

ABSTRACT

Beyond Visibility: Women's Letters as Sources of Caribbean History, 1700-1900

Aleric Joyce Josephs

Caribbean Women's History since the 1970s has made great strides in making women visible. Since the 1980s, however, it has increasingly been recognized that the process of recovering and centring women in the Caribbean's historical experience has to be furthered beyond the 'contribution histories' which traditionally rest on women's role and status, relative to men, and which are dependent on the careful investigation of traditional sources, usually male generated. This study is predicated on the assumption that 'engendering' of the history of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries can be furthered by the investigation of the textual material generated by women. It has three objectives - to identify the epistolary material generated by women that survived and so gauge the extent to which women have left on record evidentiary material for the reconstruction of the Caribbean past. Secondly, by presenting their texts, to assist in the breaking of the silence of and in centring women in Caribbean History. Thirdly, to move Caribbean Women's History beyond the focus on making women visible, by presenting their observations on the region and their responses to historical experience of the Caribbean through examination of their surviving letters.

The study centres on women's letters as sources of Caribbean History and examines letters written in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, establishing that these letters are useful for addressing multiple themes on the Caribbean past.

The claim is that the letters further the understanding of women's roles and status, and give insight into how women lived their lives. It further maintains that the surviving letters provide often overlooked information on women's contribution to the shaping of the region, on Jamaica's and the wider Caribbean's natural, built and cultural landscape; on travel, communication and migration; on women's social network patterns; on the impact of local and international events and views about the people

This study, "Beyond Visibility: Women's Letters as Sources of Caribbean History, 1700 -1900" explores the importance of moving women's history beyond merely making them visible to incorporating their voices.

Keywords: Aleric Joyce Josephs; Women's History; correspondence of women; eighteenth and nineteenth century Caribbean.