of respectability:

Louise Walker 1926	Hatchett versus Evans 1932
Paid employment if male provider absent	Paid employment if male provider absent
Helping each other out	Helping each other out
Motherhood	Motherhood
Exclusive rights to a man	Sexual purity
Marriage	Church membership
Deference to males in the household	Deference to mother

Table 2: the female witnesses' markers of female respectability

Source: The Daily Gleaner, 26 September-1 October 1926 and The Daily Gleaner, 8 June, 14-15 June and 5 July 1932.

The differences between the two trials suggest that Afro-Jamaican women's understanding of the concept of female respectability depended largely on their class and locality. Locality, for instance, explains why the Linstead women mentioned active church membership as a marker of female respectability. Not only Muriel and Irma emphasised the role that they played in the Wesleyan church but also Kathleen Hatchett and Miss Dora Forth. As for so many rural Afro-Jamaicans at time, their social life centred heavily on the church.¹⁹ The class of these women explains why they stressed the fact that they attended not just any church but the Wesleyan. While lower-class rural people attended the Baptist Church or one of the many 'spiritual' churches, the middle-classes went predominantly to the Wesleyan, Catholic or Anglican Church.

Locality also accounts for the importance that the Linstead women attached to sexual purity.²⁰ The sexual behaviour of women in a city like Kingston, which at the time had a population of 90,000, was far less scrutinised than that of women in a small town like Linstead with a population of 3,000. Irma's statement shows how the close supervision of her behaviour by her mother as well as local men and women had led her to internalise the idea that a respectable girl did not have sex before marriage or at least before she went steady.²¹ Her remark that she had never 'been walking alone with men' and that she had not called out when Evans had raped because 'it would have been a big scandal' are just two indications that show how much Irma tried to live up to her community's norm of permissible female sex. For the Kingston women, sex before marriage did not harm a girl's respectability. Her standing in the community was severely compromised, however, if she shared a man with other women. Their statements convey furthermore the idea that in working-class communities in Kingston married women, especially those who had married the father of their (potential) children, were regarded as more respectable than women in common-law or visiting unions.²² As we have seen, the women shared this idea with the lawyers.

Irma's statement suggests that rural Afro-Jamaican girls strongly associated female respectability with paying deference to the mother. Irma emphasised that she helped her mother 'all the time' in dressmaking and domestic work and that she had never objected to

her mother's insistence on picking her up after choir practice. Louise, who was of the same age as Irma, did not regard this as an important attribute of female respectability. Not only had she moved out of her mother's house, she also did not feel the need to show deference towards Stedman's mother.

For Louise and also for other female witnesses from Kingston, and this seems to reflect more the nature of the case than the women's class or locality, female respectability implied above-all deference to men in the household.²³ Ethel stressed that she did all sorts of chores for Stedman, while Louise mentioned that she and Stedman had regularly quarrelled but that in the end she had always given in.²⁴ The clearest indication that Louise was strongly influenced by the idea that a respectable woman was dependent, controlled and subservient to men is that she agreed, without any hesitation, to lend him the money for the car.²⁵ The lawyers also adhered to this 'patriarchal' ideal. They, however, argued that deference to male heads of household could only be a marker of respectability if the man in question was a 'deserving' man and not an abusive, selfish, and adulterous man like Stedman.

The female witnesses, like the lawyers, did not regard paid employment as something that diminished a woman's respectability.²⁶ In fact, they thought it made women who lacked the support of a male provider and had children to look after, more respectable. In both localities, women were expected to help such women out. Jane Case emphasised that she looked after Ethel's children when the latter went out to work in the tobacco factory, while Kathleen Hatchett mentioned that she looked after the baby when her sister and niece worked.²⁷ What comes clearly to the fore in the women's statements is that single mothers, like Ethel and Muriel, were not regarded as bad mothers because they relied on others to raise their children. If their children showed good behaviour then they were as much as women who did not undertake paid employment or relied on 'other mothers', held in high respect in their communities.

This leads us then to the last attribute of female respectability that all the women mentioned and which they valued even more than the lawyers: motherhood, whether that be biological or surrogate as in the case of Miss Dora Forth who had an adopted daughter. Muriel was one of several witnesses who regarded this as a more important marker of female respectability than marriage. She was not ashamed to admit that she had not married her daughter's father and strongly emphasised the things that she did for her daughter and praised her daughter's behaviour.²⁸

IV

While there is a substantial body of scholarly work on the lives and representations of Jamaican slave women, which includes several monographs, very little has been written about Afro-Jamaican women in the post-1865 period.²⁹ There is not a single monograph and only a handful of articles. The latter focus mainly on the lived experiences of the women, especially their working lives.³⁰ Only a few articles have explored ideas about Afro-Jamaican womanhood. These studies have concentrated either on white (stereotypical) images of Afro-Jamaican women³¹ mainly produced by visitors to the island or on notions of Afro-Jamaican womanhood articulated by educated, middle-class Afro-Jamaican men and women.³² Practically no work has been done on lower-class (rural and urban) ideas of Afro-Jamaican womanhood. This paper has suggested that there are sources available which, although not unproblematic, can be used to provide a more

comprehensive and inclusive account of the construction of notions Afro-Jamaican womanhood in the post-1865 period.³³

The paper has also indicated that future research into this area of study will have to take into account the very complex ways in which gender interacted with other markers of difference. It has merely been suggested here that middle-class Afro-Jamaican men held slightly different notions of Afro-Jamaican womanhood than Afro-Jamaican women and that lower class, city women listed different attributes of womanhood than lower middle-class, rural women. The material on which the paper is based, however, has not allowed it to indicate how race, ethnicity, age and education interacted with ideas about Afro-Jamaican womanhood. This is something that future research, making use of different sources, such as folk tales and oral testimony, will have to do.³⁴ It will also have to examine what sources informed the various notions of Afro-Jamaican womanhood. It seems that some of the attributes mentioned in these trials, such as thrift, were informed by missionary teachings and colonial education, both of which conveyed the metropolitan middle-class notion of respectability mentioned in the introduction.³⁵ Others, such as paid employment, seem to be derived from the economic and social circumstances, a past of slavery and even the African past of the lawyers and witnesses.

Endnotes

¹ The term 'respectability' in this paper refers to a particular set of values expected of Afro-Jamaican women, which were informed by a variety of sources. In Caribbean studies, the term has commonly been understood as a wide-ranging set of values that applied to both genders and which were rooted in the colonial system. For more information on this definition of respectability and its differentiation from the term 'reputation', see J. Besson, 'Reputation and Respectability Reconsidered', in J. Momsen ed., *Women and Change in the Caribbean: A Pan-Caribbean perspective* (Kingston/London, 1993), 15-37.

² For a good overview of the use of the concept in working-class communities in Britain at the turn of the century, see Shani D' Cruze, *Crimes of Outrage: Sex, Violence and Victorian Working Women* (London, 1998) and J. Giles, *Women, Identity and Private Life in Britain, 1900-50* (London, 1995).

³ The publicity that the Louise Walker trial attracted led the defence to ask the jury to 'put aside' everything they had heard or read about the case and 'give their decision in a fair and impartial and honest way.' The fairness of the Hatchett versus Evans case was also hindered by the publicity that the case received. It led the lawyer who defended Evans to suggest that in the future it should be considered to forbid newspapers from reporting about certain trials.

⁴ See for example, B. Bush-Slimani, 'Hard Labor: Women, Childbirth and Resistance in the British Caribbean Slave Societies', *History Workshop Journal* 36 (1993), 96; R. Reddock, 'Women and Slavery in the Caribbean: A Feminist Perspective', *Latin American Perspectives*, 44, 1 (1985), 75-76.

⁵ During the Interwar years *The Daily Gleaner* published verbatim accounts of court proceedings on an almost daily basis. Journalists who were skilled in shorthand and worked independently from the court stenographers recorded these. As for the official transcripts of trials, only a few were kept by the courts and those that have, have suffered from neglect. Over the years some of these have been deposited with the Jamaican archives and some with the Privy Council archive in London. For more information on court reporting in this period, see the preface in J. Ranston, *First Time UP: Lawyer Manley* (Kingston, 1998).

⁶ Between 1881 and 1921 the population of Kingston increased from 42,568 to 88,000. This was largely the result of rural migration. Women made up about 60 per cent of all the migrants. This led to a skewed sex ratio in the city. In 1921, there were 724 women per 1,000 of the Kingston population. A large number of the female migrants found employment as domestic servants. The 1921 census listed some 40 per cent of the paid female labourers in Kingston as domestics. George W. Roberts, *The Population of Jamaica* (Cambridge, 1957), chapter 5; Colin Clarke, *Kingston, Jamaica: Urban Development and Social Change, 1692-1962* (Berkeley, 1975), 49.

⁷ The money had to enable Stedman to buy a used car and set himself up as a (part-time) taxi driver.

⁸ The Jamaican court system at the time consisted of a Supreme Court and four Circuit Courts. The Home Circuit Court covered the parishes of Kingston and St. Catherine. It was presided by a chief judge and an

assistant judge and met three times a year. H. V. T. Chambers, *Essays on the Jamaican Legal System and Certain Aspects of the Substantive Law Together with a Concise History of the Courts in Jamaica* (Kingston, 1974), 43-48.

⁹ The case would be reviewed after three years.

¹⁰ At the time, there were about 100 dentists in the island. The 1927 Dental Practitioners' law was the first to regulate the practice of dentistry. Only those could be registered as dentists who were qualified to practise in the United Kingdom, held a diploma or licence that was recognised by the governor, or had practised in the island for five years or more and had been approved by a local board of examiners in dentistry. F. Cundall, *The Handbook of Jamaica for 1932* (Kingston, 1932), 141.

¹¹ The Supreme Court functioned in this particular trial as an Appeal Court. Since 1879 the Supreme Court heard appeals, both from civil and criminal cases. See, Chambers, *Essays on the Jamaican Legal System*, 31.

¹² J.A.G. Smith was one of the first black men elected to the Jamaican Legislative Council. He served the Council from his election in 1917 till his death in 1942. He was also the first KC in private practice. For more information on Smith, see J. Carnegie, *Some Aspects of Jamaica's Politics 1918-1938* (Kingston, 1973), chapter 4.

¹³ Shani D'Cruz has demonstrated in her study of late nineteenth-century court trials dealing with sexual assault in working-class communities, that women on trial practised respectability in the courtroom in order to get a mild verdict. They paid careful attention to their appearance, speech and bodily demeanour. The newspaper reports used in this paper say very little about these elements. Hence this paper concentrates on the norm of respectability articulated in the courtroom and leaves aside the practice of female respectability.

¹⁴ A similar attitude towards the sexual behaviour of city girls can be found in Jamaican novels of the period which addressed the so-called 'domestic problem', that is the middle-class criticism about the work and social behaviour of rural girls who worked as domestics in Kingston. As long as the domestic servant was in a more or less stable relationship and one which did not serve as an economic strategy, she was presented by the author as somebody who could still be redeemed, that is made respectable. For more information on this type of fiction, see R. Cobham, 'Women in Jamaican literature, 1900-1950' in C. B. Davies, ed., *Out of the Kumbia; Caribbean Women and Literature* (New York, 1990), 201.

¹⁵ For the middle and upper classes, a woman's physical assault of another woman was a clear sign of 'roughness'. D'Cruze, *Crimes of Outrage*, 78.

¹⁶ Muriel's mother had been a matron at the Linstead hospital. She paid for the servants and cook with her savings. Dressmaking was one the most popular forms of paid female employment at the time. Some 73% of the women listed in the 1921 census as carrying out 'professional, industrial and commercial' occupations were milliners, seamstresses, washerwomen, laundry employees, and hawkers, peddlers and higglers. R. A. Lobdell, 'Women in the Jamaican Labour Force, 1881-1921', *Social and Economic Studies* 37, 1-2 (1988), 212-13.

¹⁷ Smith also conveyed this idea about marriage in his questions to Irma and Kathleen Hatchett about the marital status of Muriel's mother before she was born.

¹⁸ During the depression, the Public Works Department set up a number of workschemes, including the building of roads and public buildings, the construction of telephones lines, and the upkeep of water works. It is likely that the young men who stayed in the guesthouse were employed in the renovation and extension of the Linstead water works, which had been completed in 1893. Cundall, *The Handbook of Jamaica*, 58 and 438.

¹⁹ There was a Wesleyan chapel and a Presbyterian Church in Linstead and an Episcopal and Baptist church in the near vicinity. For more information on Linstead in the 1930s see Philip P. Olley, *Guide to Jamaica* (Kingston, 1937). Madeline Kerr's *Personality and Conflict in Jamaica* (Liverpool, 1952) which is based on field work carried out in villages in the late 1940s, demonstrates the importance of the church in rural Jamaica and illustrates the close links between religion and class.

²⁰ Class also played a role. Lower class, rural women tried as much as rural women of a higher class to guard their daughters' sexuality. They, however, attached far less of a stigma to illegitimacy than their middle-class counterparts. See Kerr, *Personality and Conflict*, 107.

²¹ That local men and women controlled Irma's sexual behaviour as much as her mother, can among others be deduced from Miss Dora Forth's remark that she made sure that Irma never left her place after nine o'clock and Dr. Clark's answer to Smith that people in the church would talk about a girl and boy who would go out walking late at night.

²² None of the Kingston women indicated that economic security had to proceed marriage. Today, for most Jamaican women marriage is still the ultimate aim as a married woman has a higher status than a woman in a female-headed household. They will, however, only enter marriage if they know that the man can provide for them and their children. Hence, the marriage rate is low and the average age of marriage high. See A. Lynn Bolls, *Sister Jamaica: A Study of Women, Work and Households in Kingston* (Lanham, 1996), 44. The

statements examined in this paper then suggest that women's perceptions of marriage have not drastically changed over the course of the twentieth century.

²³ In other words, for these women male authority embodied in the patriarchal family was the ideal. That this attribute does not seem to be linked to locality can be deduced from Kerr's fieldwork. Her female informants mentioned that when present, they led men take the lead in the household.

²⁴ It is interesting to note the ease, with which Louise mentioned that she and Stedman quarrelled. Lynn Bolles, who interviewed working-class women in Kingston in the 1970s, noticed the reluctance of the women to discuss whether or not they argued with their partners. *Sister Jamaica*, 43

²⁵ Louise made two other remarks in her statement which also indicate the extent to which Afro-Jamaican women considered it essential for their respectability to be subservient to the male in the household. First, she did not quarrel with Nellie but decided to raise the matter with the most authoritative male in this woman's life: her father. Secondly, Louise forgave Elsie's betrayal. Elsie, who shared a room with Louise, manipulated the truth by telling the jury that Louise had instructed her on the morning of the murder to take certain items to her mother's, clearly implying that it was 'wilful murder' not 'manslaughter'. Louise, however, was not enraged by Elsie's 'betrayal' because she could understand Elsie's motive. Elsie was engaged to one of Stedman's best friends. She had tried to be a good woman by following her partner's orders to tell this lie.

²⁶ According to the 1921 census, about 47% per cent of the total female population were in paid employment. Lobdell, 'Women in the Jamaican Labour Force', 209.

²⁷ The Interwar years witnessed the beginnings of industrial employment in Kingston. Tobacco factories employed most of the industrial workers at the time.

²⁸ Even today Afro-Jamaican women highly value motherhood. The main reason for this is that women who manage to raise a child properly are 'held in high respect by the rest of society. See, Oliver Senior, *Working Miracles: Women's Lives in the English-Speaking Caribbean* (London, 1991), 66-67. For non-Jamaicans it seems rather contradictory that a woman who presents herself as an active church member does not highly value marriage. Even today, many churchgoing Jamaican men and women do not see a close link between church membership and marriage. The most important church rites for them, like for Muriel, are baptism, confirmation and communion. Roberts and Sinclair have argued that the failure of the church during the period of slavery and post-emancipation to advocate marriage, accounts for the fact that marriage is not seen by the majority of the Jamaicans as essential for family formation. See their *Women in Jamaica: Patterns of Reproduction and Family* (Millwood, 1978), chapter 1.

²⁹ The historiography on Jamaica differs in this respect not from that of other islands in the Anglophone Caribbean. The lack of scholarly interest in Afro-Caribbean women in the post-1865 period is most clearly demonstrated by the fact that Alvin O. Thompson's *In the Shadow of the plantation: Caribbean History and Legacy* (Oxford: James Currey, 2003), the most recent edited collection on the legacy of slavery in the Caribbean, contains not a single article on women.

³⁰ See, for instance, M. Johnson, 'Young Woman from the Country': A Profile of Domestic Servants in Jamaica, 1920-1970', in V. A. Shepherd, ed., *Working Slavery, Pricing Freedom: Perspectives from the Caribbean, Africa and the African Diaspora* (Oxford, 2002), 396-415 and M. Satchell, 'Women, Land Transactions and Peasant Development in Jamaica, 1866-1900', in V. Shepherd, B. Brereton and B. Bailey, eds., *Engendering History: Caribbean Women in Historical Perspective* (Kingston, 1995), 213-32.

³¹ See, for example, E. Brodber, *Perceptions of Caribbean Women* (Cave Hill, 1982).

³² Winston James has explored Claude McKay's ideas about Afro-Jamaican women in his book *A Fierce Hatred of Injustice: Claude McKay's Jamaica and his Poetry of Rebellion* (London, 2000), while Rhonda Cobham has examined Una Marson's view on Afro-Jamaican women in her article 'Women in Jamaica Literature'.

³³ This material offers plenty of scope for other research on Afro-Jamaican women in the Interwar years. Amongst others, it gives a good insight into the survival mechanisms used by women who headed households and the leisure culture of lower, middle-class rural women.

³⁴ The University of the West Indies in Mona and the National Library in Kingston hold various collections of oral testimony given by women who were either teenagers or young women in the Interwar years.

³⁵ In her article 'Making White Ladies', *Resources for Feminist Research* 24, 4 (1994-95), Honor Ford-Smith has pointed out that colonial education largely shaped the notions of womanhood held by mixed-race, middle-class Jamaican women. Some scholars use the term 'respectability' only with regard to values rooted in the colonial system and use the term 'reputation' for values that are 'indigenous' and based on an ethos of equality and personal worth. See J. Besson, 'Reputation and Respectability reconsidered', in J. Momsen ed., *Women and Change in the Caribbean: A Pan-Caribbean perspective* (Kingston/London, 1993), 15-37.

This paper was given at The Society For Caribbean Studies Conference held at The University of Bristol, 7th – 9th July 2003

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