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Quasheba, Mother, Queen: Black Women's Public Leadership and Political Protest in Postemancipation Jamaica

Mimi Sheller

Recent reassessments of Caribbean women's political roles both during and after slavery suggest that their leadership was crucial to popular collective action throughout the Americas. Many historians, like Jean Besson, have come to see women as 'central to the Afro-Caribbean peasant cultures of resistance, rooted in the tradition of slave resistance, which emerged in response to colonialism and the plantation system'. For the period of slavery, there has been increasing interest in women's contributions to slave resistance, including both violent opposition and what James Scott calls 'everyday forms of resistance'; for the post-emancipation period, attention has turned to women's participation in labor protest, as well as in more diffuse community organization and cultural resistance.⁽¹⁾ Above all, the most recent comparative syntheses in the field demonstrate that 'despite the sexism and racism which initially denied black and coloured women the legal right to vote, the lack of the franchise did not exclude women from active participation in the public world of politics during slavery and in the post-slavery Caribbean'. Like disfranchised people elsewhere, Afro-Caribbean women turned everyday activities into sites of resistance, ordinary space into theatres for collective action.⁽²⁾

In the case of Jamaica, one is confronted head-on with the unexpected but crucial participation of women not only in behind-the-scenes cultural resistance, but in *public* activities such as collective labor protest, petitioning, demonstration, and riot. This article



contributes to research on Afro-Jamaican women's public leadership by examining three arenas of female involvement in protest and political mobilization from the abolition of slavery in 1834 to the Morant Bay Rebellion in 1865: 1) agricultural workers' collective action against coercive plantation labor policies, especially during the apprenticeship period ; 2) challenges to white male control of religion through efforts to democratise the dissenting churches and, more radically, through indigenous forms of Afro-Christian Revival; and, 3) working-class utilization of urban popular culture and outdoor space for demonstration, riot, and rebellion. As Swithin Wilmot concludes, 'though patriarchy ruled supreme, the Jamaican freed women resisted their banishment from the public sphere and played an important part in the politics of the black community, thereby maintaining the tradition that they had established in slave society as "persistent rebels"'.(3) Despite increasing attention to Afro-Jamaican women's political activism, however, it remains to be explained why they took the kinds of actions they did, how their collective action differed from men's, and how their gender-specific uses of public space challenged white elites and the colonial state.

Drawing on both secondary sources and new primary evidence, this article synthesizes the growing evidence that many individual women and groups of women did act publicly, as well as beginning to explore the social contexts that encouraged women's political activism. Key findings are that, a) Afro-Jamaican women cited familial responsibilities to justify protest, and recognized that the role of motherhood carried special moral weight in making claims aimed at a British Christian public; b) groups of women brought together by workplace relationships or other shared activities often acted in concert and supported each others' claims; and c) ties of kinship could be important mobilizing factors in community-wide demonstrations. It is also suggested that there has been long-term continuity in the forms and style of Afro-Jamaican women's political participation and leadership, with possible parallels to be found in other African diaspora communities. Reveling in the prevalent colonial stereotype of the noisy and aggressive slave woman 'Quasheba', generations of black women reenacted and sustained their own community's empowering leadership personae, whether as African Grandmother, Jamaican Mother, Afro-Creole Queen-Mother, Revival Queen, Church Mother, or Queen of the Rebels.

I. The Rights and Wrongs of Motherhood: British Publics and Plantation Protest

The feisty female slave was commonly caricatured in Jamaican publications in the early nineteenth century with a character named 'Quasheba' who was known as an independent and outspoken trouble-maker. The eighteenth-century ode to the 'Sable Venus', for example, refers to the 'pleasure' and 'raptures' the poet would seek in 'gentle Phibia...artful Benneba...wanton Mimba...sprightly Cuba...Or grave in sober Quasheba I still shall find thee out'. This none too subtle threat to rape the least willing 'Sable Queen' alludes to her spirit of resistance. An 1829 edition of *The Watchman* depicts an imaginary slave woman intervening in political debates of the day: "But dis is not all", as Quamina says, "on dis terrible subject. Him drown de country buckra wid him Peeches pon de politics". Here the satire suggests that it was typical for a slave woman to belittle white politics, and openly speak her own views. A Wesleyan Methodist pamphlet, lamenting the absence of marriage among slaves, observed that 'Quasheba, in fact, showed no signs of subjection and demonstrated great pride in her economic independence'. In this case the caricature hinges on the black woman's lack of both husband and Christian shame. (4)

Such satire reduced women's acts of resistance to individual willfulness. The historical record, to the contrary, indicates that slave women's activism emerged in the context of the supportive networks of families, communities, and collective work-groups. The history of women's public leadership in Jamaica begins under slavery, and here we see that particular spokeswomen were often backed by organised groups of women. The phrase 'petticoat rebellion', for example, was used by Jamaican slave-owner Matthew G. Lewis, who wrote in 1816 that on his plantation 'the women, one and all, refused to carry away the [cane] trash. . . [and] in consequence, the mill was obliged to be stopped; and when the driver on that station insisted on their doing their duty, a little fierce young devil of a Miss Whaunica flew at his throat, and endeavoured to strangle him'. Resistance like this was not without risks. There was neither safety in numbers nor in gender for slave women, who were as likely to have their



challenges to authority figures met with violence as were men. A slave trial in 1828 found that a complaint of 'severe and illegal floggings' by a group of slaves was 'totally void of foundation and completely frivolous and vexatious'; the 'principal ringleaders', named as Eliza Bighie, Selina Wallace, Ruthe Thomas, Bridget Elmslie, Mary Phillips and Ithe Stewart, were each sentenced to 39 lashes, three months hard labour in the workhouse, and another 39 lashes on their release. By the time of emancipation, groups of freed women were well prepared to stick by each other in agreements to stop work and in facing the violence of plantation personnel and courts of law.(5)

Female plantation workers in the post-emancipation period not only drew on deep-rooted traditions of slave resistance to challenge coercive labour policies, but also quickly grasped new political opportunities to directly confront overseers and landowners, and to state their cases before magistrates. Several studies of plantation conflict during the apprenticeship period (1834-1838) recognize the prominence of women as spokespersons and leaders of labour protest in Jamaica. Wilmot, for example, observes that despite patriarchal definitions of 'public actors' as male, 'any balanced discussion of politics in the immediate post-slavery period in Jamaica must take into account the extent to which women never accepted that legal marginalisation'. 'Among the more striking features of all of these [plantation] disturbances', writes Thomas Holt of the postemancipation period, 'was the solidarity of the workers and the prominence of women among the activists and leaders'. (6) Yet we still lack convincing explanations of this phenomenon of female leadership. Holt attributes it to 'women [making] up a disproportionate share of the field labor force on sugar estates'; however, beyond sheer numbers at the bottom of the labor hierarchy (which does not in itself explain the emergence of leaders), one must consider how recently freed women politically exploited their dual roles as agricultural workers and mothers. Accounts of Afro-Jamaican women's leadership in plantation conflicts demonstrate that it was their strategic awareness of this duality that enabled them to become mainsprings of collective action.

Although the contradiction between 'productive' and 'reproductive' demands on slave women's time have been identified as a central structural tension within the slave system,(7) historians have often overlooked the ways in which formerly enslaved women *themselves* capitalized on their special position as care-givers and working family heads to challenge ongoing exploitation and protect their customary rights during the transition from slavery to freedom. The well-known feminist theorization of a double burden of production and reproduction must be understood not simply as a structural contradiction, but as a contradiction lived out in women's lives, which in some circumstances could be empowering. Unlike their male counterparts, female field labourers could make claims for decent working conditions not simply as free workers, but specifically as mothers who were struggling to support their families. In the initial stages of apprenticeship and emancipation, Jamaican freed women took advantage of well-known British views of femininity to press their claims against male authorities at the local level, but also with an eye to the metropolitan public sphere.

Assertions of special female prerogatives and criticisms of the abuse of women had extra resonance in the British Victorian setting, with its sharp delineation of a boundary between the masculine public world and the feminine private sphere of domesticity. If the existence of hard labor by women on the sugar plantations did not alone move abolitionists, then reports of the cruel punishments inflicted on slave women for their resistance activities did. Such reports, along with intimations of immoral concubinage, prostitution, and lurid images of naked women being whipped, fed the anti-slavery press in both England and America. Jean Yellin has shown, for example, that the emblem of the female supplicant slave with the words 'Am I Not A Woman and A Sister' was probably designed by British women and was certainly exported by them to help move middle-class American women to anti-slavery action. Publications like *The Westminster Review* 'ran lead articles urging British women to redouble their abolitionist efforts and detailing the violence inflicted on female slaves in Jamaica and the Bahamas'. British mobilization against apprenticeship built on this earlier anti-slavery literature and highlighted the treatment (and punishment) of female apprentices as important signifiers of the immorality of this 'experiment' in half-freedom. Public debate kept returning to the unacceptability of physical punishment of women, especially mothers, who were simply trying to care for their families.(8)



Thus the development of a female anti-slavery public in Britain set the stage for Afro-Jamaican women's protest leadership. As the 'cult of domesticity' took on increasing salience for the middle-class anti-slavery movement, freed women articulated their own 'rights of motherhood' in relation to the white philanthropists who claimed to speak for them. Although represented to the English public as voiceless victims, Jamaican women came into public notice precisely because they refused to suffer silently. They exploited not only an indigenous 'moral economy' of claims on planters' paternalism, but also Christian morality with its rhetoric of domestic motherhood and the mother's duty to protect her children.(9) The evidence for this exists both in the records of actual actions taken by women to protest against the system of apprenticeship, and in the political use made of those records in England, where the issue of women's treatment in Jamaica was explicitly laid before parliament and the general public.

Conflicts brought before Special Magistrates during the apprenticeship period in Jamaica revolved significantly around issues concerning women, including the rights of pregnant women; the time allowed to mothers for nursing infants, feeding children, and attending sick family members; the special allowances for elderly matriarchs who had raised large families; and the question of physical punishment of females. Female apprentices were punished in large numbers for trying to assert and protect the limited rights they had won as mothers of the slave labor force during the period of so-called 'amelioration' (the attempt to raise the slave birth rate following abolition of the slave trade). While British abolitionists focused on the cruel treatment of women, Jamaican women themselves took a major part in protesting the conditions in which they found themselves supposedly free. 'The most militant resistance to the apprenticeship regime came from women workers', Holt argues, 'and eventually the method used to tame them -- the treadmills at the houses of correction -- created a scandal discrediting the whole apprenticeship system and paving the way for its abolition'. During debate in the House of Lords on ending apprenticeship, speeches focused on the loss of 'customary indulgences' to mothers with children, as well as on the brutal and indecent flogging of women in the workhouses.(10)

John Sturge and Thomas Harvey, prominent Quaker philanthropists and promoters of immediate full emancipation, highlighted the abuse of female apprentices in their widely distributed publications. Representing the condition of women was a crucial part of their publicity project, tying into other efforts aimed at gaining sympathetic supporters in Britain, especially the middle-class women who had already been mobilized in the campaigns of anti-slavery petitioning, fund-raising, and boycotting of slave-produced imports. The two men toured several islands to interview apprentices, both on the estates and in the workhouses. They found that general complaints 'include flagrant instances of the frauds of time which are committed on the apprentices, of the enforcement of extra labor in and out of crop time for little or no remuneration, of the neglect of the sick, oppression of nursing mothers, pregnant women, and mothers of six children who were exempt during slavery from field labor'. The Stipendiary Magistrates who were responsible for settling labor disputes worried that 'symptoms of rebellion' were appearing 'particularly amongst the women'.(11)

In one case reported by Sturge and Harvey 'a strong body of police' had to be sent to Lansquinet estate near Falmouth 'to quell, we presume, by their presence, a rebellion among the nursing mothers,' a notion they seemed to find ironic, though ten of the women were sent to the Falmouth workhouse with their infants. According to them, the women stated that:

on Friday morning last, as it was very wet, and they were obliged to carry their children into the field with them, they did not turn out before breakfast. For this they were taken to the Special Magistrate on Monday, who sentenced them to pay six Saturdays. They told them they could not, as their mountain grounds were six miles distant, as they were deprived of their half Fridays and out of their salt-fish, and received now no sugar or flour for the children; that without their Saturdays, they had no means of obtaining subsistence. For their contumacy, they were sent to the workhouse for three days, and will still have to work the six Saturdays.

Anti-apprenticeship campaigners used information like this to demonstrate that plantations were exploiting female apprentices in particular, who had the added responsibility of caring for and feeding children. The incident demonstrates the women's concerted efforts to resist the plantation labor regime by stopping work, presenting justifications in terms of their need to



protect and feed their children, and protesting their lack of subsistence and free time, both of which they had formerly depended on to support their families.(12) After the long years of resistance to slavery, protesters like these seem well aware of which narratives of grievance would play best not only in a white court, but in an account given to curious white men.

Sturge and Harvey's report was backed up by a litany of unfair cases against female apprentices. When Sally Hutchinson, an apprentice at Treadways estate, spoke up for her work 'gang' to say they were not being paid enough for extra labour, the landowner responded 'I don't want to hear a word. . . Woman, hold your tongue.' When she continued to represent their collective grievances and refused to beg his pardon, he ordered her to be confined for a week in a dark room; she was subsequently sentenced by a court to six days in the 'house of correction', while the gang itself lost five alternate Saturdays (time when they normally tended their own provision grounds). In another instance three women with more than six children each, who had been exempt from fieldwork before the first of August, were ordered to the field again as soon as they were apprentices. When they did not 'turn out', a Magistrate sentenced them to the workhouse. Sarah Nelson and Bessy Grant of Phoenix Estate were sentenced to hard labour in the penal gang and twice a day on the treadmill for two calendar months, for 'combining and resisting work' and 'insolent and disorderly conduct'. Several women on Friendship Estate refused to give up their half Fridays which were needed for growing provisions; Bettriss Holland, Kitty Jones, Dolly Ferguson, Christian Williams and Ruth Allen were not allowed to speak before the Magistrate and were summarily sentenced to fifteen days on the treadmill for 'disobedience to orders'.(13)

Their campaign was also aided by the eye-witness account of James Williams, an apprentice who reported on horrific conditions for women in the Saint Ann's Bay Work-house. Williams described how on the treadmill 'one old woman with grey head...could not dance the mill at all: she hang by the two wrist which was strapped to the bar, and the driver keep on flogging her...when she come down all her back covered with blood'. Two young women were flogged so severely that 'they cut away most of their clothes, and left them in a manner naked; and the driver was bragging afterwards that he see all their nakedness'. One woman 'quite big with child' was 'not able to dance good' on the spinning treadmill, "and them flog her; she complain about her stomach hurt her... and beg the overseer not to work her on the mill", but still they persisted. Women were sexually abused by overseers, who were often prisoners themselves. On their release 'them all look quite shocking when them let out, some hardly able to walk to go home. . . all mashed up with the mill'.(14)

These recorded incidents reflect not merely British revulsion at the system that produced them, but also, more fundamentally, the widespread collective efforts by Jamaican women to resist the plantation labor regime despite harsh repression (and often by claiming a right to family subsistence). Working women's right to speak publicly, to make claims against employers and before magistrates, became central to the transition to wage labour; the everyday verbal skills of challenge and protest -- once used by slaves -- were now turned to more overt forms of public claim-making and resistance to the new order of free labour. Recognition of the prevalence of women's collective action and public protest raises new questions about the movement of women away from fieldwork following emancipation. Until recently, many historians interpreted the 'withdrawal of female labour' from plantations in terms of women's reluctance to engage in a detested form of hard physical work and men's desire to keep their female kin in the home. Yet, as Rebecca Scott, argues, '[m]ost discussions of the "withdrawal" of women's labor tend to blur the question of choice and decision, leaving it unclear just who initiated the reallocation of work time, at what point, and in what directions.'(15) This question has important political implications, for leaving the plantations was not simply a 'withdrawal' into private domestic work, but was a key move in a highly public labour struggle.

Several historians have argued that the aim of many Afro-Jamaicans after emancipation was not simply to flee the estates, but to combine wage work with small landholding. There is evidence that ex-slaves were attached to their houses, gardens, and provision grounds, which in many cases had valuable mature trees or ripening crops, not to mention the burial places of ancestors. Apprentices did not choose voluntarily to leave their homes on the plantations, Mary Turner argues, but 'were driven from the estates post-emancipation by low wages, high



rents, competition from cut-rate contract workers and the discovery that to become an estate-based wage earner was to remain, in social terms, a slave. They turned to the land for want of a different option'. It may therefore be more accurate to say that Jamaica's female workers moved away from plantation labour largely as a result of the super-exploitation of families on the plantations through both the low wages paid to women and children and the manipulative tying of wage contracts to rent payment; it was not a 'flight' from the estates so much as a strategic move in a political struggle, or as Douglas Hall says, 'a protest against the inequities of early "freedom."' These inequities affected women particularly strongly, as Marrietta Morrissey argues, since women's 'lack of access to skilled agricultural work diminished their social status and authority, and gender became an increasingly salient expression of stratification.'(16)

This puts in new perspective the postemancipation debate over the linkage of rent to wages, and its implications for female plantation workers. After apprenticeship ended, planters tried to link payment of wages to the rent of houses and provision grounds, which had once been customarily distributed among slaves and even passed down through slave families; they charged each family-member rent for estate houses and grounds, deducting it directly from wages. Thus families who had cleared ground for planting, paid for materials, built their own houses and occupied them for years, perhaps generations, suddenly found rent demanded by the property-owner from every family member, and non-payment met with notice to quit and eviction. As the *Morning Journal* noted in August, 1838,

We understand that on an estate in St. Andrew's, and upon some others in parishes to Leeward, it is demanded that each man and woman who agrees to labour should give two days in each week in lieu of house and grounds. This is objected to by such labourers as have wives and grown up children as unreasonable, and has operated to prevent the terms offered being accepted, and the labour of the properties resumed.

Wilmot suggests that, 'confronted by the women's determination not to be tied down to the rigid demands of regular work on the plantations, the planters, in the first three months of full freedom, initiated a series of labour recruitment strategies, many of which aimed at coercing women to perform estate work, especially during crop time'. Resistance to these attempts to control family labor by requiring rent from each person led to many violent conflicts immediately following emancipation, and several parishes were swept by work stoppages and strikes as workers bargained for higher wages and tried to control the terms of the labor contract. (17)

Not just men, but whole families were involved in these strikes. The *Morning Journal* reported that 'the stand for exorbitant wages is general, and the refusal to resume work, such as to justify the opinion that the plan was preconcerted. The evil is not confined to two or three parishes, or to particular parts, or districts of a parish, but to nearly every parish in the island, and to all parts of them'. In November 1838, a complaint filed at Halfway Tree Court stated that several females who were formerly apprentices had refused notices to quit and were instead planting more provisions on their grounds at Temple Hall estate. When constables tried to levy goods for outstanding rent on Spring Hill coffee plantation in St. George's parish in 1839, 'workers, especially females, confronted them with missiles and "violent language"'.(18)

Field labourers from the Richmond estate in the parish of Trelawny were imprisoned for resisting rent payment, but they actually won an appeal and were awarded significant damages. The sympathetic *Baptist Herald and Friend of Africa* editorialized, 'How any person could suppose himself justified in demanding rent from women and children, is to us astonishing, and we sincerely hope that ample redress will be afforded to those people who have been illegally imprisoned.' The court's decision, the paper pointed out, showed that,

The wife is not liable, nor can the husband be made to pay any extra rent, because his wife or friends are permitted to reside with him. Should any person be so foolhardy in Trelawny as to try to impose this system upon you, refuse to pay it: and let them, if they dare, enforce the unjust claim. -- Should they attempt it, the Society for the 'Protection of your Rights' will most assuredly take up the matter! These, and numerous other annoyances, daily practiced upon the peaceful labourer, show clearly



what the great ones would do if they could, and evince the necessity of a vigilance over their actions, of the strictest kind.

In February, 1840, the *Baptist Herald* reported other instances of unfair rent arrangements. In one case the overseer trampled the provision grounds of people who did not pay rent, and the paper advised people to leave the estate and live in Baptist free villages.(19) Women's withdrawal from plantation fieldwork must be placed in the context of this political movement, in which the new relationship between free families and plantations was a central problem. That the issue of rent and the family's control of its own labor were so crucial to wage-negotiations after emancipation demonstrates that the gains made in hard-won customary rights to houses and provision grounds during slavery were directly undercut by emancipation; the deduction of rent from wages was particularly unfair to women, who earned far less than men.

Thus the planter backlash against the customary rights of women, against the family's rights to allocate their own time and labor, and against the subsistence rights of households not only drove workers away from the plantations, but also directly contradicted the missionary's image of Christian families with married housewives by every hearth. Baptist missionaries took the side of the people in the wage-rent debates and promoted free villages because they were interested in encouraging the formation of stable monogamous Christian families. Afro-Jamaican women, meanwhile, turned the Christian vision of female domesticity toward their own ends by fighting coercive wage-rent contracts and by trying to de-link private household decision-making from enforced plantation labor. Women's withdrawal from plantation field labor was not the embrace of a more 'feminine' domestic role, then, but part of a broader political strategy aimed at breaking planters' power to control black families. Therefore, we can conclude with Carolyn Cooper of working-class Jamaican women's politics: 'This is the ultimate subterfuge: to evade domesticity in the very act of seeming to embrace it'.(20)

II. Democratizing Religion: Black Women's Voices in Dissent and Revival

As women left the plantations, they brought their gender-specific consciousness and forms of collective action to new arenas, perhaps most importantly into the very churches that had set themselves the mission of rebuilding Afro-Jamaican families in their own middle-class image. In the free villages, Diane Austin-Broos suggests, 'a new persona emerged for the emancipated. The sober and industrious 'Christian black' replaced 'Quashie' [or Quasheba, we might add], the devious trickster slave'. Yet just as they resisted the plantation labour regime, so too would Jamaicans resist the missionary's moral regime. 'The religious sects and movements that follow in a chain from emancipation', argues Austin-Broos, 'chart Jamaican attempts to supersede the persona of the Christian black' (21) Although the European missions played a colonizing role in many parts of the world, they also inadvertently provided the material, cultural, and social bases for political movements. Religious organisations at the community level have long been recognized as a source for political leadership and organisation throughout the African diaspora.(22) Yet far more attention has been paid to the overtly political actions of the Native Baptist men involved in the Baptist War of 1831 and the Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865 than to the thousands of women who constituted the mainstay in the day to day politics of the churches.

A crucial aspect of laying the foundations for subsequent oppositional cultures in Jamaica was black women's promotion of a popular 'voice' both within the missionary churches and, more radically, by forming their own Afro-Christian religious associations. By extending notions of public leadership and protest beyond the usual dualism of *either* violent rebellion *or* hidden resistance, a third realm of public, non-violent resistance emerges. Churches, as the main centers of Afro-Jamaican social life, became the terrain for this open and (usually) non-violent struggle against white domination. On one hand, Jamaicans challenged the power of white missionaries and asserted control over religious congregations (which their monetary contributions and voluntary labor supported) through participation in meetings, vocal opposition to racial and gender discrimination, and insistence on the independent church principle of democratic selection of their own elders, deacons, and pastors through voting and



petitioning. On the other hand, white resistance to increasingly autonomous popular decision-making led black congregations to adopt strategies of forcing change either through schism or forms of revivalism that promoted indigenous leadership, idioms, and practices. These 'native' practices challenged white domination and overturned the hierarchy of white, male clergy and black (often female) laity. The Revival movements and their Afro-Christian offspring turned away from the European churches and sought religious self-determination by blurring the boundaries between Christian and African religious beliefs, between male and female roles in religious practice, and between private worship and public acts.

An early public challenge to black women's subordination in the dissenting churches occurred in the Baptist congregation of Rev. Samuel Oughton in Kingston, in 1842. When Eleanor Vickars was selected to become a 'class leader,' Oughton opposed her election on the grounds that class leaders were required to read and write. Vickars took the unusual step of defending herself in the *Morning Journal*. 'Reluctant as I am to see my name in the public papers,' she wrote, 'and knowing also that it is not customary for females to defend themselves before the public, I am nevertheless compelled to this step.' She went on to explain that for upwards of twenty years she had been the leading female singer at Text-lane and East Queen Street chapels, that she was in charge of the female inquirers and was assistant leader of a class. She attributed Oughton's refusal of her nomination not to illiteracy, but to his discrimination against women:

These facts are known to thousands; and there is not a class, I believe, in the whole society, but has two or more female leaders. . . . However much he may now be opposed to it, I defy him to abolish it. It has existed from the formation of the Baptist Society in this island. Mr. Oughton was desirous of informing the public that he only recognized me in the menial situation of washing the sacrament table cloth. It was certainly sent to my washing establishment, and of which I am not ashamed.

Oughton's efforts to impose a requirement of literacy on class leaders suggests a move toward excluding working-class women from these positions of leadership. This was part of a general movement within the Baptist and other denominations to assert white control and limit the influence of more popular Afro-Jamaican leaders. That Vickars was a lead singer, an important role in Afro-American churches, also suggests that this was part of the missionary's 'broad and rigorous ethical program that inevitably stanch[ed] the eudemonic of freedom,' driving song, dance, and other African-rooted forms of religious expression from the churches. Moreover, her defense of washerwomen hints at a kind of solidarity with those of her class and gender.(23)

Many women of colour, including those who were illiterate, participated in activities of a public and political nature through their churches, including elections and petitioning. Even the relatively conservative Presbyterian church required every communicant to vote for elders, bringing non-white men into positions of leadership even while slavery existed. The act of petitioning may have first been practiced by many Afro-Jamaicans within their churches, and only later took on a wider political character as it was used for claim-making outside of the churches. There is evidence that in many denominations women were as likely to sign petitions as were men. In the case of the London Missionary Society (LMS) in the 1840s, for example, three petitions to the directors of the society from church members who identified themselves as 'a labouring people' or 'labourers with large families' have 134 signatures identifiable as women's names, out of a total of 236 signatories.(24) In the case of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS), a key debate emerged in the 1840s over the extent to which congregations should participate in church governance, which until then was facilitated via democratically-structured meetings. A subtext of this debate was the degree of power which black women should exercise within the dissenting churches.

In the mid-1840s, Wesleyan Methodist congregations began to send petitions, or memorials, first to the District Meeting and later directly to the governing Committee of the Society, which met in London. The Kingston Quarterly Meeting was the most active in producing petitions, leading to controversy not so much over the content of the petitions, as over the procedure by which they were 'got up'. Letters indicate that white missionaries in Jamaica resisted a precedent being set of members of a colonial Circuit directly petitioning the Committee in London (although this was practiced 'at home' in England). The independence of individual



congregations was already challenging church authority in England and bringing the dissenting churches into disrepute; it was seen as even less acceptable for colonial churches where suspect 'heathen' beliefs might still be rife. This debate can be seen as part of a wider trend toward radical enthusiastic revivalism and democratisation of Christianity in the proliferating Protestant sects of the Americas, in which African-Americans played a crucial part both during and after slavery. (25) Even as white missionaries denounced natives' complaints that racial discrimination blocked their promotion to positions of greater responsibility, they increasingly argued against too much congregational independence.

The crux of the matter was the charge of Rev. Martin Young that the 1847 Kingston Quarterly Meeting was 'a factious proceeding' characterized by 'a noisy and indecent discussion' which led many to abstain from voting. Most significantly, he suggested that this was due to the 'popular character' of the meeting, and particularly the number of female leaders and their energetic participation in debate and voting:

The constitution of the Kingston Quarterly Meeting, as it appears to be established by custom, is of an unusually popular character, it being composed of an exceedingly small number of stewards, and about 300 leaders, of whom two thirds are females; (usually forming by far the larger portion of the attendants, and as a matter of course discussing and deciding on all questions which may be brought forward;) and probably scarcely more than one in eight or ten of whom is able either to write or read. The meeting is therefore exceedingly liable to be influenced by the representations of any person of active and restless disposition, and that to so great an extent as sometimes to be beyond the control of the ministers, and the more discreet and reflecting portion of the attendants. (26)

Popular democratic procedures and participation in meetings by illiterate women were perceived as a threat to the English Missionaries' control over the society. Young concluded his attack on democratic procedure by noting that the Kingston petitions were a kind of test case, part of a larger agitation for popular independent control of the churches, and the society must clarify its stance on the 'privilege of petitioning Conference'. By making a formal distinction between 'home' and 'foreign' stations, the Society sought to contain not only dangerous democratic currents, but also the women who exercised roles of leadership within their churches; a major difference between 'home' and Jamaica, after all, was the degree to which women 'as a matter of course' discussed and decided all questions brought forward. (27)

If petitioning and other attempts to control the churches were engagements within the terms of the system, religious revival provided an escape from the system. Above all, its rejection of the formal order of European-controlled churches (and of the limited 'Christian black' persona) offered more opportunities for women's leadership. As numerous scholars have argued, creative adaptation of African-influenced religious practices whether in the form of Native Baptist chapels or Myal Revivals (with their communal actions against the witchcraft of Obeah) underlay an alternative 'moral order' in Jamaica that had a major impact on forms of political mobilization and leadership. Even before the 'Baptist War' of 1831, when it became clear that slave political networks were intimately related to religious organisations, white Jamaican society was threatened by black religion. An 1829 newspaper unhappily reported the 'self-styled Reverends, alias Baptist preachers' who 'roared out' psalms and hymns one Saturday night in Port Royal, 'to the great annoyance of the quiet and orderly portion of the inhabitants,' until joined on Sunday morning 'by a large party of female slaves, when the whole moved off in a body toward the sea, where they were well soused'. (28) Afro-Christian sects, already openly thriving before slavery's abolition, took on a life of their own following emancipation.

The Myal Revivals of 1842 and 1860-61 were a radical form of religious and spiritual self-determination in which women participated fully from the start. Women's houses were often used for 'prayer meetings' in which 'the spirit of convincing power' first broke out. 'Mother's meetings,' were the basis for extensive networks of revivalism, outside of the control of missionaries. Rev. Walter Dendy reported that independently of Sunday services in his district, 'there are one hundred and twelve district prayer meetings held in the week, in connexion with the [Baptist] church'. Rev. George Truman reported that 'they have what is



called a godmother of the revivals, the headmother or shepherd. . .she chastises the women'. William Hillyer of the LMS reported 'a large amount of superstition, Error, and blasphemy. Women representing themselves as the 'Virgin Mary', men calling themselves the 'Lord Jesus Christ', and others going from place to place saying they can give their fellow men the spirit'. In 1842 there were reports in Cornwall of an 'Attack upon the Police by the Obeah and Myalpeople' in which the crowd threw stones at police and threatened violence, while leaders known as 'angels' visited various estates and seized, imprisoned, and punished people accused of practicing Obeah. In the 1860s, Revivalists took to the streets of Kingston: 'Crowds of these Revivalists, followed by mobs, have been parading through the streets, singing and giving expression to imprecations most fearful'. Secret meetings of Revivalists in the western parishes were reportedly stockpiling sharpened spears and had leaders, like 'Isabella the Comforter', who were said to be 'in the habit of prophesying the destruction of life and property'. (29)

Rev. W. Holdsworth, like many other Methodists, reported that the 1860 Revival was not going as the missionaries had hoped. Although they initially gained many new and enthusiastic members, there were worrisome cases of 'extravagant' behaviour. His comments demonstrate his explicit connection of female sexuality with fears of black female empowerment:

a number of those extravagant young people are pregnant, among them, the one 'that sat as a queen' and had revelations from heaven, and saw hell without a covering, and your humble servant there, who predicted the destruction of one of our chapels by fire. She had an influence over multitudes that was astounding, she had only to say do this, and a host was ready to do it.

This spiritual 'queen' is strongly reminiscent of figures like Queen Cubah, a Koromantyn spiritual leader involved in the slave revolt of 1760, whose role may have been modeled on that of West African queen-mothers. In fact popular organizations throughout the black Atlantic, from carnival bands to collective work groups, elected female leaders who were often called queens. 'In ports and colonies around the Atlantic', notes W. Jeffrey Bolster, 'including Antigua, Barbados, Haiti, Jamaica, Mexico, Venezuela, New Orleans, and Argentina. . .annual festivals inducted or honored black kings and queens'. The Jamaican use of this politico-religious title indicates both the public ceremonial role and the political overtones of women's religious leadership. (30)

The 1860-61 Revival is the origin of several more recent Jamaican religious sects in which women continue to exercise central leadership roles, such as Revival Zion and Pukumina. 'To a far greater extent than most people realize', argues Barry Chevannes, 'Myal and its later manifestation, Revival, have shaped the worldview of the Jamaican people, helping them to forge an identity and a culture by subversive participation in the wider polity'. Female leaders in Revival Zion, Pukumina, and, more recently, Pentecostal and Holiness denominations are commonly referred to as 'Mother' or 'Queenie', and sacred healing knowledge has been passed down from mother to daughter. From a comparative perspective, Cheryl Townsend Gilkes has pointed out that in the United States African-American community, in both secular and sacred realms, 'there are powerful and respected older women addressed by the title 'Mother'. . . . The public prestige and real power of certain elderly black women in community work diverged from dominant (white) cultural norms'. Rosalyn Terborg-Penn likewise points out similar patterns of female leadership throughout the African diaspora, including popularly-given titles; celebration of militant women warriors; the attribution of spiritual powers to female leaders; and the role of older women as strategists, advisors, and warriors. Are the Queens and Mothers of today direct descendants of Quasheba, the public voice of female leadership in the slave community? (31)

III. Urban Popular Culture, Riotous Women, and Collective Action

Quasheba did not only turn to the churches, she also took to the streets. It is politically significant that black and 'brown' women formed by far the majority of inhabitants of Jamaica's larger towns and ports in the nineteenth century. An 1844 census of Kingston found a total population of 14,350 males and 18,543 females, while the 1861 island-wide census found that in all the towns of the island there was a total of 36,805 females, compared



with only 26,378 males. (32) Non-white women were a permanent presence in the public spaces of towns because of their central role in marketing agricultural produce, as well as their concentration in domestic service jobs in urban areas. Thus they played an important part in the development of a politically-active Afro-Jamaican public in two ways: 1) they facilitated flows of information between town and country; and, 2) they filled the streets and squares during popular political mobilizations or demonstrations. Whereas many studies have concluded that the street was the locale of masculine 'reputation' in the Caribbean, with women relegated to the home, the fenced-in yard, or the 'respectability' of the church, there is in fact plenty of evidence that working-class women dominated the life of the streets. (33) Above all, it is clear that black women played a highly visible part in the markets, streets, and rioting 'mob', often suffering retaliatory police attack.

Many examples of 'violent language' recorded in the British records were spoken by women, whether during slavery and apprenticeship, or in later court-house scuffles and riots; when violence occurred, working-class women were often at the forefront, brandishing not only insults and provocation, but quite often weapons as well. By the 1850s those words and weapons were increasingly turned not only against overseers and plantation personnel, but against the actual representatives of the colonial state: policemen, court-houses, militias, even magistrates themselves. Here again, women's political leadership was not simply due to sheer numbers on the lowest social rungs; rather, it was women's special economic and social position as a link between town and country, between markets and fields, and between the state and the families it tried to control, all of which enabled networks of women to facilitate crucial flows of information and to orchestrate collective action through the female-dominated public spaces of the markets.

Market women, or 'higglers', brought produce from the country into the towns and carried news and information to rural districts in the process. In largely non-literate societies, women's concentration in the towns and markets gave them an advantage in gathering oral information, while their economic and familial ties throughout the countryside enabled them to disseminate important information more quickly than official channels. An 1831 letter to the editor of the *Watchman and Jamaica Free Press* indicates the degree to which free black women dominated trade even before slavery's abolition, often making a good profit along the way:

Having occasion to go to the Beef Market on Sunday last, I was not a little astonished to find it infested by a number of black females, well known by the name of 'Higglers' (most of them free), who monopolize every thing. The poor country negroes have scarcely time to put down their loads, before they are surrounded, and in a thousand instances robbed by these women. It is a well known fact, that these Higglers take every possible advantage of the poor negroes, who, for the advantage of a better market, and with the hope of obtaining higher prices, travel upwards of forty miles from their homes to this town, with ground provisions, etc, etc.

Thus, even before slavery ended, free black urban women in Jamaica had established an entrepreneurial niche of their own, exploiting their less street-wise country cousins perhaps, but also providing them with opportunities they might not otherwise have found. The importance of these internal marketing networks as channels of political communication during the period of slavery has been recognized by a number of historians. There has been less discussion, however, of the ongoing significance of these networks after emancipation. (34)

Following emancipation, the markets of Jamaica continued to be run largely by women, with only minimal regulation of their organization. Working-class women dominated the public life of the streets, especially in major market centers. As Rhoda Reddock has noted for Trinidad & Tobago, 'For most women the street was their arena of activity. They worked there, were entertained, quarreled, fought, and even ate there. The Victorian adage that women should be seen and not heard was not applicable here, and the strict division between public and private life was not yet instituted among the working classes'. (35) Given their numerical predominance in urban public spaces, black women played a special part in public disturbances and riots, where they often made up the majority of participants in contentious gatherings. Not only were women's public activities a constant challenge to the security of the



class, racial, and gender identities of the white male elite, but working-class public culture often transmuted into direct verbal challenges to the authorities, sometimes turning into violent riots. As Richard Burton points out, 'the street woman par excellence – who in the West Indies is not the prostitute but the higgler (market woman) – is regarded with ambivalence by the wider society: admired for her "manlike" autonomy and assertiveness, she is also derided on account of her often invasive physical presence, her loud dress, and her even louder demeanor and language'; thus the higgler becomes what Lisa Douglass describes as 'a comical character, a caricature of a woman'. (36)

It is a familiar caricature, updating earlier images of the aggressive female slave Quasheba; urban women carried on her tradition of political protest. Swithin Wilmot has begun to trace women's participation not only in plantation labor protests, but also in urban riots. Even when riots arose out of religious or cultural issues, the following examples show that they were always political in so far as they demonstrated black physical power and numerical strength against representatives of the state. In a clash with police over the treatment of recaptured (and indentured) Africans in Falmouth in 1840, a woman named Mary Clarke was singled out by police: 'She abused the Police frequently and we were obliged to put her back. She always retreated with reluctance, and come back again. . . . Mary Clarke was conspicuous from first to last. . . . She damned the police and asked what right they had to interfere with people in the street'. Here the street is claimed as a public space, to which the people had a 'right'. Newspaper reports of this incident indicate that the public disturbance arose when the Africans were handcuffed, ill-treated, and most importantly, according to one witness, a woman was pitched into a cart, knocked on the head, and 'her person exposed'. (37)

After Christmas riots in Kingston in 1842, the *Morning Journal* reported that when the usual John Canoe festivities were banned by the mayor, and a man was arrested simply for playing a violin, angry women assembled:

But so soon as the people saw that one of their body who had violated no law, who had acted contrary to no order, had been taken by the police, they assembled in numbers, 4-5ths of them women. The crowd was great, but it consisted chiefly of defenseless women. Then was it that the police committed an outrage upon the people which was unparalleled. Seeing the people thus assembled, instead of recommending them quietly to disperse, they attempted to ride them down. . . . The police attempted to ride the people down -- and then had the people recourse to brick-bats; then, as he was informed, began the uproar.

The police were driven back and eventually opened fire on the crowd, killing three people, including one pregnant woman, and wounding several others. Although the imagery of 'defenseless' women was capitalized on by this writer, these urban crowds were in fact far more threatening than the small groups of women who had once challenged plantation personnel. As James Scott suggests, 'large, autonomous gatherings of subordinates are threatening to domination because of the license they promote among normally disaggregated inferiors'.(38)

A new urban political culture was emerging on the streets of Kingston and other large towns in the mid-nineteenth century, and women were instrumental in its formation. Women of the 'lower classes' were an object of fear and ridicule to elite Jamaicans who were clearly threatened by both their public presence and their domestic practices. A report by the Central Board of Health, presented to the legislature in 1852, reveals official views of popular urban life, in which the private sphere was as much a threat to 'public order' as the streets and markets. The authors want to establish better sanitation, housing, and medical provisions, but they contrast the 'powerful aid of science' with the 'filthy' customs of the 'idle' lower classes:

The market places, situated in the most crowded thoroughfares, their sheds and buildings miserably ventilated and undrained, frequently tainted articles of food exposed for sale, contaminate the surrounding atmosphere with their putrid effluvia... [The houses are] in some places sheds, more fit for the shelter of brutes than men... composed of the staves of salt fish and flour barrels... These small dark unventilated houses are frequently overcrowded, especially at night; within the small space of a few square feet, perhaps on the bare ground... a whole family of eight or nine



persons, of all ages and both sexes, huddled together with the door and so called window closed.... (39)

They go on to complain of the lack of personal hygiene, the ragged clothing, the gatherings in the open night air, the calendar of rape cases in the criminal courts, the abortions and infanticides, the quacks and unlicensed practitioners, and the 'ignorant, uneducated females attending as midwives; the majority of these are aged African crones'. Their recommendations range from changes in diet, dress, and the layout of housing, to regulation of midwives and dispensaries. Rather than addressing the causes of poverty, however, the report blames the poor themselves, suggesting that the idle man should 'be held up to public scorn and contumely, let him be deprived of all his rights as a citizen -- let him be disfranchised'. Poor men and women were, of course, already disfranchised by property and gender qualifications for voters.

Disfranchisement did not preclude women from participating in political movements, however, in some cases via their own associations. In a popular petitioning movement led by the Native Baptist Rev. Charles Fletcher in 1858, for example, separate females and juveniles committees were formed to send petitions to the Queen and raise subscriptions. The subsequent petitions carry over one thousand signatures, with at least 160 identifiable as women's names. (40) Women also participated in more riotous claim-making. During the Westmoreland Toll-gate riots of February, 1859, several toll bars and toll houses on the main roads were pulled down after petitions to have them removed were ignored. Over one hundred warrants were put out and thirty-one people were bound over to appear at the Circuit Court. During the hearing, according to Stipendiary Magistrate D.W. Kelly, the petty court near Grange Hill was surrounded by a 'large mob collected principally of Females and boys', who threatened witnesses and interrupted the proceedings. When the Circuit Court met in Savanna-la-Mar, it had to be adjourned when crowds estimated as up to 10,000 people, 'male and female', filled the streets. A group of over 1,800 people attacked thirty policemen, stoned the police station, broke windows, and vandalized its interior. As the Custos put it, 'every person, male and female, amongst the laboring population, are now sympathising with the parties concerned in this movement and from all I can learn labor is at a standstill on the estates.' (41) Because women were the backbone of the internal marketing network, shifting goods between the countryside and the towns for tiny profits (carrying much on their heads), added tolls were particularly burdensome to them.

In July 1859, another riot broke out during a court case in Falmouth. The 'Rabble' freed prisoners from the lock-up, assailed both police and magistrates, and stoned the houses of officials. Finally, they attacked the police station and battered in every window; twenty-two policemen holed up inside opened fire, killing two women and wounding others, one of whom later died; the deaths were ruled to be justifiable homicide. Trials of the rioters revealed that women were prominent in the riot, including Emily Jackson, Mary Hoad, Margaret Anderson, Wilhemina Peterkin, Jessy Simpson, Isabella Campbell, Mary Frackis, Adelaide Benarm, Elize Lyon, Rebecca Saffery, Maria Chippendale and Mary Campbell. The crowds involved in the disturbances were described by some witnesses as 'principally female'. Emily Jackson was singled out in the report of the inspector of police, Michael J. Taaffe, who states that, 'Emily Jackson was also most prominent, she was armed with this stick and flourishing it, she was very violent. She and Sutherland appears to be leadings [sic] the whole mob. The riot began with her that morning and she was one of those rescued in the first attack and rescue at the Cage in the morning'. Further reports indicate that she had to be forcibly removed from court after shouting that, 'Da Buckra commence the war and they must take all them get. This is nothing, before the week is out you will see the whole of the Maroons down here and they will make them fly'. Her father was said to be a Maroon himself. (42)

In periods of drought and economic recession like the early 1860s, the large unemployed population of the towns became especially apparent (and threatening) to the ruling elite. Working in an informal economy of higglering, domestic work, washing, sewing, and little-documented but ever-present prostitution, urban women were especially vulnerable to economic downturns. As the Custos of Kingston reported in 1865, 'Out of a population of 27,000 persons in Kingston, nearly one-half have nothing to do. Great hulking men and women may be seen in the different yards all day long, basking in the sun and picking each



other's heads, alternating the singing of psalms with ribald and obscene songs'. Baptist missionaries described the 'very precarious existence' of Spanish Town's tradesmen and other residents in 1865, including 'nearly 1,000 domestics, not half of whom were employed; 772 seamstresses, who got occasional work before the August and Christmas holidays; 422 laundresses, who were nearly all out of work; and 163 fishermen and fisherwomen'. The town 'was pauper-stricken, with large numbers seeking relief'. Even the 'respectable' women who had the advantage of owning property were subject to greater poverty and unemployment than their male counterparts:

Hundreds of females in this city [Kingston] and in other parishes are obliged to eke out a miserable existence by sewing, and of this very little can be obtained even at low rates of remuneration. This is well known to those who occasionally visit them in their homes, habitually miss them in places of public worship, and witness the eagerness to obtain employment when offered by public Institutions.

Out of this urban milieu emerged the politicized population who participated in the Underhill Meetings and petitions of 1865. Given that many of the complaints in the lead-up to the Morant Bay Rebellion concerned low wages, unfair terms of employment, lack of food and clothing, and the failure of the courts to provide justice, it is not surprising that women again played a prominent part in protesting a system which threatened the very existence of their families. (43)

Protest involved the entire community, and emerged out of the popular justice of the street and the market, locales populated by women as well as men. Even before the events at Morant Bay, reports of 'disturbances' in the western parishes led Governor Eyre to send two war vessels. A Custos reported one such incident in Black River, in which women participated:

on the first day of August a large body of Negroes from the neighborhood... determined on proceeding to Black River accompanied by their wives and the women of the Neighborhood and that the purpose was that the women should take at the stores any thing they required. . . . The People allege that they have been informed that the Queen has sent out a large sum of money to be laid out in the purchase of lands to be divided among them and that the Custos has kept it for himself. (44)

Here, a popular sense of justice was asserted through the symbolic act of a procession through the streets on the 'First of August' anniversary of emancipation; due to their special role in the 'moral economy' of the market, it was the *women* who were to take from the stores what was asserted to be their due, while the supposed good intentions of the Queen were used to legitimise protest against local authority. Other urban disturbances also indicate a division of roles between the sexes, with men at times playing the more dissident part. The Custos of Kingston described the enormous crowd that turned out to fight a fire in the Kingston Medical Depot in 1865:

as usual, the women, for the most part, were active and willing, quite the contrary with the men – not only do the latter not work, but they offer a passive resistance in every way. With folded arms they will stand in the streets, making their remarks aloud, and, if requested to stand on one side for any purpose, they immediately maintain they are doing no harm; that they have as much a right there as any one.

There is not enough evidence to determine why the women acted differently than the men in this situation, but there are a number of possibilities. These may have been women who had homes or shops in the area; it may have been more important to women, as care-givers, to save the medicine supply in the Depot; or, these particular men may have been an organised group of some kind, with their own leaders and reasons for passive resistance (45)

Women were again prominent during the events at Morant Bay in October 1865, as both Swithin Wilmot (1995) and Gad Heuman (1994) have carefully documented, and my own research (1997) confirms. As Heuman notes,

At Morant Bay [women] threw stones at the volunteers, encouraged the men to continue fighting and were responsible for the burning down of the court house. Some had scores to settle: Elizabeth Faulkner wanted to kill a black shopkeeper 'because of



his dishonest business practices.' Mary Ward and other women implicated in the killing of Charles Price complained that he had not paid them for their work. Swithin Wilmot has suggested that 'women may have had their own agenda in addition to the general ones relating to land, low wages and oppressive and partial administration of the law'. (46)

Family ties may have been one important aspect of some women's participation in the Morant Bay Rebellion, as for example in the case of the Geoghagan family. It was James Geoghagan who shouted out in the Morant Bay Court House on 7 October 1865, that the defendant should not pay the costs of 12s 6d; he was ordered out of the court, and when he did not go quietly, the judge ordered his arrest. A policeman named John Burnett reported that he said to Geoghagan "You come here to cheek me always in this Court", and as Geoghagan was going out of Court, his sister, called Isabella Geoghagan, came up directly and said, "Come out of the Court, let us go down in the market, and let us see if any d---d policemen come here if we don't lick them to hell". (47) Her challenge clearly demonstrates the sense of female control over the market as a public space in which, unlike the courts, popular justice could prevail; it was a threat backed by force, because once out in the market square, an armed mob indeed rescued James from police.

Isabella was not the only family member involved in the events at Morant Bay. A woman of the same surname was described by one of the Volunteer Militiamen as the 'guide' or 'leader' at the front of the crowd which marched into Morant Bay on the 11th of October. She threw the first stone at the Militia, initiating the rebellion:

Afterwards we saw them coming round the corner into the Parade, with guns and bayonets fixed, sticks, swords, machettes, and lances; they were advancing, blowing shells and playing drums. How near did they get to you before anything was done? -- About 20 yards, and a woman named Geoghagan...-- Is that a person now living? -- No, she is dead. What did she say or do? -- She first fired a stone, and several other women followed her, and then the men rushed right in... Whereabouts was this woman when she threw the stone? --She was just in front of us, in the north part of the Parade. Did she come up with the people? -- She was the guide and led them; she came up in front of them. But they did not want a guide? -- She was a sort of leader. Well, she threw the first stone? -- Yes. Then other women threw stones? -- Yes.

This woman was Mrs. Letitia Geoghagan, the mother of Isabella, James, and another son, Charles; the family owned a shop at Church Corner where meetings had been held prior to the rebellion. The British investigators seemed uncomfortable with the idea of a female leader, but the description makes it clear that Mrs. Geoghagan's role was as a leader. Mrs. Geoghagan was tried by court martial, and sentenced to be hanged alongside one of her sons. Wilmot names other women, like Rosanna Finlayson, Caroline Grant, and Sarah Johnson who were also found to have been directly involved in the march into Morant Bay, the raid on the police station to get weapons, and the attack on the Court House; a policeman even described Grant as 'a queen of the rebels', perhaps using a popular title. (48)

One striking aspect of initial reports on the rebellion at Morant Bay were the repeated descriptions of women taking a particularly 'fiendish' part in the violence, often spread by hearsay and third-hand reports. The Custos of Kingston, Dr. Bowerbank, for example, reported that 'All parties agree that the most heartless and beastly atrocities committed by the blacks were done by the women, who in many cases mutilated the dead bodies'. Thomas Clark of the LMS reported (falsely as it turned out) that 'One minister had his tongue cut out, while he was alive, by a Woman, who held it up in fiendish triumph'. Governor Eyre was especially influenced by such reports; in his initial dispatches he compared the incident at Morant Bay to the Indian mutiny, and added that 'Women, as usual on such occasions, were even more barbarous and brutal than the men'. He even argued that 'It is not pleasant to hear of women being flogged... but the evidence is that in the attack upon the Court-House some furies urged on the men, and in the after raids upon the estates they are responsible for much of [the] pillage'. Rev. Fletcher expressed his outrage at the actions of General O'Connor who in his own military dispatch stated that he had hung a woman as an example to others,



not because she individually had been convicted of perpetrating these atrocities, but because 'women' were supposed to have perpetrated them, and, therefore, it seems, he thought it desirable to hang her as a warning, or punishment -- what shall we say? -- to those other women; the fact being that these atrocities which the women were supposed to have perpetrated, had not been perpetrated at all. (49)

Indeed, the dispersed nature of women's networks of political mobilisation and communication probably made it difficult to identify leaders, and the punishment of a few did send a message to the entire black community. The official demonisation of black women suggests a back-handed recognition of their community leadership.

The reports of women's involvement in 'atrocities' and looting during the rebellion led to their harsh treatment by troops and courts of martial law. Papers published in London by the Jamaica Committee compiled excerpts from local newspapers with numerous reports of the flogging and execution of women. The *Colonial Standard* reported in October that 'Prisoners are every day brought in, and those on hand left to be tried number over two hundred -- a great many women among them'; and in November reported, 'thirteen sentenced to be hanged, among these Jessie Taylor, the woman who, it was proved, sat on the late Charles A. Price's chest with a hatchet in her hand'. In the end, seven women were hanged -- Sarah Francis, Mary Ward, Mrs. Letitia Geoghegan, Mary Ann Francis, Ellen Dawkins, Judy Edwards, and Justina [Jessie] Taylor; thousands had their property destroyed by soldiers, and at least two or three hundred women and girls were flogged. Dr. Underhill himself wrote to a colleague, 'I am afraid that our newspapers will be too delicate in reporting the atrocities of which we hear. . . . I think English women ought to know how their black and coloured sisters have been treated.' There was particular concern for the case of Miss Roach, whose father, an Independent Wesleyan Methodist pastor, had been arrested for involvement in public meetings in Kingston. When informed of her father's arrest, Miss Roach 'imprudently gave vent to her feelings, and gave utterance to language that was very improper in such times'. For this she was taken into custody in Kingston, which was not under martial law, and conveyed to a military camp, 'where martial law did exist; her clothes were turned up, thus exposing the person of a young and virtuous female in the presence of soldiers, and she was flogged on her bare person'. In 1867, Thomas Harvey, back to investigate complaints in Jamaica, found nearly thirty people in Port Antonio still 'under sentence of Court Martial, chiefly women, some of them mothers of families who knew not what had become of their children'. Once again the punishment of women became a prominent cause of complaint in England, where the Jamaica Committee demanded an official inquiry into the suppression of the rebellion and prosecuted Governor Eyre for his part in it. (50)

IV. Conclusion

One year after the brutal suppression of the Morant Bay Rebellion, *The Gleaner* printed a parody letter to the editor in a white approximation of working-class speech, signed 'Quasheba'. Under the headline 'Colour fe Colour,' the erstwhile slogan of the defeated rebellion, the letter supposedly concerned a recent lecture by Rev. Samuel Holt at the East Queen Street Baptist Chapel. During a visit he made to England to raise money for a Jamaican cooperative marketing association, it was said that 'white ladies' there had asked him whether 'any Black men in Jamaica had married white women'. The fictional 'Quasheba' therefore writes to 'Massa Editor' to complain that her husband says he is 'gwine to England fe marry one Bucra lady' since they 'is all fe black man now, dem no care no mo fo de Bucra man, black man is de bess'. The mock letter poses as a plea for white men's help and a warning to white women about black family life:

Dem nigger man is de real good for noting nega, dem tump and trash we al'time, dem cuss we mothus, dem make we labour for dem all time. . . Dem take all de money and go a rum shop -- gamble, drink and come home drunk den dey kick up de row, beat we, buse we, flog de picaninnies, and make we house jis like a hell. ⁽⁵¹⁾

This white Jamaican humor, in the long tradition of Quasheba jokes, simultaneously ridicules black speech, black families, black working-class culture, and black women who noisily butt into public space with their 'private' grievances. It rests on the ideology of white women as 'angels in the house', whose domestic life is heaven rather than hell, and it relegates male



violence and women's uncompensated domestic labor to the realm of the 'nigger' family. It uses a standard repertoire of ridicule to disarm the threatening power of the real black women who participated in the recent rebellion, to criticise black men who travel to England seeking public support, and to warn off white women who become involved in colonial politics. (52)

This parody also raises questions about where we find the recorded 'voices' of working-class black women in the historical record. Contrary to this fake voice, the actual records of protest that have been considered in this article suggest black family solidarity, associational cohesiveness, and community self-protection -- with an understanding that violence against black women came most often from the wider white society. The few preserved accounts of Afro-Jamaican women's leadership and political protest exist precisely because of the contradictory position they occupied in the colonial symbolic mapping of social order and disorder. Their words speak for themselves, while their troubled embedding in government archives, missionary correspondence, and newspapers suggest their powerful impact.

This article has shown first, that female agricultural laborers turned the 'discourse of domesticity' on its head by taking advantage of their special position as workers and mothers to organize collective action against labor coercion and to protect their household autonomy; second, that Afro-Jamaican women led efforts to promote black power within the dissenting churches, to democratise decision-making in the independent congregations, and to revive and pass down the African-rooted practices of their own communities; and third, that urban working-class women were central to public protests and demonstrations against injustice and social inequality, and suffered heavy state repression for their troubles. While these three aspects of Afro-Jamaican women's public leadership and political protest between 1834 and 1865 may seem unrelated, they are in fact all part of a complex culture of resistance based on a strategic manipulation of points of contradictory tension within the social, economic, and political structures of post-slavery Jamaica. By recognizing the depth and continuity of women's activism in Jamaica in the nineteenth century, whether in the roles of Quasheba, Mother, or Queen, we are in a better position to understand later popular political mobilization. This history forces us not only to re-evaluate prevalent conceptions of female 'respectability' in the Caribbean, but also to re-examine assumptions (developed from European and North American experiences) about the supposed 'silencing' and 'exclusion' of women from the bourgeois public sphere.

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Government Documents and Missionary Archives (Abbreviations):

CO	Colonial Office Archives, Public Record Office (Kew, England).
BMS	British Missionary Society Archives, Angus Library, Regents College, Oxford.
JA	Jamaica Archives (Spanish Town, Jamaica).
JRC	<i>Report of the Jamaica Royal Commission, 1866, Parts I and II.</i> (London: G.E. Eyre & Wm. Spottiswoode, 1866).
LMS	London Missionary Society Archives (SOAS, Univ. of London, England).
NLJ	National Library of Jamaica (Kingston, Jamaica).
PRO	Public Record Office (Kew, England).
WMMS	Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Archives (SOAS).

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Notes

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1. Jean Besson, 'Reputation and respectability reconsidered: a new perspective on Afro-Caribbean peasant women', in Janet Momsen (ed.), *Women and Change in the Caribbean: a Pan-Caribbean Perspective* (London: James Currey, 1993), p.30. Important works on slave women's resistance include James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); Sidney Mintz, *Caribbean Transformations* (New York: Columbia University Press, [1974] 1989); Rhoda Reddock, 'Women and Slavery in the Caribbean: A Feminist Perspective', *Latin American Perspectives*, Issue 44, Vol.12, no.1 (Winter 1985), pp.63-80; Barbara Bush, "'The Family Tree is Not Cut": Women and Cultural Resistance in Slave Family Life in the British Caribbean', in Gary Y. Okihiro (ed.), *In Resistance: Studies in African, Caribbean and Afro-American History* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986), pp.117-32; Hilary Beckles, *Natural Rebels: A Social History of Enslaved Black Women in Barbados* (London: Zed Books, 1989); Marietta Morrissey, *Slave Women in the New World: Gender Stratification in the Caribbean* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1989); and David B. Gaspar, 'From "The Sense of Their Slavery": Slave Women and Resistance in Antigua, 1632-1763', in David B. Gaspar and Darlene C. Hine (eds.), *More Than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), pp.218-38. On women's post-emancipation resistance, see Karen F. Olwig, *Cultural Adaptation and Resistance on St. John* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1985); Gad J. Heuman, *The Killing Time: The Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica* (London: MacMillan Caribbean, 1994); and Swithin Wilmot, "'Females of Abandoned Character"? Women and Protest in Jamaica, 1838-65', in Verene Shepherd, Bridget Brereton and Barbara Bailey (eds.), *Engendering History: Caribbean Women in Historical Perspective* (Kingston and London: Ian Randle, James Currey, 1995), pp.279-95.
2. Shepherd *et al.*, *Engendering History*, p.xix. New conceptualizations of slave and peasant political culture in the Caribbean converge not only with recent agrarian studies which have reformulated peasant political agency in terms of oppositional cultures or 'cultures of resistance' -- e.g., Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Frederick Cooper *et al.*, *Confronting Historical Paradigms: Peasants, Labor, and the Capitalist World System in Africa and Latin America* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993); Florencia Mallon, *The Defense of Community in Peru's Central Highlands: Peasant Struggle and Capitalist Transition, 1860-1940* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); Steve J. Stern (ed.), *Resistance, Rebellion and Consciousness in the Andean Peasant World: Eighteenth to Twentieth Centuries* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987) -- but also with the growing historiography of 'plebeian publics' and 'black publics' as submerged networks within bourgeois democracies, e.g., Sara M. Evans and Harry C. Boyte, *Free Spaces: The Sources of Democratic Change in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986); Nancy Fraser, *Unruly*



Practices: Power, Discourse, and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989); Mary Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1994); Elsa B. Brown, 'Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere: African American Political Life in the Transition from Slavery to Freedom', in The Black Public Sphere Collective (ed.), *The Black Public Sphere* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp.111-50.

3. Wilmot, 'Women and Protest', p.292.
4. The ode appears in Bryan Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies* (1801), and is discussed in Barbara Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society, 1650-1838* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p.11, as well as in Carolyn Cooper, *Noises in the Blood: Orality, Gender, and the 'Vulgar' Body of Jamaican Popular Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), p.23. *The Watchman and Kingston Free Press*, Vol. I, no.21, 9 September 1829; Wesleyan pamphlet cited in Mary S. Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries: The Disintegration of Jamaican Slave Society, 1787-1834* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), p.74. It is notable that the numerous female activists named in this article do not have African names like the ones in these caricatures; their English names suggest that the culture of opposition was thoroughly Creole.
5. Matthew G. Lewis, *Journal of a West Indian Proprietor Kept During a Residence in the Island of Jamaica, Reprint* (New York: Negro Universities Press, [1834] 1969), p.139; Jamaica Archives, St. Georges 2/18/6, Buff Bay Court House, General Slave Court, Summary Trial, 27 May 1828. Later that year, a woman slave was sentenced to 39 lashes for 'use of the most obscene, filthy and gross language'. Even after emancipation, in 1839 the Buff Bay Court was still notorious for injustice, and in one instance the stipendiary magistrates 'were not only received with violent language, but were pelted with stones by some of the most turbulent of the party, amongst whom', according to the Governor, 'the women were the most conspicuous' (cited in Wilmot, *Women and Protest*, p.283).
6. Wilmot, 'Women and Protest', p.287; Thomas Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1939* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p.64. See also Mary Turner, 'Chattel Slaves into Wage Slaves: A Jamaican Case study' in Mary Turner (ed.), *From Chattel Slaves to Wage Slaves: The Dynamics of Labour Bargaining in the Americas* (London: James Currey, 1995).
7. E.g., Barry Higman, *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean, 1807-1834* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984); Bush, *Slave Women*; Morrissey, *Slave Women*; Olwig, *Cultural Adaptation*; and Reddock, 'Women and Slavery'. This contradiction was first recognized by Max Weber as a major factor in the transformation of the system of slavery in the Roman world; cf. *The Agrarian Sociology of Ancient Civilizations*, Trans. R. I. Frank (London, 1976), p.54-5.
8. Jean F. Yellin, *Women and Sisters: The Antislavery Feminists in American Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), p.12. In the United States, too, northern middle-class women's 'growing perception of the exploitation of slave women as a violation of the norms of true womanhood' fed anti-slavery activism and was popularized by publications like Harriet Jacob's *Incidents in the Life of A Slave Girl* (Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, 'Strategies and Forms of Resistance: Focus on Slave Women in the United States', in Okihiro, *In Resistance*, pp.143-65). A rich discussion of visual imagery in the anti-abolitionist press can be found in Phillip Lapsansky, 'Graphic Discord: Abolitionist and Antiabolitionist Images', in Jean F. Yellin and John C. Van Horne (eds.), *The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women's Political Culture in Antebellum America* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp.201-30. For the British Caribbean, cf. Bush, *Slave Women*; and Catherine Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992).
9. Despite all of its contradictions for the slave, the role of mother also has had a special resonance within Afro-Caribbean cultures; as Jean Besson notes, 'the significance of



motherhood in conferring personal status among Afro-Caribbean women. . . is widely indicated in the regional literature' (Besson, 'Reputation and respectability', p.28). Missionaries were especially concerned with the treatment of mothers, as when Rev. William Knibb took up the cause of Catherine Stewart, an apprentice punished on the treadmill while pregnant (see *The Falmouth Post*, 23 Sept. 1835). The honorific use of the title 'Mother' in Caribbean and African-American communities is discussed further below.

10. Holt, *Problem of Freedom*, p.64. On the parliamentary debate, see *The Morning Journal*, Vol.1, no.14, 25 April 1838.
11. John Sturge and Thomas Harvey, *The West Indies in 1837* (London: Hamilton, Adams & Co., 1838), pp.231, 217.
12. *Ibid*, pp.217-18. Similar incidents of protest among female workers -- nursing mothers in particular -- occurred on other islands just after emancipation. For St. John, cf. Olwig, *Cultural Adaptation*, pp.33, 54; for a Special Magistrate's observations on St. Vincent and Barbados, cf. Woodville K. Marshall (ed.), *The Colthurst Journal* (Millwood, NY: KTO Press, 1977), p.95; and cf. Judith Kafka, 'Action, Reaction and Interaction: Slave Women in Resistance in the South of Saint Domingue, 1793-94', *Slavery and Abolition*, 18, 2 (Aug. 1997), pp.48-72. As Kafka observes, 'Motherhood appears to have been a role commonly called upon by women in order to promote their own self-interest. . . a woman [could use] her identity as a mother to aid in her challenge to the colonial regime' (p.65).
13. Sturge and Harvey, *The West Indies in 1837*, Section IV, Statements of Apprentices.
14. 'A Narrative of Events since the First of August, 1834, by James Williams, An Apprenticed Labourer in Jamaica', Bound with Lord Brougham's Speech on the Slave Trade in the House of Lords, 29 January 1838, (London: J. Rider, 1838), pp.7-8, 12. Williams' account was read in the House of Lords by the anti-slavery advocate Lord Brougham, initiating an inquiry which eventually contributed to the early ending of the apprenticeship system.
15. Rebecca Scott, 'Exploring the Meaning of Freedom: Postemancipation Societies in Comparative Perspective', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 68 (Aug. 1988), p.423.
16. Turner, *From Chattel Slaves to Wage Slaves*, p.12; Douglas Hall, 'The Flight from the Estates Reconsidered: The British West Indies, 1838-1842', reprint, in Hilary Beckles and Verene Shepherd (eds.), *Caribbean Freedom* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1993), p.62; Morrissey, *Slave Women*, p.xi. On the importance of access to land, see Jean Besson, 'Symbolic Aspects of Land in the Caribbean: The Tenure and Transmission of Land Rights Among Caribbean Peasantries', in Malcolm Cross and Arnaud Marks (eds.), *Peasants, Plantations and Rural Communities in the Caribbean* (Guildford: Surrey, 1979), pp.86-116; and Barry Higman, *Jamaica Surveyed: Plantation Maps and Plans of the 18th and 19th Centuries* (Kingston: Institute of Jamaica, 1988). On women's post-emancipation disadvantage, see also Reddock, 'Women and Slavery'.
17. *The Morning Journal*, Vol. 1, no.115, 21 Aug. 1838; Wilmot, 'Women and Protest', p.280. On evictions, see Rev. Hope Masterton Waddell, *Twenty-Nine Years in the West Indies and Central Africa: A Review of Missionary Work and Adventure, 1829-1858*, Reprint (London: Frank Cass, [1863] 1970), pp.148-51; on plantation strikes, see also Holt, *Problem of Freedom*.
18. *The Morning Journal*, Vol.1, no.116, 22 Aug. 1838, Vol.1, no.187, 7 Nov. 1838; Swithin Wilmot, 'Emancipation in Action: Workers and Wage Conflict in Jamaica, 1838-40', *Jamaica Journal*, 19 (Aug.-Oct. 1986), pp.55-62.
19. *The Baptist Herald and Friend of Africa*, Vol.1, no.5, 9 November 1839, p.2; and Vol.1, no.2, 28 September 1839, p.2. Between 1838 and 1844, as Sidney Mintz notes, '19,000 freedmen and their families removed themselves from the estates, bought land, and settled in free villages'; with an average of five persons per family, this represented as many as 100,000 people out of the total 311,000 freed. Sidney Mintz, 'Historical Sociology of the Jamaican Church-Founded Free Village System', *De West-Indische Gids*, Nos.1-2 (Sept. 1958), p.49.



20. Cooper, *Noises in the Blood*, p.66; on the Christianizing aims of the free villages cf. Catherine Hall, 'Gender Politics and Imperial Politics: Rethinking the Histories of Empire', in Shepherd *et al.*, *Engendering History*, pp.48-59.
21. Diane J. Austin-Broos, *Jamaica Genesis: Religion and the Politics of Moral Orders* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), pp.38-9; and on the 'Quashie' personality, cf. Orlando Patterson, *The Sociology of Slavery: An Analysis of the Origins, Development and Structure of Negro Slave Society in Jamaica* (London: Granada, [1967] 1973), pp.174-81.
22. Fox-Genovese, 'Strategies and Forms of Resistance', p.159. On African-American women's church networks in the United States, cf. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993) and Brown, 'Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere'. On African-American churches as political networks, cf. Evans and Boyte, 'Free Spaces', and Aldon Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York: Free Press, 1984). Jamaican women appear to have held many lay offices in the churches in this period, especially among Baptists, Wesleyan Methodists and the United Brethren, or Moravians. An 1844 report on the latter notes that 'deaconesses are retained, for the privately admonishing of their own sex, and visiting them in their sickness, but though they are solemnly set apart to this office, they are not permitted to teach in public' (*Baptist Herald and Friend of Africa*, Vol.5, no.29, 16 July 1844, p.225). Other denominations are discussed below.
23. *The Morning Journal*, Letter of Eleanor Vickars, 25 May 1842, and continued in another letter on 2 June 1842. Vickars' father was a deacon, and she may have been a relative of Edward Vickars who ran for the House of Assembly in 1844 with the slogan, 'Vote for Vickars, the Black man' (Gad Heuman, *Between Black and White: Race, Politics and the Free Coloreds in Jamaica, 1792-1865* [Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1981], p.121). In regard to female literacy, the BMS Education Society reported thirty-six female teachers in 1841, with over 2000 girls in day schools, and bible classes described as 'chiefly composed of the elder girls'; there was also a 'Normal School for the Training of Female Teachers' at Kettering and a 'School of Industry' for girls (*Baptist Herald and Friend of Africa*, Vol. 2, no.11, 17 March 1841, p.78; Vol. 3, no.1, 2 Feb. 1842). On the eudemonic elements of Jamaican Christianity, the quote is from Austin-Broos, *Jamaica Genesis*, p.39. It is notable that in 1843, and again in 1854-55, Rev. Oughton became embroiled in disputes with his congregation who 'were encouraged by black leaders to insist on being able to choose their pastor and conduct their own financial administration' (Robert Stewart, *Religion and Society in Post-Emancipation Jamaica* [Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992], p.93-4). For ongoing black conflict with Oughton, including criticism of his views on 'Quashie', see *The Sentinel*, 24 March 1865.
24. LMS, Box 5, Memorial of the Church at First Hill, Clarendon (1845?); Memorial of the Congregations at Dry Harbor and Claremont, St. Ann's, enclosed in Clark to Directors, 21 May 1845; Memorial of the Members of the Church assembling at Union Chapel, Davyton, Manchester, 30 December 1846. On Presbyterian elections, see Waddell, *Twenty-Nine Years*, p.113; on the wider development of petitioning in Jamaica see Mimi Sheller, 'Democracy After Slavery: Black Publics and Peasant Rebellion in Postemancipation Haiti and Jamaica', Ph.D. Dissertation (New School for Social Research, 1997), Chs.5-6. On women's petitioning in the United States, cf. Deborah B. Van Broekhoven, "'Let Your Names Be Enrolled": Method and Ideology in Women's Antislavery Petitions' in Yellin and Van Horne (eds.), *Abolitionist Sisterhood*, pp.179-99.
25. Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989); Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The 'Invisible Institution' in the Antebellum South* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978); and Austin-Broos, *Jamaica Genesis*.
26. WMMS, West Indies Correspondence, Martin Young to Directors, 23 May 1847; see also Edmondson to Directors, 4 May 1847, and Rev. Henry Bleby to Directors, 8 May 1847.



27. In 1845 the BMS was similarly torn by a bitter dispute over congregational independence. Rejecting the pastorship of Rev. J.M. Phillippo, black supporters of the Rev. Thomas Dowson 'claimed that the Baptist system was entirely democratic, that the power to depose was inherent in the power to elect, and that a minister had no right to continue if voted out by a majority'. A conflict over refusal of church burial to two women led to court cases over possession of the chapel, riots in 1845-46 and 1850-51, and the arrest of Dowson's supporters, whom Phillippo described as 'a motley mass', 'rabble', and 'the scum of the Town' (BMS, General Corr., WI/5, Evans to Angus, 20 April 1845; WI/1, Phillippo to Angus, 23 Dec. 1845, 5 Jan. 1846, 20 Sept. 1846). Like the WMMS, the BMS gradually eroded 'congregational democracy' after 1845, 'in reaction to black assertion of independence' (Stewart, *Religion and Society*, pp.84, 148). It is unfortunate that Stewart pays no attention to women in his otherwise excellent study; Austin-Broos picks up the story of Jamaican women's passionate and pervasive participation in religion, but concentrates on the twentieth century.
28. *The Watchman*, Vol.1, No.36, 31 October 1829. On creative adaptation and the alternative moral-order in Jamaican popular religion, see Austin-Broos, *Jamaica Genesis*; Stewart, *Religion and Society*; Monica Schuler, 'Myalism and the African Religious Tradition in Jamaica', in Beckles and Shepherd, *Caribbean Freedom*, pp.295-303; Barry Chevannes, *Rastafari: Roots and Ideology* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1994).
29. On women's prayer meetings, see WMMS, West Indies Correspondence, Jamaica, unsigned letter from Montego Bay, 17 November 1860, and also Waddell, *Twenty-Nine Years*, p.169. Quotes are from: National Library of Jamaica, MS 817a, 'Thirty-six letters and Reports of Baptist Missionaries,' Rev. Walter Dendy to BMS, Salter's Hill, 18 March 1862; Jamaica Royal Commission (1865), Part II, Evidence of Rev. George Truman, p.415; LMS, Box 8, Hillyer to Directors, Mt. Zion, 7 Jan. 1861; *Morning Journal*, 21 Oct. 1842; LMS, Box 9, Gardner to Directors, 23 Feb. 1861, encl. newspaper extracts, 18 Feb. 1861; *Papers Relating to the Disturbances in Jamaica* (1865), various enclosures in Eyre to Cardwell, 23 Nov. 1865 (No.47). On the general participation of women in circle dances, processions, and attacks on Obeahmen, see Waddell, *Twenty-Nine Years*, pp.187-9; and Rev. T. Banbury, *Jamaica Superstitions; Or, the Obeah Book: A Complete Treatise on the Absurdities Believed in By the People of the Island* (Kingston: Mortimer de Souza, 1895), p.22. The revivalists of 1860-61 were described by one Clerk of the Peace as 'principally women' (JRC, Part II, Evidence of Beckford Davis, p.520).
30. WMMS, West Indies Correspondence, W. Holdsworth to Directors, 23 Oct. 1861. On Queen Cubah and other Queen-Mothers or popular queens, see Lucille Mathurin, *The Rebel Woman in the British West Indies During Slavery* (Kingston: African-Caribbean Publications, 1975); Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, 'Black Women in Resistance: A Cross-Cultural Perspective', in Okihiro (ed.), *In Resistance*, p.204-6; Gaspar, 'Slave Women and Resistance', p.231; and W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1997), p.109. A distinct but related issue is popular loyalty in Jamaica (and other British colonies) to Queen Victoria, evident in rumours of royal proclamations, popular petitions, and speeches of gratitude and loyalty. This 'naïve monarchism,' as James Scott argues, appears as 'an apparently conservative myth counseling passivity [but] becomes a basis for defiance and rebellion that is, in turn, publicly justified by faithful allegiance to the monarch!' (James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, [London: Yale University Press, 1990], p.98). Like the African American and Afro-Caribbean usage of monarchical titles for popularly elected leaders, this belief system preserved the 'goodness' and authority of the Queen as a figure, while still allowing for political protest and the selective autonomy of her subjects.
31. Chevannes, *Rastafari*, p.21; on use of the titles Mother and Queen, see Besson, 'Reputation and respectability', p.28; H.C. Lowe, 'Jamaica Folk Medicine', *Jamaica Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (June 1972), p. 20-4; Terborg-Penn, 'Black Women in Resistance'; and on the transferal of herbalist knowledge from a Revivalist woman of the 1860s to her daughter, Rozanne Forbes, and granddaughter, see Leonard Barrett, *The Sun and the Drum: African Roots in Jamaica Folk Tradition* (Kingston: Sangster's Books, 1976), p.54.



On the United States, the quote is from Cheryl T. Gilkes, 'The Roles of Church and Community Mothers: Ambivalent American Sexism or Fragmented African Familyhood?' in Timothy E. Fulop and Albert J. Raboteau (eds.), *Afro-American Religion: Interpretive Essays in History and Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), pp.367, 372; and cf. Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*.

32. Census figures are from *Baptist Herald and Friend of Africa*, Vol.5, no.33, 13 Aug.1844, p.259 and Barry Higman, ed. *The Jamaican Censuses of 1844 and 1861* (Kingston: University of the West Indies, 1980); the overall female population in 1861 was 6,521 white, 42,842 brown, and 179,097 black. The distinction between 'black' and 'brown' women is a socially significant one, with brown women generally occupying a higher social status; however, given that most of the sources drawn on here do not identify colour, it is difficult to differentiate black from brown political actions (I thank Gina Ulysse for pointing out this crucial issue to me). Since brown women as a group were more likely to own property and succeed in the female pursuit of 'respectability' (discussed further below), while black women as a group were more likely to live and work outside and to frequent the markets and streets, I have identified the general culture of urban working-class opposition as 'black'. The existing sex ratio imbalance of the 1840s was exacerbated by male emigration to Panama in the 1850s to build the railway and canal; see Elizabeth M. Petras, *Jamaican Labor Migration: White Capital and Black Labor, 1850-1930* (Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1988).
33. I will not re-hash the reputation/respectability debate here, but see Peter J. Wilson, *Crab Antics: The Social Anthropology of English-Speaking Negro Societies in the Caribbean* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973); Diane J. Austin, *Urban Life in Kingston, Jamaica: The Culture and Class Ideology of Two Neighborhoods* (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1984); Besson, 'Reputation and respectability'; and, on 'slack' women, cf. Cooper, *Noises in the Blood*. Most recently, Richard Burton argues for a more complex understanding of the reputation/ respectability dialectic, but does not abandon the emphasis on a *masculine* culture of play and opposition (Richard D. E. Burton, *Afro-Creole: Power, Opposition and Play in the Caribbean* [Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997]).
34. CO 142/1, *Watchman and Jamaica Free Press*, Vol.3, No.4, 12 January 1831. On marketing as a crucial network of communication during slavery, see Sidney Mintz and Douglas Hall, 'The Origins of the Jamaican Internal Marketing System,' *Yale University Publications in Anthropology*, No.57 (New Haven: 1960); Olwig, *Cultural Adaptation*; Mary S. Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries: The Disintegration of Jamaican Slave Society, 1787-1834* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1982); Janet Momsen, 'Gender Roles in Caribbean Agriculture' in Malcolm Cross and Gad Heuman (eds.), *Labour in the Caribbean* (London: Macmillan, 1988), pp.141-58; and Robert Olwell, "'Loose, Idle and Disorderly": Slave Women in the Eighteenth-Century Charleston Marketplace' in Gaspar and Hine, *More Than Chattel*, pp.97-110. Despite Sidney Mintz's oft-cited belief that there is little evidence of women predominating in marketing prior to slave emancipation in Jamaica, there are enough early references – some of which he himself cites -- to 'wandering higglers' (Lewis 1816), women selling their husband's produce (Madden 1835), etc., to show that marketing was very much a female activity even before emancipation (see Mintz, *Caribbean Transformations*, pp. 211, 216).
35. Rhoda Reddock, *Women, Labour and Politics in Trinidad & Tobago, A History* (London: Zed Books, 1994), p.81. A similar point has been made regarding the working women of San Juan, Puerto Rico (Felix V. Matos-Rodriguez, 'Street Vendors, Peddlars, Shop-Owners and Domestic: Some Aspects of Women's Economic Roles in Nineteenth-Century San Juan, Puerto Rico, 1820-1870' in Shepherd *et al.*, *Engendering History*, pp.176-96); Kingston was one of the great female-dominated trading centers of the nineteenth-century colonial world.
36. Burton, *Afro-Creole*, p.164; on 'inside' versus 'outside' as gendered spaces, see Lisa Douglass, *The Power of Sentiment* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), and Austin, *Urban Life in Kingston*.



37. *The Baptist Herald and Friend of Africa*, Vol.1, No.31, 3 June 1840. Mary Clarke ended up among the three women and six men sentenced to three months in prison for rioting; Wilmot has found that women were also prominent in several tax riots in the 1840s, and in election riots in the 1850s (Wilmot, 'Women and Protest', pp.286-9).
38. *Morning Journal*, Vol. I, No. 215, 7 January 1842; Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, p.65. A similar violent struggle between police and 'the mob' over banned Christmas parading occurred in Montego Bay in 1841, when an African drum known as a 'Joe Wenda' was confiscated by a magistrate (*Morning Journal*, Vol.1, no.211, 1 Jan. 1842).
39. *Report by the Central Board of Health of Jamaica* (Spanish Town: F.M. Wilson Printer, 1852), pp.98, 102, 112-14.
40. CO 137/345, Government Despatches, Darling to Newcastle, 9 June 1859, enclosing petitions submitted by the Rev. Charles Fletcher, letter of Henry Ireland Davis (enclosing meeting resolutions), 2 May 1859, and letter of Joseph Williams to George Stevens, 2 June 1858.
41. CO 137/344, various enclosures in Darling to CO, 25 March 1859.
42. CO 137/345, Darling to CO, 9 August 1859, enclosing Kitchen and Castle to the Governor's Secretary, 2 August 1859; CO 137/346, Darling to CO, 10 November 1859. Although not directly mentioned, the story is reminiscent of Nanny, the 17th century Maroon leader who has remained a central figure of resistance to colonial rule; women's oral histories preserve the accounts of Nanny's victories over European armies and she remains an important icon of female leadership; cf. Honor Ford-Smith with Sistren, *Lionheart Gal: Life Stories of Jamaican Women* (London: The Women's Press, 1986); and Besson, 'Reputation and respectability'.
43. PRO 30/48/44, Cardwell Papers, Evidence of Louis Q. Bowerbank; Baptist report quoted in Douglas Hall, *Free Jamaica, 1838-1865: An Economic History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), p.213; WMMS, Box 199, Edmondson to Directors, April 20, 1865.
44. CO 136/392, Eyre to Cardwell, 7 August 1865, encl. report of John Salmon, Custos.
45. PRO 30/48/44, Cardwell Papers, Original Evidence Collected by the Jamaica Royal Commission, Evidence of Lewis Q. Bowerbank, p.5.
46. Heuman, '*The Killing Time*', p.185. See also Wilmot, 'Women and Protest', and Sheller, 'Democracy After Slavery', Chs.6-7.
47. JRC, Part II: Evidence of John Burnett, p.229. In other parts of the report, the family's name is spelled 'Geoghegan', but I keep the spelling in this part of the evidence for consistency.
48. JRC, Part II: Evidence of James Britt, Volunteer, p.178. Heuman, '*The Killing Time*', p.139; Wilmot, 'Women and Protest', p.291.
49. PRO 30/48/44, Cardwell Papers, Evidence of Louis Q. Bowerbank; LMS, Box 9, Clark to Directors, 23 October 1865; CO 137/393, Eyre to Cardwell, 20 Oct. 1865 (No. 257); Eyre and O'Connor cited in Rev. Duncan Fletcher, *Personal Recollections of the Hon. George W. Gordon, late of Jamaica* (London: Elliot Stock, 1867), p.150-1.
50. NLJ, Ms.74, Morant Bay Rebellion: Contemporary Newspaper Cuttings, p.23; *Jamaica Papers*, No.1 (London: Jamaica Committee, 1866), pp.23, 28; Heuman, '*The Killing Time*', p.139; Thomas Harvey and William Brewin, *Jamaica in 1866. A Narrative Tour Through the Island, with Remarks on its Social, Educational and Industrial Condition* (London: A.W. Bennett, 1867), p.11-16; BMS, *Extracts from Correspondence of Edward Bean Underhill with Missionaries in Jamaica, 1864 to 1866*, p.54, Bean to Phillippo, 26 January 1866. And see Bernard Semmel, *The Governor Eyre Controversy* (London: Macgibbon & Kee, 1962); and Catherine Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992).



51. NLJ, MS 1353, 'Extracts from local newspapers, 1866.' *The Gleaner*, 16 November 1866. For an excellent discussion and usage of Jamaican language in relation to women's politics, see Cooper, *Noises in the Blood*, pp.87-95.
52. For similar attacks on political 'intercourse' between white female abolitionists and black men in the United States in the 1830s, see the cartoons in Lapsansky, 'Graphic Discord', pp.225-9.