Journal of British Studies (2025), 1–21
doi:10.1017/jbr.2024.184

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT

"A Lazy Mistress Makes a Lazy Servant": Domestic Labor and White Creole Womanhood in Jamaica, *ca.*1865–1938

Liz Egan

University of Warwick, United Kingdom
Please direct any correspondence to elizabeth.a.egan@warwick.ac.uk.

Abstract

This article traces the reproduction of whiteness in Jamaica during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through the lens of domestic labor. Articulated in dialogue—and at times in tension—with Britain, what it meant to be white was forged through representations and practices of domestic service and household management, shaped by the legacies of slavery and the shifting colonial relationship. Anxieties about a declining white population and attempts to rejuvenate the island's image contributed to prescriptions of domestic labor management that positioned the white creole mistress as a model of respectability and colonial modernity. Black domestic servants were repeatedly presented as the mirror through which white creole womanhood was constructed, and this article argues that these representations served to consolidate class/color hierarchies that privileged whiteness into the twentieth century. Yet mapping these discourses onto the daily interactions between mistress and maid also exposes the persistent work required to secure racialized hierarchies. Through photographs, diaries, and correspondence read alongside published oral histories, the article argues that domestic servants persistently exercised agency that disrupted and spoke back to popular depictions, demonstrating the fraught reproduction of creole whiteness at the intersections of race, class, color, gender, and colonial identity.

In 1913, the Jamaican journalist Herbert de Lisser noted that "almost any one in Jamaica, with any pretensions to respectability, invariably keeps a servant, and sometimes two."[1] His words reflect how, across Britain and its empire, the employment of domestic servants denoted a social and cultural status informed by broader negotiations of class and gender. Yet in Jamaica, as a pigmentocracy borne out of slavery, race and color added further layers to domestic labor dynamics.[2] The figure of the black domestic servant was repeatedly represented as the mirror through which an idealized white creole mistress was constructed—even as domestic servants persistently disrupted and spoke back to these popular depictions.

Approaching domestic service as "a form of knowledge, a site of self-fashioning, as well as an employment relationship and a site of physical and emotional labour," domestic labor relations in Jamaica offer a crucial lens through which to interrogate the fraught reproduction of white creole womanhood after the 1865 Morant Bay uprising.[3] Across the nineteenth-

[1] H. G. de Lisser, *Twentieth Century Jamaica* (The Jamaica Times, 1913), 98; see also Stuart Hall and Bill Schwarz, *Familiar Stranger: A Life between Two Islands* (Penguin, 2018), 28; "How to Live on £150 a Year in Jamaica," *Daily Gleaner*, 14 December 1912, 31.

[2] Gordon K. Lewis, *Main Currents in Caribbean Thought: The Historical Evolution of Caribbean Society in Its Ideological Aspects, 1492–1900* (Johns Hopkins, 1987), 9.

[3] Lucy Delap, *Knowing Their Place: Domestic Service in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2011), 236.

and twentieth-century British empire, the home was a contested space of racialization and reproductive labor. Colonial homemaking was a highly politicized component of the "civilizing mission," operating as a self-affirmation of difference, cultural superiority, and one's right to settle. Domestic relations spoke to wider colonial ideologies of "civilizing" maternalism, with white women expected to uphold the ideals of European standards of civilization through their management of the home.[4]

India and the settler colonies have typically dominated such colonial histories of domestic service during this period, but the Caribbean's distinctive place within the contours of British colonialism and enslavement ensured that domestic labor performed a powerful role in post-emancipation negotiations of race and gender. During slavery, the reproduction of whiteness had long been gendered, as the matrilineal inheritance of enslaved and free status had inscribed onto women's bodies the responsibility for social and biological reproduction. White women possessed power and status simply by virtue of their whiteness, even as colonial authorities carefully regulated their sexuality to secure racial hierarchies.[5] Enslaved black women meanwhile, dispossessed of their children, were tasked by slaveowners with mothering the next generation of both enslaved laborers and enslavers.[6] In Jamaica, the politics of reproductive labor were further strained by the dearth of white women on the island, contributing to enduring concerns about sustaining a white population.

The figure of the white creole mistress illustrates the evolution of racialized and gendered forms of reproductive labor into the early twentieth century. Following abolition, a white metropolitan model of femininity that emphasized marriage, maternity, and domesticity became an integral part of the post-emancipation "civilizing mission."[7] But while existing studies of gender in post-emancipation Jamaica primarily center African Caribbean women's subjectivities, there remains relatively limited research into whiteness in the Caribbean during the late nineteenth century. Maintaining economic and political dominance across the Caribbean, white minority populations had to navigate the transition from enslaved labor and a changing colonial relationship with Britain.[8] In Jamaica, this included the fluctuating fortunes of sugar, the growth of tourism and the banana industry, and an increasingly prominent black and brown middle class. Nevertheless, in an 1888 essay marking fifty years since the full abolition of slavery, black Jamaican J. H. Reid still noted that to "live like Backra [white man] is the standard up to which all Jamaica desires to reach."[9] Reid's words capture the persistent prominence of whiteness in Jamaica, not just politically and economically, but socially and culturally as well. Bringing gender and whiteness into conversation, this article seeks to "make whiteness strange" by demonstrating how domestic labor played an essential

[4] Alison Blunt, *Domicile and Diaspora: Anglo-Indian Women and the Spatial Politics of Home* (Blackwell, 2005); Eva Bischoff, "Being at Home: Intersections of Race, Class, and Gender in Settler Colonial Australia," in *New Perspectives on the History of Gender and Empire: Comparative and Global Approaches*, ed. Ulrike Lindner and Dörte Lerp (Bloomsbury, 2018); Fae Dussart, *In the Service of Empire: Domestic Service and Mastery in Metropole and Colony* (Bloomsbury, 2022); Maia Silber, "The Servant Problem and the Colour Line: Race, Class, and Domestic Labour in the Transvaal Colony, 1902–1914," *History Workshop Journal* 93, no. 1 (2022): 138–58; Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (California, 2002), 8.

[5] Cecily Jones, *Engendering Whiteness: White Women and Colonialism in Barbados and North Carolina, 1627–1865* (Manchester, 2007); Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Pennsylvania, 2016), 74–94; Hilary Beckles, "White Women and Slavery in the Caribbean," *History Workshop* 36, no. 1 (1993): 66–82.

[6] Catherine Hall, "Gendering Property, Racing Capital," *History Workshop Journal* 78, no. 1 (2014): 22–38; Diana Paton, "The Driveress and the Nurse: Childcare, Working Children and Other Work Under Caribbean Slavery," *Past & Present* 246, no. 15 (2020): 27–53.

[7] Henrice Altink, *Destined for a Life of Service: Defining African-Jamaican Womanhood, 1865–1938* (Manchester, 2011); Brian L. Moore and Michele A. Johnson, *Neither Led Nor Driven: Contesting British Cultural Imperialism in Jamaica, 1865–1920* (University of the West Indies, 2004); Brian L. Moore and Michele A. Johnson, *"They Do as They Please": The Jamaican Struggle for Cultural Freedom after Morant Bay* (University of the West Indies, 2011).

[8] Howard Johnson and Karl Watson, eds., *The White Minority in the Caribbean* (Ian Randle, 1998).

[9] J. H. Reid, 'The People of Jamaica Described,' in *Jamaica's Jubilee: Or, What We Are and What We Hope to Be* (S.W. Partridge, 1888), 85–101, at 86.

https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2024.184 Published online by Cambridge University Press

role in securing—and at times unsettling—racialized hierarchies during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[10]

The distinction of "creole" whiteness grounds this analysis in the local context, contributing to our understanding of the geographic and historic contingency of whiteness.[11] "Creole" typically referred to locally born peoples of non-indigenous descent—white, black, and brown—but it also captures the process of creolization and its implications for racialized identities.[12] This means locating the white creole mistress within Jamaica as a pigmentocracy. Although B. W. Higman connects the resurgence of domestic service during the late nineteenth century to an expanding "brown" middle class, popular representations of domestic relations continued to center a black maid and white family.[13] This served to reify racial hierarchies even as white folk comprised a declining proportion of Jamaica's population: in 1881, "Europeans" made up just under 2.5 percent of the population according to the census, reducing to just under 1.7 percent in 1921.[14] Census categories were complicated, however, by the porosity of racial identities in Jamaica during this period. In 1913, Herbert de Lisser explained that wealth, education, employment, respectability, and family all informed Jamaicans' classifications as "white," "black," and "brown." While some people, with "a strain of African blood," might categorize themselves as white "and are considered such," others may "also have a strain of white blood but [who] count themselves or are counted as black."[15] Colorism was a prominent component of these social hierarchies, and beyond the categories of "white," "brown," and "black," Jamaicans also employed terms such as "light," "fair," "clear," "sambo," or "dark." References to "light" and "dark" complexions throughout this article engage explicitly with these imbrications of whiteness and colorism to recognize the nuance of Jamaica's pigmentocracy.[16]

Against this backdrop, domestic labor relations functioned as a fundamental tool of white creole self-fashioning across the late nineteenth and into the early twentieth centuries. The reproduction of whiteness was a key concern for commentators in the aftermath of the Morant Bay uprising, and by the end of the century, the development of dedicated "women's columns" saw newspapers play a significant role in circulating prescriptive discourses of white creole womanhood. However, the whiteness of this womanhood was increasingly implicit as a "euphemistic, coded discourse" emerged around discussions of race as the period progressed. With the intersections of class and color within Jamaica's pigmentocracy, this contributed to what Stuart Hall described as the "class/colour code" that informed the everyday social interactions of his Jamaican childhood.[17] By the early twentieth century, this class/color code shaped expectations of domestic labor relations, yet prescriptive representations of white womanhood also expose the anxieties plaguing creole whiteness.

[10] Richard Dyer, *White* (Routledge, 1997), 4.

[11] Alastair Bonnett, *White Identities: An Historical & International Introduction* (Routledge, 2016); Steve Garner, *Whiteness: An Introduction* (Routledge, 2007).

[12] Edward (Kamau) Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770–1820* (Clarendon, 1971), 296.

[13] B. W. Higman, "Domestic Service in Jamaica, since 1750," in *Trade, Government, and Society in Caribbean History, 1700–1920: Essays Presented to Douglas Hall*, ed. B.W. Higman (Heinemann, 1983), 117–38.

[14] Kálmán Tekse, *Population and Vital Statistics, Jamaica 1832–1964* (Department of Statistics [Jamaica], 1974), 78; George W. Roberts, *The Population of Jamaica* (Cambridge, 2013).

[15] de Lisser, *Twentieth Century Jamaica*, 43.

[16] Throughout, I do not capitalize "black," "brown," or "white" so as not to reify them but instead reinforce their cultural and social construction, recognizing the fluidity across these creole categorizations. The census itself used the terms "white," "black," and "coloured"; however, I use the term "brown" in place of the latter due to its offensive nature while remaining in keeping with the use of "brown" during this period. "Light" and "dark" are used by scholars of colorism, and I use these terms in keeping with their work. See, for example, Margaret L. Hunter, *Race, Gender, and the Politics of Skin Tone* (Routledge, 2005); Shirley Anne Tate, *Skin Bleaching in Black Atlantic Zones: Shade Shifters* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Henrice Altink, *Public Secrets: Race and Colour in Colonial and Independent Jamaica* (Liverpool, 2019).

[17] Hall and Schwarz, *Familiar Stranger*, 14; 54–55. See also Altink, *Public Secrets*.

https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2024.184 Published online by Cambridge University Press

These fractures in idealized representations of white womanhood become clearer in the responses and perspectives of servants themselves. Writing in a US context, bell hooks has emphasized the "power of looking," arguing that black servants working in white homes observed their employers, their "gaze" operating as "a site of resistance."[18] By reading both against the grain and "along the bias grain" of little-used photographs, diaries, and correspondence alongside published oral histories, a more layered and complex picture of domestic labor is proposed, which treats the home as a "site of contested articulations of whiteness."[19] Servants' voices are difficult to identify in the historical archive, especially during the nineteenth century, but their actions (and inactions) often suggest an acute understanding of white attempts at self-fashioning, which were vulnerable to disruption or exploitation. Domestic labor thus captures the contested reproduction of creole whiteness in colonial Jamaica, demonstrating how ideas about class, color, and gender were being continuously reformulated during a relatively overlooked period of British Caribbean history.

"How to manage servants"

In the first months of 1866, Englishwoman Emelia Russell Gurney accompanied her husband to Jamaica as he sat on the Royal Commission investigating the causes of the October 1865 Morant Bay uprising. Her letters home to her mother reflect transatlantic discourses about the rebellion and its violent suppression, its origins as a black response to injustice and disempowerment rapidly overshadowed by debates about racial difference and liberal imperialism.[20] Less than thirty years since the abolition of slavery, these discussions reinforced the ambiguity of Jamaica's place in British colonial geographies. Physical distance from the metropole reflected an imagined distance that had long cast aspersions on the respectability, "Englishness," and indeed the "whiteness" of those born—or who had simply lived for too long—in the Caribbean colonies.[21] At the turn of the nineteenth century, abolitionist discourse had emphasized the degrading impact of slavery on enslavers, epitomized by the violence and cruelty of the white Jamaican planter.[22] These tensions were compounded by the Morant Bay uprising and shaped Gurney's observations of the island and her interactions with its white residents.

Domestic service emerged as a recurrent topic in Gurney's letters home, in part reflecting gendered expectations of her as a woman and wife.[23] The mistress-servant relationship was likely also one of the main points of contact between white and black, and so operated as a prominent site from which many white Jamaicans attempted to convey their understanding of post-emancipation society to this English visitor. Distancing themselves from the racial antagonism of the rebellion, Gurney's acquaintances often emphasized familiar—and even familial—relationships with their domestic servants. One woman explained that her children still left flowers on the grave of their childhood nurse who died in 1850. Romanticizing her domestic labor relationships, Gurney's acquaintance fashioned a maternalistic and idealized

[18] bell hooks, "Representations of Whiteness in the Black Imagination" and "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators," in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (South End, 1992), 165 and 115–16 respectively.

[19] Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives*, 70–99; David Lambert, "Producing/Contesting Whiteness: Rebellion, Anti-Slavery and Enslavement in Barbados, 1816," *Geoforum* 36, no. 1 (2005): 29–43, at 35; Mia Bay, *The White Image in the Black Mind: African-American Ideas about White People, 1830–1925* (Oxford, 2000).

[20] Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830–1867* (Polity, 2002); R. W. Kostal, *A Jurisprudence of Power: Victorian Empire and the Rule of Law* (Oxford, 2008); Jonathan Connolly, "Re-Reading Morant Bay: Protest, Inquiry, and Colonial Rule," *Law and History Review* 41, no. 1 (2023): 193–216.

[21] Christer Petley, ""Home" and "This Country": Britishness and a Creole Identity in the Letters of a Transatlantic Slaveholder," *Atlantic Studies* 6, no. 1 (2009): 43–61; Soile Ylivuori, "Whiteness, Polite Masculinity, and West-Indian Self-Fashioning: The Case of William Beckford," *Cultural and Social History* 18, no. 5 (2021): 669–89.

[22] David Lambert, *White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity during the Age of Abolition* (Cambridge, 2005), 12; Hall, *Civilising Subjects*.

[23] Aleric Josephs, "Jamaica Before and After October 1865: A Laywoman's Views," *Journal of Caribbean History* 51, no. 2 (2017): 171–96; Emelia Russell Gurney, *Letters of Emelia Russell Gurney*, ed. Ellen Mary Gurney (J. Nisbet, 1902).

https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2024.184 Published online by Cambridge University Press

whiteness from the memory of enslavement, describing how "one very faithful old servant (he had been a slave and could not read)" had come to them offering his protection during the October uprising. Imploring them to take refuge in his cottage, she had been willing to go but her daughters would not: "[T]hey do not like the blacks as I do, because they have not seen the good specimens there were in the old times."[24]

Such celebratory stories of loyal and brave servants defending their masters during the uprising were common, both in the immediate aftermath and into the twentieth century. They seemingly tempered accusations that blamed the rebellion on an intransigent white population unwilling to adapt to appropriate post-emancipation labor relations.[25] By nostalgically portraying idyllic pre-emancipation relationships, Gurney's acquaintance also refuted prominent portrayals of elite white violence during slavery. While acknowledging that "emancipation was perfectly necessary," she complained that it had "completely destroyed all the affection that there was between the blacks and the whites." Blaming violence on the overseers who were left in charge "when the master was away from the country," elite white men and their families were exculpated in her eyes.[26] Hidden beneath her comment, however, that "the house slaves were part of our own family, and they felt the same interest, more in us than they did in their own children," we also get a glimpse of the familial alienation that many enslaved people suffered under slavery, forced to care for the children of their enslavers rather than their own. With this comment, Gurney's acquaintance evoked the essential reproductive labor associated with the home and the family that would continue to shape discussions of domestic service into the early twentieth century.

For some British observers, however, a fresh influx of non-elite white Englishmen was essential to the preservation of whiteness on the island. A few years later, in 1873, "An Englishman" drew a firm connecting line to domestic service in a letter to the editor of the *Morning Journal* newspaper. Advocating for the immigration of English couples to serve as domestic servants in Jamaican households, he argued that they would play a crucial role "disciplining the creole servants into orderly habits, and teaching them how to clean house, wait a table, and conduct themselves." Proposing that these families would rejuvenate the white population of the island, the writer expressed his fears about the negative influence of Jamaican servants on their employers. He criticized "the gross ignorance shewn by house servants" in Jamaica who "use improper language" and "wear (while doing their work) dirty, ragged garments, hardly covering them decently," asking "with such servants … how can you bring up your children at home to be truthful, candid and pure-minded, unless under your own eyes?"[27] By explicitly calling for married couples to come to the island, An Englishman's proposal exemplified lingering concerns about the biological and cultural reproduction of whiteness. The declining white population threatened the very civilization of Jamaica, and the home was a key battleground in attempts to arrest this challenge. James Froude similarly argued that white settlement was paramount to the maintenance of British colonialism in the Caribbean in his 1888 travelogue. Responding to the recent reintroduction of limited representative government in Jamaica following its abolition in 1866, Froude criticized white Jamaicans as "pale complaining beings" who despaired at their declining economic and political position.[28] His proposal carried an implicit criticism of the historical associations of white creoles with decadence, as Froude argued that, rather than sites of fortune-making, the British Caribbean colonies should be valued as

[24] Gurney, *Letters*, 307–08.

[25] "From the Disturbed Districts," *Colonial Standard*, 16 October 1865, 2; "Packet Summary," *Morning Journal*, 24 October 1865, 2; *Report of the Jamaica Royal Commission 1866: Part 1* (Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1866), 15; Sir David Sibbald Scott, *To Jamaica and Back* (Chapman and Hall, 1876), 199–200. For later fictional accounts, see Eliza Caroline Phillips, *Meyrick's Promise, or, Little Fugitives from the Jamaica Rebellion in 1865* (G. Routledge, 1881); Herbert G. de Lisser, "Days of Terror," *Daily Gleaner*, 13 January 1914, 20.

[26] Gurney, *Letters*, 307–08.

[27] "An Englishman," "To the Editor of the Morning Journal," *Morning Journal*, 20 December 1873, 1.

[28] James Froude, *The English in the West Indies, or, The Bow of Ulysses* (Longmans, Green, and Co., 1888), 8, 192, 221, 252.

https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2024.184 Published online by Cambridge University Press

"homes where English people can increase and multiply; English of the old type with simple habits, who do not need imported luxuries."[29]

These recurrent concerns about the declining white population would continue to influence discussions about women's reproductive labor at the end of the century. In the 1890s, newspaper representations of white women emphasized the maternal, civilizing mission of the mistress of the house prevalent in colonial ideologies of this period.[30] "Uplift" and respectability were promoted as prominent elements of middle-class Jamaican womanhood more broadly, but the *Gleaner* newspaper, as the voice of the white elite, inscribed these responsibilities onto the space of the white home and the figure of the white wife.[31] Publishing an intermittent women's column, the *Gleaner* offered recipes and household tips from laundry to kitchen cleaning, often clipping articles from British and American newspapers with illustrations of white-presenting women modelling the latest fashions.[32] Despite the growth of Jamaica's brown middle class during this period, the *Gleaner*'s "Woman's Corner" thus firmly presented the elite white woman as symbolic of Jamaica's modernity. Preoccupied with the latest Parisian fashion trends, she stood in contrast to the increasingly prominent visual trope of the black working woman produced for and by tourists. As part of the broader discourse of the New Jamaica campaign that emerged in conjunction with the 1891 Jamaica Exhibition, articles, guides, and photographs emphasized the productivity and law-abiding character of Jamaica's laboring population. This "New" or "Awakened Jamaica," as Krista Thompson argues, worked to allay British and American fears of black violence following Morant Bay, seeking to promote investment, tourism, and immigration.[33] In contrast to An Englishman's complaints, depictions of black washerwomen represented the "cleanliness" of the population, while the black market woman, pictured against a backdrop of bananas and palm trees, "signified that the 'anarchy' of tropical nature had been tamed or subdued through their cultivation and imperial transplantation."[34] This New Jamaica was seemingly a modern paragon of the civilizing mission.

Proper domestic management was an essential component of this civilizing imperative; the 1895 Women's Prize in the *Gleaner*'s annual Christmas Essay Competition asked women to respond to the theme of "How to manage servants." Entries emphasized both the authority that should be imbued by the woman of the house, and the maternal benevolence she must show to her staff. Advising that "a lazy mistress will make a lazy servant," the winning essay warned that servants should not be looked upon as "machines" from whom to "extract as much work as possible," but rather treated "as members of the family for the time being." In contrast to the familiarity of Emelia Gurney's 1866 acquaintances, who complained that "education ruined" servants, this personal relationship now extended to taking an interest in servants' leisure time and exercising a moral influence by ensuring

[29] Froude, *The English in the West Indies*, 278.

[30] Fae Ceridwen Dussart, "'That Unit of Civilisation' and 'the Talent Peculiar to Women': British Employers and Their Servants in the Nineteenth-Century Indian Empire," *Identities* 22, no. 6 (2015): 706–21; Barbara N. Ramusack, "Cultural Missionaries, Maternal Imperialists, Feminist Allies: British Women Activists in India, 1865–1945," *Women's Studies International Forum* 13, no. 4 (1990): 309–21; Vron Ware, *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History* (Verso, 2015).

[31] Leah Rosenberg, "'The New Woman' and 'the Dusky Strand': The Place of Feminism and Women's Literature in Early Jamaican Nationalism," *Feminist Review* 95, no. 1 (2010): 45–63.

[32] "Woman's Corner," *Daily Gleaner*, 23 November 1895, 6; Kathleen, "Woman's Corner," *Daily Gleaner*, 1 February 1896, 6; Kathleen, "Woman's Corner," *Daily Gleaner*, 15 February 1896, 6; "The Woman's World," *Daily Gleaner*, 24 August 1894, 7.

[33] Henry A. Blake, "The Awakening of Jamaica," *The Nineteenth Century* 28, no. 164 (1890): 534–44, at 541–42; Edgar Mayhew Bacon and Eugene Murray-Aaron, *The New Jamaica: describing the island, explaining its conditions of life and growth and discussing its mercantile relations and potential importance; adding somewhat in relation to those matters which directly interest the tourist and the health seeker* (A.W. Gardner, 1890); James Johnston, *Jamaica, the New Riviera* (Cassell and Company, 1903).

[34] Krista A. Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics: Tourism, Photography, and Framing the Caribbean Picturesque* (Durham, 2006), 65–71.

https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2024.184 Published online by Cambridge University Press

that "it is profitably employed."[35] The second-place essay similarly emphasized the maternal role of the mistress, arguing that a woman "who is loud, rough and unladylike in her demeanour cannot expect propriety of manner in her servants; for they are apt to imitate her a great deal." Rather, "sympathy; justice; firmness; and command of temper" were the qualities of the "ideal mistress."[36]

Bestowing an expected social and cultural distance between a mistress and her employee, a brief reference to color also inscribed an expected racial distinction between mistress and maid. Warning that mistresses often viewed their domestic servants as inferior, the writer advised that "a black man or woman who works diligently and is honest and good-tempered as a servant is more respectable than an [sic] vile, useless [?] master or mistress."[37] Whiteness, however, is notably unnamed in these essays. Indicating the growing reticence toward race and color at the end of the century, this also points to potential porosity. Just as the practice of "marrying light" might secure or reposition an individual within Jamaica's class/color hierarchy, proper household management could be a performance of social status for those on the margins of whiteness.[38] Whiteness and its attendant significations thus held the possibility of being aspirational.

These themes, and particularly this emphasis on demeanor, continued into the twentieth century, with class/color codes remaining integral to discussions of domestic labor. Herbert de Lisser's 1913 novel *Jane's Career* was significant, however, for centering a title character described as "black"—although with "features" that supposedly "hinted at some white ancestor."[39] Mirroring the urban migration pattern of many early twentieth-century domestic servants, Jane moves from the country to take up a position in the home of a woman of "yellow complexion" who treats her cruelly. Mrs. Mason's claims to gendered respectability are questioned by her servants, who describe her as a "disgrunted [sic] female."[40] The status associated with her relative wealth and skin color is undermined by her deportment, and thus Jane's fellow maid Sarah questions their employer's claims to be a "lady," a term laden with class/color implications.[41] Mrs. Mason was clearly portrayed at a distance from the white ladies whose photographs would soon grace the pages of the *Gleaner*, a paper edited by de Lisser from 1904.

Over the following decades, the ongoing growth in the numbers of black and brown employers of domestic servants did little to disrupt the white maternal archetype, which was increasingly informed by evolving colonial nationalism. Instead, a more explicitly Jamaican identity emerged following the First World War and by the 1930s, the *Gleaner*'s "Our Women's Page" had become a mainstay of the Saturday issue. Society portraits of white women and their children were accompanied by articles and advice columns that reflected women's evolving civic leadership locally. Initially slow to develop among white Jamaican women, the First World War marked a significant expansion of charity and welfare work as an important component of articulations of white creole womanhood. Earlier efforts had been largely led and supported by the governor's wife, but the Women's Social Service Club was established amid the women's suffrage campaign in Jamaica and its committee members were prominent white and "near white" advocates of suffrage. Reminiscent of imperial feminism, members endeavored to improve the social conditions among the island's poor young women, addressing child welfare and moral hygiene, but in doing so

[35] Mrs Collier, "Woman's Paper: How to Manage Servants," *Daily Gleaner*, 24 December 1895, 7; Gurney, *Letters*, 302.
[36] Mrs King, "Woman's Paper: How to Manage Servants," *Daily Gleaner*, 24 December 1895, 7.
[37] Mrs King, "Woman's Paper," 7.
[38] Henrice Altink, "'Marrying Light': Skin Colour, Gender and Marriage in Jamaica, c. 1918–1980," *The History of the Family* 24, no. 3 (2019): 608–28.
[39] H. G. de Lisser, *Jane's Career: A Story of Jamaica* (Gleaner Co., 1913), 27.
[40] de Lisser, *Jane's Career*, 43, 80.
[41] de Lisser, *Jane's Career*, 63; Honor Ford-Smith, "Making White Ladies: Race, Gender and the Production of Identities in Late Colonial Jamaica," *Resources for Feminist Research* 23, no. 4 (1994): 55–67; Altink, *Destined for a Life of Service*, 124.

https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2024.184 Published online by Cambridge University Press

they reified class/color hierarchies predicated on the apparent moral and cultural superiority of whiteness.[42]

The mistress/maid relationship extended these maternalistic attitudes into the home, even as white women's developing philanthropic work was facilitated by these same domestic servants. Indeed, one 1935 article from the *Gleaner*'s Women's Page openly recognized the circularity of these relationships, asking readers "what sort of home does your cook come out of?" The writer proposed that readers should take an interest in the welfare of their domestic servants,

> If for no better reason than that you are the guardian of the health of your own home you are bound to consider the problem of these other women because you must bring them from wherever they come into your home.[43]

Called on to take an interest in the social conditions of their fellow women, "improvements" would be beneficial to their employers as well. This is not to reject their work and interests as simply self-serving, but to recognize how welfare initiatives could contribute to articulations of whiteness, and especially white womanhood, that were conceived in opposition to those they were "assisting." Notably, this article was entitled "Quashie is a Nice Woman." This was a popular name during slavery, but also a common stereotype deployed by whites that was characterized by lying, laziness, joviality, and caprice. By the twentieth century, it was commonly used to refer to a "fool" or member of the peasantry but remained racialized as black.[44]

The *Gleaner*'s interwar columns also suggest the persistent work required to uphold these representations of white womanhood, often reflecting similar themes to the earlier 1895 essays. Recurring complaints about the so-called "servant problem" point toward the ongoing power struggles between mistress and maid as, like in Britain, articles and letters lamented the dearth of reliable and efficient domestic workers.[45] In 1935, one writer, however, suggested that "The Servant Problem is a Mistress Problem," and stressed that a mistress must be competent, efficient, and empathetic. She should be able to instruct her servants appropriately, and "if you complain that the soup tastes like pot water and has no flavour, you can hardly discharge the cook for impertinence if she asks you how to do it." Maintaining composure was also essential; after all, "how can you command her respect if you then fly into a terrible rage and behave like a market woman?"[46] Positioning the market woman as the counterpoint to notions of civilized white femininity, this description once more drew on stock tourism figures of black working women. The feat of her labor as she walked long distances with a heavy burden atop her head epitomized the parochialism of black womanhood in contrast to the modern white creole woman who spent her evenings dining and dancing at Constant Spring Hotel.[47] Yet as the writer called on "Jamaican girls" to learn the "housekeeping arts" before marrying so as to avoid "losing the respect both of your husband and your maids," the home remained a site of critical reproductive

[42] "Efforts of Women Here to Better Social Conditions," *Daily Gleaner*, 2 October 1919, 3; Linnette Vassell, "The Movement for the Vote for Women 1918–1919," *Jamaican Historical Review* 18 (1993): 40–54; Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture 1865–1915* (University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Ramusack, "Cultural Missionaries."

[43] Vox Populi, "Quashie is a Nice Woman," *Daily Gleaner*, 30 November 1935, 36.

[44] "Quashie" or "Quashee," and its female equivalent "Quasheba," originate from the Twi name-day for "Sunday." For more on the stereotype of "Quashie," see Orlando Patterson, *The Sociology of Slavery: An Analysis of the Origins, Development and Structure of Negro Slave Society in Jamaica* (MacGibbon & Kee, 1967), 174–81; *Dictionary of Jamaican English*, s.v. "Quashie", by Frederic Gomes Cassidy and R. B. Le Page (Cambridge, 1967), 370–71.

[45] Laura Schwartz, *Feminism and the Servant Problem: Class and Domestic Labour in the Women's Suffrage Movement* (Cambridge, 2019); Dussart, *In the Service of Empire*, 55–62.

[46] A Mother, "The Servant Problem is a Mistress Problem," *Daily Gleaner*, 19 January 1935, 32.

[47] Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics*, 104–08.

https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2024.184 Published online by Cambridge University Press

labor. Conjuring the homely image of a family gathered around the fireside to perform household tasks, the writer suggested that this "has made the English family, and probably the English nation, what it is." A sense of distinctive island identity emerged as the writer nevertheless proposed that Jamaica, with "our sunshine out-of-doors so brilliant, our nights so lovely and warm," may not be suited to "this kind of home life," but "a little of it would later on make better husbands and wives, and fathers and mothers, of our young people."[48]

Juxtaposed representations of white and black women were also circulated by the annual magazine *Planters' Punch*, first published in 1920. The magazine placed white British and Jamaican women on a par by frequently publishing their portraits alongside commentary extolling their virtues, promoting a common vision of idealized white womanhood.[49] *Planters' Punch* was "mixed" by Herbert de Lisser, whose increasing integration into elite circles saw his class/color position shift during the first decades of the twentieth century. He is often described as "near-white," and literary scholars have noted that, in contrast to his sympathetic portrayal of black working women in his early novels, white heroes and tragic brown heroines populate his later works.[50] Many of his stories were first published in *Planters' Punch*, which was primarily aimed at the island's white elite, although its reasonable price and annual appearance meant that it was likely read by the literate middle classes as well.[51] The magazine was also designed with British audiences in mind and possessed close ties to the Jamaica Imperial Association, founded in 1917 to promote "the producing, commercial, social and public interests of Jamaica" within the British Empire, and of which de Lisser was secretary.[52] Contributing to this growing colonial nationalist outlook, the representations of Jamaica and its people produced by *Planters' Punch* were thus far-reaching, reinforcing ideas about class and race that not only idealized whiteness but also sought to collapse the distance between colony and metropole.[53]

One 1925 article was dedicated solely to the "fair daughters of Jamaica" and illustrated with photographic portraits of young white "Jamaica belles." The article noted that the women of Jamaica were typically "represented as peasants merely," gesturing again toward the prevalent presentation of black Jamaicans as figures to be consumed by tourists in photographs and postcards.[54] Cautioning that an outsider might think Jamaica consisted solely of a "burlesque" of "sturdy dames trudging it down to a market town … laughing damsels washing clothes by the riverside; giggling servant girls," *Planters' Punch* committed itself to emphasizing "the other side of the picture." Models of modernity, the white women in its pages were not bound to the home but had jobs and spent their evenings at the exclusive Liguanea Club. Such active lives, however, necessitated domestic labor from the "giggling servant girls" against whom the magazine sought to construct these visions of creole white womanhood.[55]

It was significant that this article not only positioned the "fair daughters of Jamaica" in opposition to their "giggling servant girls," but also emphasized the distance between these modern women and their eighteenth-century counterparts. Citing the unfavorable descriptions of planter and enslaver Edward Long, the article attempted to recuperate the image of

[48] A Mother, "The Servant Problem is a Mistress Problem," 32.

[49] Leah Reade Rosenberg, *Nationalism and the Formation of Caribbean Literature* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 76–82.

[50] Rhonda Cobham-Sander, "The Literary Side of H. G. de Lisser (1878–1944)," *Jamaica Journal* 17, no. 4 (1984): 2–9, at 7–9; Rosenberg, *Nationalism*, 67.

[51] "Duchess and Jamaica Ladies," *Planters' Punch*, 1929, 1; Belinda Edmondson, *Caribbean Middlebrow: Leisure Culture and the Middle Class* (Duke, 2011), 42.

[52] Herbert G. de Lisser, "The Romance of an Idea, or From Thirty-Nine to Many Thousand in Six Years," *Planters' Punch*, 1923/24, 1–2.

[53] Henrice Altink, ""The Case of Miss Leila James B.A.": Class, Race, Gender and National Identity in Early Twentieth-Century Jamaica," *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 10, no. 1 (2009).

[54] Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics*; Mimi Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean, From Arawaks to Zombies* (Routledge, 2003).

[55] "The Fair Daughters of Jamaica: Characteristics," *Planters' Punch*, 1925–26, 4–5.

https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2024.184 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the white creole woman from history. Long had been a vocal advocate of slavery and his *History of Jamaica* was entrenched with visceral racism that stretched to an unfavorable depiction of the white creole woman corrupted through proximity to her enslaved servants. "Awkwardly dangling her arms with the air of a Negro-servant, lolling almost the whole day upon beds or settees," Long described the white creole woman as dependent on her "sable hand-maids" and her speech as "whining, languid, and childish."[56] His opinion was not unique. Lady Maria Nugent, wife of the governor of Jamaica from 1801–06, had expressed similar criticisms when she wrote disparagingly of white creole women who spent their time "writing, reading, and creolizing," surrounded by a coterie of servants who "all are obliged to attend to any caprice" of white mothers and their children.[57] In contrast, proselytizing and teaching her domestic staff how to perform their duties, Nugent constructed herself as a white, civilized Englishwoman in opposition to both the African Jamaicans and creole whites around her.[58] Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, *Planters' Punch* frequently published retrospectives that both sanitized the island's history of slavery and placed it at a distance from the new, modern Jamaica.[59] As the "fair daughters of Jamaica" contributed to this wider agenda, they were expected to not simply be "civilized" but "civilizing," taking up Nugent's mantle to guard against the potential dangers of creolization in the wrong direction.[60]

Tensions between British and Jamaican domestic management had already come to the fore earlier that year with a letter from "An English Housekeeper" to the *Gleaner* newspaper. Complaining about attempts to encourage more middle-class British settlers to Jamaica, her letter reinforced a sense of distance between metropole and colony as she detailed her disillusionment with her new home. Domestic servants were a major source of her frustration as she described her "struggle with help, who to say the kindest thing are usually anything but helpful." Complaining that it was a "harassing struggle not for style and effect but just to keep her home moderately clean and tidy, and to get decently prepared and well cooked food on her table," the island was deemed thoroughly unsuitable for prospective British settlers[61] Other correspondents to the *Gleaner* in 1925 concurred, arguing that Jamaicans were used to "living in a slovenly manner" but English people struggled to adapt.[62] Many Jamaican and other resident English readers rallied in disagreement, proposing that while good servants might be difficult to find, a good housekeeper would be able to train and manage them appropriately.[63]

Familiarity was again employed in relation to authority, but now to assert a local identity. A particular complaint by "An English Housekeeper" was the communication gap between housekeeper and servant, arguing that the former "cannot even understand when they do try to explain unusual things to her."[64] Signifying the creolization taking place, many elite Jamaicans moved easily between standard English and Jamaican Creole, communicating with their servants in the latter. The travel writer Mary Gaunt noted that, in response to her

[56] Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica …* Reprint, with introduction by Howard Johnson (McGill-Queen's, 2002; orig. edn, 3 vols: T. Lowndes, 1774), II: 279. For more on Long, see Catherine Hall, *Lucky Valley: Edward Long and the History of Racial Capitalism* (Cambridge, 2024).

[57] Philip Wright, ed., *Lady Nugent's Journal of Her Residence in Jamaica from 1801 to 1805* (University of the West Indies, 2002), 98, 117, 146.

[58] Anne Shea, "Property in the White Self: Assessing Lady Maria Nugent's Jamaican Journal," *Women's Studies* 30, no. 2 (2001): 175–97.

[59] For example, "Jamaica Society of Past Days: Their Robust Manners, in Notable contrast with the more decorous behaviour of to-day—some modern Society ladies pictured," *Planters' Punch*, 1937–38, 4.

[60] Kamau Brathwaite, *Contradictory Omens: Cultural Diversity and Integration in the Caribbean* (Savacou, 1974), 17–18.

[61] "The Recent Interview with Mr. Cradwick: 'An English Housekeeper' Writes on the Conditions Prevailing here," *Daily Gleaner*, 6 January 1925, 8.

[62] "Housekeeping in Jamaica: The Experience of an 'English House-holder'," *Daily Gleaner*, 3 February 1925, 12.

[63] "Housekeeping in Jamaica," *Daily Gleaner*, 6 February 1925, 17; "An English Housekeeper Who is Happy in Jamaica," *Daily Gleaner*, 9 February 1925, 10; "In Defence of Jamaica," *Daily Gleaner*, 13 February 1925, 12.

[64] "The Recent Interview with Mr. Cradwick," 8.

https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2024.184 Published online by Cambridge University Press

own difficulty communicating with household staff, the cook in question commented that Gaunt "don't tark our tark, Busha." Addressing her employer in this way, the cook invoked the shared language of the creole home.[65] Another commentator similarly noted the ease with which the creole woman could:

> pour tea with the best, dine with the highest in the land, conversing in correct if rather stilted English, attend a garden party where "form" is everything, then go home and indulge in a wordy battle in the native vernacular with a fat, perspiring, black cook.[66]

This was a notable difference to the ways in which "native" language use was perceived as dangerous in other colonial settings such as the British Raj and Dutch East Indies. Lady Maria Nugent had similarly complained of white creole ladies who "speak a sort of broken English, with an indolent drawling out of their words, that is very tiresome if not disgusting."[67] Yet, by the interwar period, the white creole woman's command of creole language, and subsequent relationship with her servants, was a source of pride.

The representations of creole whiteness and domestic service discussed here were not limited to circulations of print but permeated written and visual sources of families and visitors to Jamaica, as well. Twentieth-century photographs such as in Figure 1, for example, capture the powerful role domestic servants occupied in the fashioning of the employer's sense of self. Showing three maids lined up behind seated members of the family, the photograph reproduces the negotiations of modernity, respectability, and familiarity present in newspaper discourses. Clothed in black dresses, white aprons, and lace-trimmed caps, their uniform clearly marks them as employees. The maids possess a notably darker complexion compared to the main family members and are positioned so that the family car can be seen at the center of the photograph. Framing the house and car, the maids serve as visual symbols of wealth and status, even as their inclusion in this family photograph also hints at their peripheral place within the family unit.

We cannot know how these three women felt about their inclusion in the Livingston family photograph, although their stance with arms by their sides appears somewhat stilted in comparison to the relaxed comportment of the other figures in the image. This is not to deny the real emotional and familial bonds that may have characterized their relationships, but to argue that we need to excavate a more complete picture of how everyday experiences of domestic relations were mobilized as part of discourses of creole whiteness. The representations of domestic labor discussed above illustrate an outward-looking, prescriptive image of the kindly white mistress, but the persistent discussions about correct household management and concerns about the "servant problem" expose the frailties of this idealized image. This was a period of ongoing negotiations of race, class, color, and gender that interacted in ways that refused singular definitions.

"She Just Thinks I Can't Do Without Her"

Servants were not silent in debates about household management and, as such, were active participants in the negotiations of meanings embedded in white creole womanhood throughout this period.[68] For example, intervening in the debate provoked by An English Housekeeper, two letters to the editor ostensibly from servants also appeared in the *Gleaner* in 1925. "Jane" recounted her experience working for an English mistress who had

[65] Mary Gaunt, *Reflection—in Jamaica* (Ernest Benn, 1932), 23; Moore and Johnson, *"They Do as They Please"*, 88.

[66] Sub Inspector Harvey Clarke, "Miss Jamaica," *Planters' Punch*, 1929, 4.

[67] Dussart, "That Unit of Civilization," 713; Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge*, 121; Wright, ed., *Lady Nugent's Journal*, 98.

[68] David R. Roediger, ed., *Black on White: Black Writers on What It Means to Be White* (Schocken, 1998); Alastair Bonnett, "White Studies: The Problems and Projects of a New Research Agenda," *Theory, Culture & Society* 13, no. 2 (1996): 145–55.

https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2024.184 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Figure 1. "Livingston Family," Livingston Collection, National Library of Jamaica (NLJ), Kingston. Reproduced with kind permission of the NLJ.

her working until "all ungodly hours of the night" due to the "'Home' custom of having dinner at 8p.m." "An Experienced Servant" likewise wrote to the *Gleaner*, suggesting that English women were perhaps "unfortunate" with domestic servants in Jamaica because "the majority of us have been accustomed to work with the ladies of Jamaica who treat their servants with humanity, whilst you Englishwomen treat your servant with brutality." Jane went further, voicing an awareness of class tensions by suggesting that "It 'tek tief fe ketch tief' [It takes a thief to catch a thief]. In the same way it takes an erst-while servant to know a servant." She proposed that the women who went to Jamaica and were "supercilious, hypercritical and carping" were not "moneyed" but those recently "elevated to house-keeping offices" themselves.[69]

In questioning the class origins of those women who could not maintain proper domestic labor relations, Jane undermined simple racialized hierarchies and spoke back to the racism and white superiority of An English Housekeeper. Her words suggest a sharp awareness of the class anxieties intersecting with race and color in Jamaica during this period. To be white was not simply about skin color, but also about wealth, deportment, and occupation. In his 1927 memoir, police inspector Herbert Thomas referred to the common practice of "tracing" as Jamaicans of all colors would try to interpret each other's family ancestry. "[A] favourite form of abuse" often involved "making uncomplimentary allusions to one's ancestry and antecedents," Thomas noted when he was subjected to tracing in his early career by allusions that he, or his family, had once been "in the Reformatory in England." Thomas was accepted as white, but the social origins of his family were called into question, indicating the importance of class as well as color to these considerations.[70] Significantly,

[69] Jane, "Answer to English Housekeeper," *Daily Gleaner*, 19 February 1925, 8; An Experienced Servant, "A Servant Writes," *Daily Gleaner*, 19 February 1925, 8.

[70] Herbert T. Thomas, *The Story of a West Indian Policeman* (Gleaner, 1927), 356.

https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2024.184 Published online by Cambridge University Press

tracing represented a means by which black and brown Jamaicans recognized and probed points of potential white vulnerability.

Jane's letter to the editor appears to offer rare access to the voices of domestic servants during this period. These were not simply anonymous automatons performing work for their white employers, but returning the gaze bestowed upon them. The act of writing to the *Gleaner* newspaper, a paper that so often spoke about the black working class, but rarely facilitated their own voices, is significant. The Women's Page might offer prescriptive advice for her mistress, but Jane claimed space for herself. She employed similar methods of resistance in print found in mid-nineteenth century British newspapers, illustrating how Jamaican negotiations of the employer/servant relationship formed part of a broader pattern across the Atlantic.[71] Of course, we do not know whether Jane's words were authentic. They may have been ventriloquized or invented by anyone wishing to wade into the debate to defend creole households. Yet even if Jane's letter was a fabrication, it reveals the significance assigned to the domestic labor relationship and its place as a key arena where ideas about race and creole identity were negotiated. Jane is a marked contrast to the "giggling servant girls" portrayed in that year's issue of *Planters' Punch*, and it is perhaps not a coincidence she shared a name with the eponymous heroine of de Lisser's celebrated debut novel.

Oral history testimonies of former servants similarly capture the equivocal experiences of domestic service during the early twentieth century. Barry Chevannes spoke to several former domestic servants who had become Rastafari later in life. Brother Faulkner attested to the affection of one white pen-keeping family who employed him to tend their gardens and polish the car. He recalled that the lady of the house "did love me very much" and she would regularly ask him to fetch her water because she felt "more satisfied than when other servants give me water." Although this summoning by bell from the garden might have been irksome, Faulkner appears to have taken pride in her preference and notes that he took care to wash the glass properly to improve the water's taste. Alongside his wage of twelve shillings, Faulkner was given lunch every Sunday and unfurnished accommodation, but he supplemented this income by going to the market for "Big Missis." Charged less by vendors due to his color, he pocketed the difference. Eventually, Faulkner was dismissed for taking money he was given to pay the milk supplier, but magnanimously noted that he easily found more work through his acquaintance with "plenty gentlemen in authority."[72]

Not everyone was as positive as Brother Faulkner. In contrast to Jane's letter to the *Gleaner*, another interviewee, who had worked for a British Army officer, complained that it was only when the officer's wife had "walk about Jamaican people and find out how dem handle dem servant, and she want to bring rule on me." Perhaps for this officer's wife, adopting creole management techniques was a means through which to fit in with local white society. Nevertheless, this experience stands in contrast to the ameliorative picture of social relations presented in the *Gleaner* and *Planters' Punch*. Describing Jamaican employers as authoritarian and concerned that "even reasonable concessions to servants would 'spoil' them," the anecdote is more reminiscent of the supposedly corrupting influence of the Caribbean on whites during slavery.[73] For another female interviewee, her extensive responsibilities for cooking, cleaning, managing the laundry, and taking care of the children, all for seven shillings a week, warranted the description of "slave maid."[74] This choice of language poignantly drew a clear connecting line between the extractive practices of enslavement and the twentieth-century experience of domestic service.

Gender, class, and color profoundly shaped these different experiences of domestic service. The experience of Sister Missis likely reflected the middle-class status of her employer, in contrast to Brother Faulkner who worked in an elite multi-servant household, a typical pattern for men and boys who were often employed as gardeners, chauffeurs,

[71] Dussart, *In the Service of Empire*, 170–94.
[72] Barry Chevannes, *Rastafari: Roots and Ideology* (Syracuse, 1994), 73–74.
[73] Chevannes, *Rastafari*, 72–73.
[74] Chevannes, *Rastafari*, 74.

https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2024.184 Published online by Cambridge University Press

and yard boys.[75] Color was also prominent across hiring practices. Twentieth-century advertisements in the *Gleaner* document prospective employers who often specified their desire for applicants of a specific shade; those looking for work similarly characterized themselves as "light," "fair," or "coloured."[76] Domestic servants may have specified a light complexion to gain employment, with 34.6 percent describing themselves as "clear," "brown," "fair," or "white" in advertisements from 1920. Because they were paying for print space, how servants chose the words they used to market themselves was telling. Michele Johnson describes these advertisements as a "sort of dialogue" between prospective employers and employees. The specification of traits such as honesty, decency, and respectability alongside color reveal both the anxieties of employers, and the ability of servants to effectively respond to these concerns.[77] A minority of jobseekers also marked themselves as "dark," perhaps seeking to avoid potential rejections later. Alternatively, they may have been marketing themselves to families who, due to class or color themselves, would have been less likely to possess the status to attract "light" servants or might have wished to accentuate their place in the pigmentocracy by deliberately hiring "darker" employees.[78] There was a historical precedent to these employment patterns that privileged a light complexion, replicating slavery-era distinctions between field and domestic labor. Enslaved men and women who possessed a light complexion would be typically exempt from the more physically demanding fieldwork: enslaved men of color were often trained as tradesmen and enslaved women of color in domestic labor. These positions were deemed preferable to the cane fields, reflecting proximity to whiteness both in terms of color but also heritage, as many were the children of white slave-owners.[79]

Into the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, domestic labor continued to be viewed as a valuable avenue of employment. This was especially true for working-class women for whom this was perceived as respectable and appropriately feminine work.[80] Although peasant proprietorship grew during the late nineteenth century, giving small settlers freedom over their labor, making a living from the land was not easy. The decline in domestic service following abolition reached its nadir in 1881, and its subsequent resurgence accompanied the resuscitation of the plantation—in 1861, the census recorded 16,253 domestics, which increased to 49,965 in 1921, a figure that was not inclusive of an additional 9,580 washerwomen and 23,237 seamstresses.[81] Competition with large sugar estates for land and government support undermined peasant proprietorship and, from the early twentieth century, this was further exacerbated by the corporate domination of the fruit trade by the likes of the United Fruit Company.[82]

Parental preferences also suggest the social capital associated with domestic service, especially when an employer was white.[83] Men and women interviewed by Erna Brodber

[75] Higman, "Domestic Service in Jamaica," 117, 131; The National Archives (TNA): CO 950/944, "Questionnaire on Certain Matters Connected with Social Welfare," West India Royal Commission 1938–39, Written Evidence Jamaica, Vol. 2., fols. 18–23.

[76] See for example, *Daily Gleaner*, 1 September 1920, 8; 4 September 1920, 12; Altink, *Destined for a Life of Service*, 127. This was not confined to domestic service: see also Altink, *Public Secrets*, 21–55.

[77] Michele Johnson, "Intimate Enmity: Control of Women in Domestic Service in Jamaica 1920–1970," *Jamaican Historical Review* 18 (1993): 55–65, at 57; Michele A. Johnson, ""Decent and Fair": Aspects of Domestic Service in Jamaica, 1920–1970," *The Journal of Caribbean History* 30, no. 1 (1996): 83–106.

[78] Caroline Bressey, "Looking for Work: The Black Presence in Britain 1860–1920," *Immigrants and Minorities* 28, no. 2 (2010): 164–82; Louis Fernando M. Henriques, *Family and Colour in Jamaica* (Macgibbon & Kee, 1968), 58; Johnson, "Decent and Fair," 101.

[79] Lucille M. Mair, *A Historical Study of Women in Jamaica, 1655–1844* (University of the West Indies, 2006), 269–71.

[80] Erna Brodber, *The Second Generation of Freemen in Jamaica, 1907–1944* (Florida, 2004), 67–69; Higman, "Domestic Service in Jamaica," 122.

[81] Higman, "Domestic Service in Jamaica," 118.

[82] Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832–1938* (Johns Hopkins, 1992), 347–48.

[83] Higman, "Domestic Service in Jamaica," 118; Michele Johnson, "'Young Woman from the Country': A Profile of Domestic Servants in Jamaica, 1920–1970," in *Working Slavery, Pricing Freedom: Perspectives from the Caribbean, Africa and the African Diaspora*, ed. Verene Shepherd (Ian Randle, 2002), 396–415; Chevannes, *Rastafari*, 69.

https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2024.184 Published online by Cambridge University Press

about their lives at the beginning of the twentieth century referred to the security offered by domestic labor. Parents often sought out places in affluent homes for their daughters and greater status was attached to those roles that brought a servant into closer contact with their white employer.[84] Alice Spinner, the pseudonym of British novelist Augusta Zelia Fraser, explored this in her short story "Margaret: A Sketch in Black and White" (1896). Likely informed by her own experiences in Jamaica during the 1890s, Spinner describes how Margaret was valued by her family for being "so clear an' fair."[85] Such language, loaded with positive connotations, reinforced the valorization of whiteness that also informed Margaret's role as a nurse. She "worships the white 'buckra' baby that was her peculiar charge" and claims that since she was young, her mother had wished to distance her from black Jamaicans and so "put me wid white ladies, an' dey all like me, an' learn me all dere ways."[86] The tutelage that Margaret refers to again conjures the cultural and social performances associated with whiteness that underscore the extent to which it went much further than physiognomy.

In the preface to her short story collection, Spinner claimed to be recording the stories of her own servants and described reading the work back to her staff who corrected mistakes. While this claim was likely designed to assert the supposed authenticity of her account, it also highlights the difficulties of identifying the voices of servants themselves.[87] Beyond oral histories refracted through memory, or a letter like Jane's, records of servants in their own words are unusual and especially rare earlier in the nineteenth century.[88] However, the ambivalences of domestic labor relations still emerge from employers' own records. Their frustrations and complaints capture persistent tensions. In contrast to the idealized mistress constructed by newspapers and magazines, reading against the grain—and along the bias grain—of letters, diaries, and photographs can evoke the multiple means by which servants returned their employer's gaze. Doing so, they often engaged with, and disrupted, dominant discourses of whiteness, contributing to the persistently fraught reproduction of whiteness throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

For example, returning to the aftermath of Morant Bay in 1866, another acquaintance of Emelia Gurney's indicated the changing nature of domestic service since emancipation. Mrs. Bravo complained that servants "were so conceited they would not have a fault found with them, and so independent they would walk off at an hour's notice." On the other hand, she praised the servants who had once been enslaved and who "were much attached to them." She had "occasionally used the whip to them, and they had said since, 'Ah, Missus, you had no used give us enough whip, you only tickle our faces; if you had given us more, we do better now'."[89] Maternal authority was not simply about familial ties, but the proper use of everyday violence as a disciplinary tool. Physical discipline was integral to the colonial mission of teaching servants their proper duty, even into the twentieth century.[90] Yet reading against the grain, we might also ask if Mrs. Bravo's servants were subtly mocking her impotence now that such private forms of discipline were at least technically illegal.[91]

[84] Brodber, *Second Generation*, 68; Altink, *Destined for a Life of Service*, 134.

[85] Patrick Bryan, "Augusta Zelia Fraser in Jamaica: The Case for Racial Separation," *Caribbean Quarterly* 48, no. 4 (2002): 12–26.

[86] Alice Spinner, "Margaret: A Sketch in Black and White," in *A Reluctant Evangelist, and Other Stories* (Edward Arnold, 1896), 288, 295–96.

[87] Rosenberg, *Nationalism*, 41.

[88] Johnson, "Decent and Fair," 84.

[89] Gurney, *Letters*, 302.

[90] Claude McKay, *Constab Ballads* (Watts & Co., 1912), 66–67; de Lisser, *Jane's Career*, 78–79.

[91] Between 1850 and 1865, flogging was re-legalized as a punishment for various crimes. As Diana Paton argues, the commentary surrounding flogging was highly racialized but rather than a simple return to the days before penal-reform, its reintroduction saw it "integrated into a modernized penal system, as slavery had integrated

https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2024.184 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Mockery and speaking back held transgressive potential that could challenge the authority of whiteness and resist the silencing of enslavement. Mrs. Bravo's reference to whipping attests to the central role violence had played in the management of enslaved people, violence that likely left physical marks on their bodies, inscribing onto their skin their former status as enslaved men and women.[92] Yet the jarring playfulness of "tickle" is almost carnivalesque in its description of violence.[93] In making fun of their former torment, these men and women could downplay its power over them, and by drawing attention to the compulsion under which they had previously labored, subvert the fondness Mrs. Bravo ascribed to their relationship.[94] Moreover, there was an implicit acknowledgement that they were now not working as hard as they could. Mimicry, slowing down, willful ignorance, and obstinacy were all prevalent strategies of resistance among enslaved people that continued to be practiced long after abolition.[95] By carefully reading the words of white employers, we can—even if only speculatively—tease out examples of these subversions that fractured the idealized images produced by the island's press.

Visual sources also offer some glimpses into the power dynamics between white employers and their domestic servants during the nineteenth century. Like the later Livingston family photograph, a picture of G. M. Campbell alongside his household staff evokes a visual register of domestic servants serving as reflections of their employer's status (Figure 2). Campbell's casual demeanor contrasts with the unnamed man and two women who are positioned as props to his rank and authority, presented as ornamentation in a manner similar to the appearance of black servants in eighteenth-century British paintings.[96] The woman on the left appears well-dressed with a bright white trim accentuating the overskirt of her dress, yet she also seems to be holding a brush in her right hand, signifying her place as a laborer. Captured in profile, the man on the left echoes anthropometric studies, but as he and Campbell gaze in similar directions, both wearing hats, left arms crooked at the elbow, a visual comparison is encouraged. Campbell is firmly in command, but a sense of respectability is attached to his unnamed servant, whose open topcoat and hand-in-waistcoat is evocative of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century portraiture where such gestures symbolized reserved English gentility.[97] We cannot know how much agency the man had over his positioning in this photograph, but he hints at the multiple meanings we might glean from photography; was the hand-in-waistcoat designed to reflect these virtues onto his employer, or was it a personal claim to these attributes? Hands down by her sides, the woman on the right appears thoroughly unimpressed by her inclusion in this photograph.

Campbell's centrality in this photograph also indicates how popular emphasis on white women's role as mistress of the house obscured broader patterns of reproductive labor in the home. Bachelor households were not uncommon, especially among those managing estates and plantations in more rural regions. Limited discussion of these scenarios in the press likely reflected the association of domestic work with women but may also have constituted an attempt to shy away from the sexual exchanges that sometimes characterized

prisons and flogging": see Diana Paton, *No Bond But the Law: Punishment, Race, and Gender in Jamaica State Formation, 1780–1870* (Duke, 2004), 139–44.

[92] Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives*, 19.

[93] Mikhail Bakhtin, "Carnival and Carnivalesque," in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, ed. John Storey (Pearson, 1998), 250–59, at 250–51.

[94] Miles Ogborn, *The Freedom of Speech: Talk and Slavery in the Anglo-Caribbean World* (Chicago, 2019); Richard D. E. Burton, *Afro-Creole: Power, Opposition, and Play in the Caribbean* (Cornell, 1997).

[95] Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Cornell, 1982), 52–57.

[96] Beth Fowkes Tobin, *Picturing Imperial Power: Colonial Subjects in Eighteenth-Century British Painting* (Duke, 1999), 27–55.

[97] James Ryan, *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualisation of the British Empire* (Reaktion, 1997), 140–82; Arline Meyer, "Re-Dressing Classical Statuary: The Eighteenth-Century 'Hand-in-Waistcoat' Portrait," *The Art Bulletin* 77, no. 1 (1995): 45–63.

https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2024.184 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Figure 2. Anon, undated, G. M. Campbell and Servants, 7/264/3 Photographs (Deposited by John Roper), Jamaica Archives and Records Department [JARD], Spanish Town, Jamaica. Kindly reproduced with permission from JARD.

domestic labor relationships. The term "housekeeper" was often used to refer to the black and brown women who lived with white men, managing their homes, sleeping in their beds, bearing their children, but rarely marrying.[98] The euphemism of "housekeeper" underscored the role of labor in the production of difference as domestic and sexual labor merged. The intimacy evoked by white employers was thus multisided and we should remain attuned to the diversity of domestic labor relationships. Proximity to an employer might be accompanied by physical and sexual violence, but as well as coercion and exploitation, the practice of sexual economic exchange offered some women financial and even social security.[99]

The ambiguous familiarity of domestic relationships and reproductive labor was also powerfully embodied in the figure of "the kindly old black 'Nana' to be found with almost every Jamaican family." Supposedly responsible for spoiling her young charges, "Nana" was characterized as a "good natured, large personage, marvellous in knowledge of children, yet, as a rule, inclined to pet and 'let off' through her over-kindness."[100] Published in the 1929 issue of *Planters' Punch*, this description was, as usual, accompanied by photos of elite white or white-

[98] Patrick Bryan, "The White Minority in Jamaica at the End of the Nineteenth Century," in *The White Minority in the Caribbean*, ed. Howard Johnson and Karl Watson (Ian Randle, 1998), 116–32, at 122. See also Meleisa Ono-George, "'Washing the Blackamoor White': Interracial Intimacy and Coloured Women's Agency in Jamaica," in *Subverting Empire: Deviance and Disorder in the British Colonial World*, ed. Will Jackson and Emily J. Manktelow (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 42–60.

[99] Meleisa Ono-George, ""To Be Despised": Discourses of Sexual-Economic Exchange in Nineteenth-Century Jamaica, c.1780–1890" (Ph.D. diss., University of Warwick, 2015); Altink, "'Marrying Light'"; Higman, "Domestic Service in Jamaica," 125–26. For literary examples of this violence, see Thomas Redcam, *One Brown Girl and a Jamaica Story* (Jamaica Times Printery, 1909); de Lisser, *Jane's Career*.

[100] Clarke, "Miss Jamaica," 4.

https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2024.184 Published online by Cambridge University Press

presenting young Jamaican women that promoted whiteness as the implicit and idealized norm, with frailties of character blamed on the overindulgence of "Nana." Peta Gay Jensen similarly fondly recalled her family's relationship with their servants in her family memoir, *The Last Colonials*. Her aunt Linda, born in 1898, had reminisced affectionately about her childhood nurse, Rosa, who had slept in the children's room. Rosa died of typhoid when she was nearly 30 and Linda 11, indicating the precarity of her health and life. Rosa had been with the family since Linda was a baby, suggesting the impact she had on Linda who recalled sharing her sweets with the nurse. This relationship, filtered through the memory of both Linda and then Jensen herself, evokes the potential intimacy of domestic service, but also leaves much unsaid or forgotten in its telling and retelling.[101] Rather, Michele Johnson argues that domestic service was a labor relationship characterized by the ambivalences of "intimate enmity."[102] Familiarity could contribute to the emotional and labor exploitation of the nanny or nurse but it could also be employed by the domestic servant as part of a "social safety net." Emotional bonds with an employer might ensure care into old age, as Jensen describes servants who, "when they were too old to work … simply lived on with the family until they died. The dates of their deaths are listed amongst the other family names."[103]

This social safety net underscores the transactional character of domestic service, which could bring access to food, clothing, and other resources. Accommodation was often available in elite homes, although this typically entailed surveillance that meant many servants preferred to rent elsewhere to maintain freedom over their movements and relationships.[104] Supplementing meager wages, theft was also common, and food and other household supplies often went missing. While some were infuriated by this, Peta Gay Jensen notes that others accepted it as de jure and did not class it as stealing.[105] "As a rule, in a Jamaican establishment the servants are not found, so the expenditure was only for the master's table," explained travel writer Mary Gaunt in 1932, and as such "there is bound to be a leakage, but it should be a discreet one." Gaunt recounted how one acquaintance, in his "bachelor days," struggled to manage his situation when he found himself spending money on twenty-one loaves in two weeks. Complaining that he only ate two slices of toast at breakfast, his housekeeper explained that she used a fresh loaf each morning, "never putting cut loaf on Buckra's table." Outwardly, she was complying with notions of white prestige, but it was understood that she claimed the rest of the loaf for herself. Additionally, Gaunt offered the story of a woman who "brought home from Kingston a month's supply of tinned luxuries … *Pate de foie gras* and caviar and truffles and strawberry jam, and other such good things." The butleress emptied every tin out, claiming that her previous mistress had ordered her to always throw tins away. While Gaunt recounts this as a humorous tale of misunderstanding, it also reads as a willful act of petty subversion through the decanting of edible symbols of wealth and whiteness.[106] Prescriptive descriptions of the white mistress may have characterized her as firm but benevolent, but accounts such as these hint at different means of disrupting her self-fashioning.

Elsewhere during the interwar period, the ambiguous dynamic of reproductive labor, white maternalism, and intimacy was powerfully captured in the correspondence of Mrs. Violet Allwood. In a rare opportunity to read the words of one servant in his own hand,

[101] Peta Gay Jensen, *The Last Colonials: The Story of Two European Families in Jamaica* (Radcliffe, 2005), 27.

[102] Johnson, "Intimate Enmity."

[103] Michele A. Johnson, "'Ah Look Afta De Child Like Is Mine': Discourses of Mothering in Jamaican Domestic Service, 1920–1970," in *Colonization and Domestic Service: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Victoria Haskins and Claire Lowrie (Taylor and Francis, 2014), 90; Jensen, *The Last Colonials*, 32–33; A Mother, "The Servant Problem is a Mistress Problem," 32.

[104] Johnson, "Intimate Enmity," 56–60; de Lisser, *Twentieth-Century Jamaica*, 103.

[105] Rev. Henry Clarke, Thursday 17 January 1867, vol. 5, MSS. W.Ind.r.10, fol. 202, Oxford University Weston Library; Jensen, *The Last Colonials*, 116–17; de Lisser, *Twentieth Century Jamaica*, 106.

[106] Gaunt, *Reflection*, 179–82.

https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2024.184 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Violet exchanged brief letters with "your old servant Freddy" during a stay in Britain. Thanking his "Mistress" for her "dear and loving letters," Freddy's writing encapsulated negotiations of familiarity and labor that pervaded elite homes in 1920s Jamaica. One letter began with a report that his mother was recovering from fever, but Violet's husband Major Allwood, meanwhile, was "well and going fat." Reassuring her that "we are trying to take the best care we can of him," Freddy's letter evidences a mistress and servant exchanging "love and best wishes," but also the reliance of a white man on his servants to manage his home and his health.[107] Freddy assured his mistress that "I am still looking the same way we are no fatter as we have to work very hard." A reminder of the labor undergirding their relationship, perhaps Freddy wished to emphasize that he was working dutifully, or maybe he sought to remind Violet that, fundamentally, theirs was a transactional relationship. Even within a seemingly otherwise close relationship, implicit remarks draw attention to the power imbalance ingrained in the labor exchange of the domestic servant/employer relationship. Subtly remarking that he did not have the time or leisure to put on weight—in contrast to Major Allwood—Freddy emphasized the asymmetry of their relationship.

Again, this is not to deny the possibility of real affection, but to recognize Freddy and Violet's relationship in all its dimensions so as to better understand the plurality and contingency of articulations of creole whiteness in Jamaica.[108] As Judy Giles has described early twentieth-century British domestic service as a "an emotional war zone" characterized by "numerous battles of attrition and manipulation," a closer look at Violet's letters and diary similarly reveals various tensions between her and her servants against which we can read Freddy's letters.[109] Domestic service therefore emerges as a space of negotiation in which domestic servants intervened in the reproduction of the meanings of whiteness. Grievances abound as Violet frequently complained about the problems of domestic management, exposing fractures in the dominant image of the ideal mistress. On the first page of her 1920 diary, Violet recorded feeling "the difficulties of housekeep, very much—house servants and yard boys, all very difficult and trying."[110] Violet's diary records a succession of servants who moved through her house, presenting domestic labor as a contested terrain where scripts of commanding mistress and compliant maid were never secure. On 25 May, she engaged a new cook, but less than two weeks later she was already complaining that Ellen was "very lazy and cleans badly."[111] Her poor opinion of Ellen was compounded when she heard from an acquaintance, "Mrs L," that "my cook Ellen is a thief etc." Violet also engaged a new washer at this time, and just a few days later Rosie found herself transferred to cook in Ellen's absence, representing the breadth of labor extracted by employers.[112] Despite being described as "very amazing," it appears that Rosie still did not remain with the family for long.[113] Another servant, Cherry, also inspired the ire of her mistress who claimed that "things aren't all they should be & she objects to me saying so." Following a battle of wills, Cherry soon gave in her notice.[114]

Cherry was not alone in exerting this agency over her labor, and complaints about the high turnover of household staff suggests that domestic servants were able to sell their labor with a flexibility not afforded to other workers. Although expected to give notice, it appears that many servants simply left positions to seek new employment as best suited them. Employers in turn were expected to give at least a week's notice for dismissal, or a

[107] Freddy to Violet Allwood, Jamaica to England, 16 December 1928, Pearson Collection, MS 1989, Kingston, Jamaica, National Library of Jamaica (hereafter NLJ).

[108] Alison Light, *Mrs Woolf and the Servants* (Penguin, 2007).

[109] Judy Giles, "Authority, Dependence and Power in Accounts of Twentieth-Century Domestic Service," in *The Politics of Domestic Authority in Britain since 1800*, ed. Lucy Delap, Ben Griffin and Abigail Wills (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 204–20, at 211.

[110] Diary of Violet Allwood (nee Moxsy), 5 January 1920, MS1989, NLJ.

[111] Diary of Violet Allwood, 25 May 1920; 5 June 1920, MS1989, NLJ.

[112] Diary of Violet Allwood, 7 June 1920, MS1989, NLJ.

[113] Diary of Violet Allwood, 24 June 1920, MS1989, NLJ.

[114] Diary of Violet Allwood, 16 July 1920; 26 July 1920, MS1989, NLJ.

https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2024.184 Published online by Cambridge University Press

week's pay in lieu, but "in cases of inefficiency or insolence," "instant dismissal" was also common.[115] Diaries kept by Frances Cundall between 1911 and 1938, like Allwood's, reflect a frequent turnover of domestic servants; between June 1912 and January the following year she appears to have engaged at least seven cooks. Some were dismissed due to unauthorized absences or because their cooking was deemed wanting, but others left of their own accord. Some perhaps had found a better position, but others may have been responding to Cundall's domestic management style as she notes one cook "left in a temper."[116]

Servants could also assert their identities in ways that denied easy interchangeability and threatened the prestige of the white woman as mistress of her house. Violet Allwood's sister, Dorothy, was similarly emphatic in her battle to assert her domestic authority. Writing to Violet in 1919, she was full of praise for her current "girl," Louise, "really a formidable, quick, intelligent girl, can do everything very nicely and classily, cakes, puddings, etc." Nevertheless, Dorothy complained that "she just thinks I can't do without her" and she had already started looking for a replacement. The previous Friday, Louise's "manners" had been "the limit." Having looked after the children for a month in place of another member of staff, Louise had returned to her former position as butleress but had failed to wear her cap when delivering her mistress's afternoon tea. Told to put it on, by dinner time Louise's head remained uncovered. When Dorothy chastised her again "she had some forward answers and since then has sulked & done everything to annoy me." Correct dress reinforced the difference and distance between employer and employee, and Louise's rejection of her cap disrupted these power hierarchies.[117] Detailing her woes to her sister, Dorothy declared she would "miss her like anything, and she washes all my things so beautifully," but, concerned that Louise was setting a "very bad example" for the new cook, she had to go.[118]

Conclusion

In 1938, questions of domestic servants' training and welfare formed part of wider discussions about labor and economic inequalities. That year, before the Allwoods enjoyed a Christmas ski trip, Jamaica had been shaken by a series of strikes and labor uprisings protesting the low wages, unemployment, and widespread poverty among the working-class population.[119] The Royal Commission charged with investigating the 1930s Caribbean labor disturbances framed domestic labor in predominantly gendered terms and characterized by poor working conditions. A typical working day stretched from 6am until 9pm, while sick leave and holidays were dependent on the goodwill of the employer.[120] Testimony submitted by black feminist writer, journalist, and campaigner Una Marson suggested that domestic service was widely perceived as "degrading," advising that employers "should be urged to treat them well."[121] Despite the popular representations of the kindly mistress since the late nineteenth century, it seems such prescriptive discourses largely remained unfulfilled.

Beyond 1938, as Michele Johnson has explored, domestic service continued as a "microcosm" of colonial and postcolonial class, color, and gender relations.[122] Forming a bridge between histories of slavery, emancipation, and the twentieth century, this article has

[115] TNA: CO 950/944, "Questionnaire on Certain Matters Connected with Social Welfare," West India Royal Commission 1938–39, fols. 22–23.

[116] Diaries of Mrs F. S. Wiehan (nee Cundall), 1912, 4/14/93, Jamaica Archives and Records Department.

[117] Dussart, *In the Service of Empire*, 91–92.

[118] Dorothy to Violet Allwood, 8 May 1919, MS1989, NLJ.

[119] Photograph album compiled by Betty Pearson (nee Allwood), MS 1989, NLJ.

[120] *West India Royal Commission Report* (His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1945), 218–19.

[121] TNA: CO 950/36, Miss Una Marson, Memorandum of Evidence.

[122] Michele A. Johnson, "'Problematic Bodies': Negotiations and Terminations in Domestic Service in Jamaica, 1920–1970," *Left History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Historical Inquiry and Debate* 12, no. 2 (2007): 84–112.

https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2024.184 Published online by Cambridge University Press

emphasized the negotiations at the heart of this labor relationship by focusing on the period between 1865 and 1938. While often seen as the "quiet period" of Caribbean history, Faith Smith reminds us "quiet is also violent routinization."[123] Domestic labor exemplifies the everyday practices and interactions that underpinned Jamaica's social system. The relationships between mistress and maid reproduced categories of difference grounded in the island's history of enslavement and colonialism. In the first decades after the Morant Bay uprising, anxieties about the sustainability of whiteness in Jamaica infused discussions of domestic labor, and with the emergence of the New Jamaica campaign at the end of the nineteenth century, representations of a maternal white mistress were articulated both in opposition to black domestic servants and in conversation with the metropole. By the interwar period, prescriptive discourses reflected attempts to forge a new creole identity that affirmed the modernity and respectability of Jamaican society while naturalizing the island's pigmentocracy. Domestic servants fundamentally facilitated these renegotiations both as the figurative foil to white creole womanhood, and through the reproductive labor they performed in the homes. Yet at the same time, throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, domestic servants returned the gaze of their employers, spoke back, and acted in ways that continuously disrupted white self-fashioning, contributing to the ambivalent meanings and contingent reproduction of creole whiteness in colonial Jamaica.

Liz Egan is a Teaching Fellow in Modern European History at the University of Warwick and a Research Associate in the Legacies of Enslavement at Trinity Hall, University of Cambridge. She thanks David Lambert, Sascha Auerbach, Adam Challoner, Erin Geraghty, and Ellen Smith for their comments on earlier versions of this article, as well as participants at the North American Conference for British Studies 2022 and the Society for Caribbean Studies UK 2022 conference. She is also especially grateful to the reviewers and editors at the *Journal of British Studies* for their support and feedback. For their assistance navigating the archives and permission to reproduce photographs from their collections, she extends particular thanks to the staff at the National Library of Jamaica and the Jamaica Archives and Records Department.

[123] Faith Smith, *Strolling in the Ruins: The Caribbean's Non-Sovereign Modern in the Early Twentieth Century* (Duke, 2023), 2.

Cite this article: Egan L (2025). "A Lazy Mistress Makes a Lazy Servant": Domestic Labor and White Creole Womanhood in Jamaica, *ca.*1865–1938. *Journal of British Studies* 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2024.184