

Brooke N. Newman, *A Dark Inheritance: Blood, Race, and Sex in Colonial Jamaica* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018). 352 pp. Hardcover \$65.00 USD.

Brooke Newman's ambitious and erudite *A Dark Inheritance: Blood, Race, and Sex in Colonial Jamaica* is a study of racial classifications in eighteenth century Jamaica and their complex relationship to the inherited rights of British subjects. Her excellent work is a valuable and timely contribution to two of the main themes of recent British imperial historiography: the constitutional relationships between colonies and the metropole, and the significance of the body and sexual exchange to colonial history. This study focuses on Jamaica—Britain's most valuable and productive sugar-exporting colony and a failed settler society—as an example of the incompatible dualities at the heart of the Empire. Colonial Jamaica offered British men an opportunity to enrich themselves by investing in sugar plantations worked with the labour of one of the most brutal and exploitative slave systems in the world. Its small British population and the lack of marriageable white women also created social conditions which condoned illicit unions between white men and women of African descent that resulted in a growing population of enslaved and free people of mixed ancestry. The moneyed, vocal and politically influential white settler and absentee landholders attempted to limit the rights increasingly demanded by mixed race Jamaicans, who often invoked native liberties from their paternal forbears. For Newman, these legal conflicts and political debates show the extent to which “sex and reproduction, and the institutional mechanisms designed to regulate intimate practices and put them into the service of the colonial state, are foundational aspects of colonialism” (21). Newman demonstrates that interracial sex in colonial Jamaica was a way to both assert white male dominance through control of black female sexuality, and to produce a population of illegitimate mixed offspring who could, in extraordinary cases, receive limited legal recognition as British subjects and buttress the colony's minority socio-racial order. She further argues that Jamaica's lineage-based racial classification was not an anomaly in the Empire, but one of the many ways in which extensive local autonomy allowed colonial governments to assert British dominion overseas through population management and social engineering.

Using a rich array of primary sources, Newman connects Jamaica's local political and social context and constitutional background with larger debates about the nature of the rights and liberties of British subjects (Part 1) and then considers the intimate and individual experiences of Jamaica's white men, enslaved women of African descent and free people of mixed lineage within a transatlantic context

(Part 2). For instance, in Chapter 4, “Blood Ties in the Colonial Sexual Economy,” Newman uses the Tailyour Family papers at the William Clements Library in Ann Arbor, Michigan to trace the career of John Tailyour, a Scottish merchant who moved to Jamaica in 1783 to make his fortune, and his relationship with his cousin’s slave Polly Graham, who bore him four children. When his mother heard the news of her first grandson, she wrote to offer her congratulations, and to say that he would always be welcome in Scotland. When she heard of the next two sons, however, she wrote to say, “I would wish you to have no more until you have a wife” (155). In preparation for his departure from the island, he asked that Polly and her children be manumitted, which was fairly unusual even in cases of interracial concubinage which had produced children. When Tailyour returned to Scotland in 1792 with the profits he had amassed, he bought back his family estate at Kirktonhill and married a Scottish bride. He also brought three of Polly’s children to be educated in England, though on his brother’s advice they were kept far from their grandmother and the ten children John would go on to have with his wife. Newman interweaves Tailyour’s story with examples of other Jamaican mixed-race offspring who remained the enslaved property of their fathers to demonstrate how the colonial system empowered white men to sexually exploit and then dispose of women of African descent, and to determine their own responsibility towards their illegitimate mixed-race offspring.

In the next chapter, she traces this exploitation of black female bodies to the metropolitan imagination by analyzing a rich array of graphic art, plays, novels, and popular songs. For example, the numerous satirical prints depicting a white man and various incarnations of a black female grotesque by artists such as Gillray, Cruikshank, and Rowlandson demonstrate the metropolitan belief that British male control over the black female body led to inappropriate and degrading expressions of male desire, and dangerous consequences. The prints provide a powerful visual expression of metropolitan assumptions about African women’s bestial natures, offensive bodies, and uncontrollable lusts, and demonstrate the extent to which concubinage with female slaves and mixed race offspring was perceived to threaten the integrity of British lineage and racial boundaries in a way never contemplated by seventeenth and early eighteenth century authors and artists.

A Dark Inheritance: Blood, Race, and Sex in Colonial Jamaica is a ground-breaking work, whose great strength is Newman’s ability to harness a broad and diverse range of sources to an original and important argument. She refocuses British imperial history on the body, demonstrating that blood inheritance was central to Jamaica’s narrative of subject rights, and that the sexual exploitation of African women was not an accidental by-product, but a central component of Jamaica’s imperial project.

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