

# ENGENDERING CARIBBEAN HISTORY

*Cross-Cultural Perspectives*



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## Victims or Strategists?: Female Lodging House Keepers in Jamaica

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The question of commercial provision for accommodation for visitors to Jamaica was addressed on an official level in the 1880s with the impending International Exhibition which Jamaica hosted in 1891. It was believed at the time that there would not be enough places offering acceptable services to visitors.

It was probably overlooked by the Jamaican officials that before the 1880s, Jamaica boasted a number of lodging houses, inns and taverns which supplied the varying needs of visitors and local inland travellers for accommodation, food, drink and other services.

It has already been established by writers like Lucille Mathurin<sup>1</sup> and Sheena Boa<sup>2</sup> that the main providers of hospitality in these houses, which were strategically located all over the island, were coloured and black women. These women were referred to as 'a despised race and a despised sex' who, according to Boa, were victims of a white male-dominated society. They suffered the injustices meted out to people of their colour and in addition were victimised as women.

They were placed in a position of subservience to white males as their mistresses and treated scornfully by other women. They were ostracised by black men, coloured men, black women and white women.

Hilary Beckles,<sup>3</sup> in his work on slave women in Barbados, contends that the keeping of lodging houses in Bridgetown was inextricably linked within what he calls the mistress/prostitute cycle, that is, most women involved in the hospitality trade were involved either as mistresses of white men who gave financial support for the establishment of the business or were themselves prostitutes within these houses. Some might have played double roles too. In essence, he says that these women,

whether as owners or workers, were held in a sexual bind to white men who created the situation to further their own gain. He also states that it was extremely difficult for these women to break out of the cycle.

There is little concrete evidence to suggest that prostitution was institutionalised in lodging houses in Jamaica. But it is true that many lodging house keepers were established by their white lovers and their businesses maintained by the support of white men who also formed the bulk of their clientele and for whom they provided sexual favours among other services. Most of these women were bound in informal liaisons or concubinage with white men.

Gad Heuman thinks that concubinage in Jamaica was a system engineered by the white male to continue the social inferiority of women, especially coloured women.<sup>4</sup> He argues that the sexual exploitation of these women was institutionalised in these relationships. Were these women allowed to become lodging house keepers to maintain the status quo by keeping them tied to a traditional sexist role of providing sexual favours for men? Since white men had been involved in the hospitality trade for decades, was the rise of women in the trade manoeuvred by these men? Were these women in fact victims of male-dominated society?

A number of writers, including Aleric Josephs, contend, however, that the keeping of lodging houses and taverns was one of the few means of economic and possibly social independence for women during and after slavery.<sup>5</sup> Boa also argues that from a position of being victimised, lodging house keepers, like other coloured women, liberated themselves by using whatever resources were available to them.

Might we therefore argue like Enrol Miller that the marginalisation and victimisation of

women by men is simply a step away from women liberating themselves?<sup>6</sup> And if, as Miller says, this liberation is the unintended outcome of male conflict, did white men block the entrance of other males into the occupation of lodging house keepers, thereby opening the way for females? What then were the historical situations which gave rise to this occupation becoming a stronghold for coloured females? Further, how did these women emerge from the relationships which they formed with their male clients? Were they in fact 'liberated?'

A number of these questions will be addressed by tracing the rise of the female lodging house keeper and showing that from a position relegated to her by dominant males where her opportunities were limited, she emerged with a number of avenues for social and economic success. She strategised rather than gave into her circumstances.

Although the focus of the chapter is not essentially ethnicity or colour, it is difficult to separate gender from colour when dealing with this particular occupation in nineteenth-century Jamaica, as the majority of these women were in fact coloured or of mixed race.

As with other works on gender, the discussion on these women's relations with their clients as well as their business ventures is limited because of the researchers' almost total dependence on the diaries and books of male visitors, newspapers and official documents like censuses, annual reports and inventories. The data do not express the actual views and feelings of these women.

The term 'lodging house' will be used interchangeably with the term 'inn' and sometimes 'tavern.' This in no way negates the distinctions which can be made between the various institutions. It is usually agreed that an inn is a larger establishment offering drink, food and lodging, while taverns are usually restricted to the selling of wine, ale and other spirits. In Jamaica, although these differences existed, there was an overlap in services and functions. The term 'lodging house' will be used as it was the term most frequently used in the official sources and since the term 'lodging house keeper' was a recognised occupation during the nineteenth century, while no reference was made to an 'innkeeper.'

## Strength in Numbers

Trelawny Wentworth who travelled throughout the West Indies in the 1830s observed that: 'All the taverns we had visited in the Antilles were conducted by a miss somebody which seemed to indicate that the office strictly appertained to the sagacity and intelligence of the fair sex; and experience confirmed us in this deduction.'<sup>7</sup>

John Waller in his travels noted that all the taverns in Barbados were kept by women.<sup>8</sup> In Havana, Cuba, Robert Baird made mention of 'boarding houses such as Madame d'Almy's or Miss Chambers, both of which were excellent.'<sup>9</sup>

In Jamaica the references to female lodging house keepers were quite numerous. Matthew Lewis in 1817 was cared for by female hostesses in all the places where he stayed while travelling from St James to St Thomas-in-the-East. 'Miss Hatley,' 'Miss Cole' and the famous 'Judy James' are just a few of the women who cared for him.<sup>10</sup> It was to Charlotte Beckford's lodging house that Lady Nugent sent her guests in 1802.<sup>11</sup> Robert Madden, writing in 1834, mentioned 'such establishments as Miss Hannah Lewis, Miss Winter and the innumerable brown misses, who board [and] lodge.'<sup>12</sup> Kitty Paisley, Judith Pines, Mary Fisher and Mary Anderson were some of the women to whom Benjamin Scott Moncrieffe paid tidy sums for lodgings.<sup>13</sup> Thomas Davies, Special Magistrate, used the services of women like Elizabeth Lawrence, Georgiana Tyndale and Martha Sylvester during his stay in Jamaica.<sup>14</sup>

The Jamaican census of 1844 gives the total number of lodging house keepers as 157. Of these 88 were female, 26 male, and the rest were not defined in terms of sex.<sup>15</sup> In nine of the 16 parishes there was no record of a male-operated lodging house. In Kingston the ratio of females to males was almost 2:1. The census of 1861 is very defective in its breakdown of occupations by sex. However, other sources for the second half of the century all suggest that there was a significantly high proportion of women in the trade. In fact, as table 29.1 shows, in 1878 all lodging houses in Kingston were operated by women.

Contemporary newspaper advertisements confirmed the travellers' reports of women as the leading providers of accommodation and

**Table 29.1**  
**Lodging Houses and Lodging House Keepers, Kingston, 1878**

Place	Operator	Address
Barkley Hall	Mrs H. Gardner	64 Harbour Street
Blake, Harriet		45 Orange Street
Clarendon House	Susan Foderingham	23 East Street
Corinaldi, Emma		93 King Street
Farebrother, Jane		83 King Street
Fiddes House	Mrs E. B. Lillie	95 East Street
Grampian House	Jane Lamont	87 Barry Street
New Blundell Hall	Luisa Grant	7 East Street
Gosford Lodge	Mary Dewa	1 Highholborn Street, 70 King Street
Manchester House	Annette McFarlane	95 Water Lane
McDowell, Ann		5 East Street
Nosworthy, Margaret		38 Parade
Parade Villa	Sarah Hopgood	58 Harbour Street
Portland House	Mrs Dias	43 West Street
Rogers, Mrs Maria		3 Hanover Street
Shaw Henriet		33 Duke Street
Stewart, Jane		54 Hanover Street
St Thomas House	Susan Burton	

*Source:* The Jamaica Directory 1878, 18.

food all over the island. These advertisements directly or indirectly point to women in these establishments. In Falmouth in 1854,

Mrs Davies begs to announce that she has taken that airy and commodious dwelling in Cornwell Street lately tenanted by the Rev. W Thornburn where she will be happy to receive lodges.<sup>16</sup>

And,

the undermentioned begs leave respectfully to inform the friends and patrons of her late sister, Miss Elizabeth Green that she has taken possession of the House near the sea-side where she will be glad to receive LODGERS and BOARDERS on moderate terms and promises that every attendance will be given. Catherine Green<sup>17</sup>

It was believed that to stray from a female-operated lodging house was unwise. Trelawny Wentworth went to the extent of advising other travellers to avoid staying in taverns operated by men because 'there is nothing attractive about it; your necessities need anticipating, your appetite requires stimulants and coaxing and there is that instinctive eloquence in the

female voice and especially in the fine drawn wheedling of a mulatto hostess.<sup>18</sup>

Anthony Trollope thought there was something mysterious about the phenomenon of female owners.

There is a mystery about hotels in the British West Indies. They are always kept by fat middle-aged coloured ladies who have no husbands. I never found an exception except at Berbice...these ladies are generally called Miss so-and-so...I only mention this. I cannot solve the riddle, but it did strike me as singular that the profession should always be in the hands of these ladies and that they should never get husbands.<sup>19</sup>

## Historical Roots

It is not clear when free coloured and black women began operating taverns and lodging houses on a wide scale in Jamaica. Tavern and innkeeping in the seventeenth century was strictly the domain of men. Of 44 tavern keepers and victuallers in seventeenth-century Port Royal, only 2 were women,<sup>20</sup> possibly white women. However, as the role of taverns changed to provide the services of

inns and lodging houses rather than liquor exclusively, references to female-operated taverns became more frequent. By the start of the nineteenth century several freed women were operating taverns because and female lodging house keepers outnumbered males. It might be that women created this occupation by expanding the services of taverns to include all the domestic services associated with the nineteenth-century lodging house.

With the development of the plantation system it seems that lodging house keeping moved out of the hands of whites. This is not strange, as many other occupations did the same. As whites moved up socially to better-paid, more prestigious occupations involving less manual work, blacks and coloureds took over occupations such as those of millwrights, coppersmiths, coach-makers and masons. It is likely that tavern-keeping became a less prestigious occupation for whites in the later seventeenth century. What is strange about tavern and lodging house keeping is that the occupation moved into the hands of coloured females rather than coloured males.

Certainly in all towns females outnumbered males, and, according to Heuman, the free coloured woman was the fastest growing part of the population. Yet according to the 1844 census females outnumbered males only in the occupation of lodging house keeper.

There are a number of possible explanations for this peculiarity of the West Indies during the period, that is, the high percentage of women in the hospitality trade.

In examining Montpelier estate during the early nineteenth century, Barry Higman found that the major determinants of the 'weight' of labour given to a slave were colour, sex and age.<sup>21</sup> Therefore coloured female slaves made up almost all of those who were domestics or washerwomen, since these jobs were seen as 'light work.' Furthermore some of the skills involved in operating lodging houses in the nineteenth century were primarily though not exclusively part of women's work during slavery. These skills included laundering and baking. The hospitality trade was therefore a logical occupation to follow.

In explaining the predominance of women in this business there arises the question of whether their willingness to provide sexual

favours gave them any advantage over males in setting up these houses. Certainly women stood a better chance of receiving capital outlay from their white lovers. Most of the women who established lodging houses were in fact housekeepers or mistresses of whites.

The stark reality too was that the options for occupations open to coloured females during the period were quite limited. They had been 'trained' for little else, while coloured and black men had a variety of options open to them, such as craftsmen, tradesmen, artisans and mechanics.

There is the possibility, however, that although historical precedents had been set for women to move into this occupation, white men may have deliberately closed the doors to coloured men and made it easier for women to become lodging house keepers. How does one explain that, throughout the nineteenth century, reference to male owners of lodging houses revealed a white-dominated group? There were no coloured male lodging house keepers who were given contracts to operate by the white authorities. In one parish, St David, between 1801 and 1813, Mary Hatley, a coloured woman, was the only licensed tavern keeper. Liquor licences were granted by white men as magistrates or as members of the vestry.<sup>22</sup> They therefore had the power to decide who was allowed in the group.

Coloured men might have been seen as economic competitors to white men in the hospitality industry, and white men would hardly miss the political implications of assisting coloured men to enrich themselves.

Beckles thinks that white men understood gender implications and used this knowledge to their own advantage. Were coloured men deliberately kept out of this group or did white men feel that opening the trade to women would maintain the status quo? Heuman says that white males were uncertain whether coloured males would prove a threat to their continued supremacy.<sup>23</sup> They therefore chose to support females who did not appear to pose a threat. Probably white men felt that by allowing women in the trade their sexual wishes would be met and the women would be kept in 'bondage' to them since they had assisted them financially. What followed was exactly what Errol Miller refers to as the empowering of women resulting

from the marginalisation of men by men.

What needs explanation is why more white women did not enter the occupation, or why they did not take it over from white men who had moved up into the ranks of overseers or bookkeepers. There was a scarcity of white women during the plantation era. The few upper class English women who did come to the West Indies came as wives and daughters of estate owners and in a few instances were owners themselves. There is record, however, of some working class English women holding domestic positions in white households. Many of the women who attended to governors' wives were white, and affluent women often brought maids with them from England. And there were, of course, poor white creole women. These groups could have provided more than the very few white female lodging house keepers who did emerge.

Part of the explanation might be that coloured women were able to amass larger fortunes than white women to go into business. Many white women were indeed 'passed over' by white men and favours sought from coloured women. For example, Charlotte Beckford in Spanish Town was a free mulatto who had two sons by George Ffrench, Crown Solicitor and later Clerk of the Council. Her lodging house was also known as 'Miss Ffrench's' lodging house although there is no record of a marriage between her and George Ffrench.<sup>24</sup>

Additionally, because of their training in domestic chores coloured women did not find the work involved in keeping a tavern or inn below their dignity. White working class women might have done so, and perhaps did not wish to offer these services commercially.

Furthermore, businesses became female-dominated, as once coloured women established themselves in this business, there was a tendency to involve other female family members. If a business was profitable, it made sense to prepare a daughter or sister, or some other close relative, to take it over. Anthony Trollope was cared for by Mary Seacole's sister at Blundell Hall and Mary Seacole herself learned the trade from her mother who operated a lodging house on the same site as Blundell Hall.<sup>25</sup> Catherine Green of Falmouth took over the business on the death of her sister Rebecca Green in 1851.<sup>26</sup>

## Strategists – As Business Women

If the historical situation made it easier for women to enter this occupation, what was their role in liberating themselves from being victims? Are we to believe with Errol Miller that their 'liberation' was simply the unintended outcome of male conflict<sup>27</sup> and that there was no planning on their part? The evidence suggests that these women did plan especially for economic independence. The female lodging house keeper was indeed a strategist.

First, not all these women were given taverns or lodging houses. Most of them turned dwelling houses given to them into shops, hospitals and lodging houses. They turned their 'wealth' into more wealth. Second, in the establishment of these houses, they chose strategic locations, that is, land routes and in the main seaport towns of Falmouth, Montego Bay, Port Antonio and Black River. They sought out the places where there were no planters' residences and only the houses of a few merchants. They met the demand for lodging and food from a wide cross section of travellers and became indispensable.

Many of the women who operated these establishments became 'women of considerable wealth in both houses and slaves.'<sup>28</sup> Some of the visitors to the lodging houses did not fail to comment on the flurry of servants and slaves attending their tables and rooms.

The records confirm that tavern- and lodging house keepers made fairly decent incomes when compared with other occupations. In fact, their annual income was quite comparable with other workers in the nineteenth century. The figure proposed by Gisela Eisner<sup>29</sup> of £1 per week is therefore quite unrealistic when one considers the range of services which were offered by these places and the cost of these services. In fact, it is quite likely that most lodging house keepers under-reported their incomes.

A number of lodging house keepers could swell their coffers by providing a multitude of services in addition to those of food, drink, accommodation, laundering and probably prostitution, whether overtly or disguised. These additional services included being nurse or 'doctress.' Mary Seacole and other so-called

**Table 29. 2**  
**Annual Incomes Attached**  
**to Various Occupations in**  
**Jamaica, 1847**

Occupation	Income, £
Minister of religion	400
Schoolmaster	70
Planting	—
Bankers	500
Public servants	500
Professional persons	500
Surveyors	300
Artists	150
1,000 persons (unclassified)	50
Pilots	70
Storekeepers	300
Retailers	100
Clerks	120
Master tradesmen	150
Journeyman	50
Professional persons	500
Tavern keepers	300
Lodging house keepers	150
Master mariners	80
Miners	70

Source: G. Scotland, 'A letter addressed to the public of Jamaica on the political and financial state of the colony. Jamaica, 1847.' Cited in Douglas Hall, *Free Jamaica 1838–1865: An Economic History* (London: Caribbean Universities Press, 1969), 228.

doctresses operated within the context of the lodging house and catered mainly to seamen and soldiers who were often sorely in need of medical care. The white and coloured transient community depended on these public houses.

Many lodging house keepers also catered to the vestry by providing their quarterly dinners and other refreshments. In St Ann, Catherine Paisley catered to the vestry from 1807 to 1833, being paid £10 for each diner.<sup>30</sup> In addition, these women organised dances and balls for members of the white community. These dances were largely attended by coloured females with white men admitted.

These owners of lodging houses also wisely diversified their businesses, often using incomes derived from lodging houses. In 1878 a considerable bakeries. Mary McPherson of Porus owned a bakery as well as a lodging house in Porus. She also owned a lodging house in Old Harbour. Mrs Magnus of Golden Spring, Emily Lyons of Annotto Bay and Maria Eastwood

of Porus are a few lodging house keepers who operated bakeries.<sup>31</sup> Elizabeth Sutton, who owned a lodging house on East Street and who died in the early part of the century, had amassed a large fortune. An inventory of her estate when she died revealed that it was worth £2,821 in 1803. She left 14 slaves worth over £1,200 each. Her five-bedroom house was fully furnished and there were many rooms in another building which she owned.<sup>32</sup>

Another coloured lodging house keeper, Susanah French of Kingston, left an estate worth £3,219. In addition to the five-bedroom fully furnished house which she operated as a lodging house, she also owned a three-bedroom house in Hannah Town. She had 34 slaves to her credit.<sup>33</sup>

The famous Ann Fraser of Laughlands Tavern in St Ann, which, according to Philip Wright, was 'frequented by gentlemen of the legal profession journeying to and from the Cornwall Assizes in Montego Bay,<sup>34</sup> amassed personal property worth £5,838. Her furniture and goods alone were worth £2,213. Among her 37 slaves were four carpenters, one mason, ten field hands, cooks and a house washer.<sup>35</sup>

In 'opening up' her lodging house the lodging house keeper ensured that she would maintain a fairly comfortable existence. The lodge house of the nineteenth century, was at times post office, sales room, community bill-board room, hospital, court house for trials of petty offences or court martials, and a kind of community centre where favoured people from the private sector and from government met for business.

## Relationships

It is extremely difficult to determine the kinds of relationships which existed between female proprietors and their customers, who were mainly male. Part of the difficulty in reconstructing these relationships is due to the almost total dependence on sources which do not give an insight into the feelings of these women. With the exception of Mary Seacole, nothing is heard directly from the women.

The nature of these relationships might result from the different and varied tasks which were carried out in these establishments. Some services required a more businesslike approach,

while for others the owners had to assume the role of friend and confidante. The types of relationships might also hinge on the kinds of customers; the lodging house keeper adapted to suit her clients. As one-sided as the report of visitors might be, they do give some insight into the ways the female owners strategised for their own good.

### **Strategists – In Relationships with Customers**

There were two basic types of customers of these taverns and inns: guests who lodged in the establishments for varying periods; and non-guests, who paid for various services without lodging in the establishments. Often semi-permanent guests were the relatively poor, single white and coloured clerks who were boarders for long periods. These men had their meals provided and their laundry done.<sup>36</sup>

A great number of people passed through the doors of these lodging houses and taverns. There must have been also hundreds (possibly thousands) of sailors, military and naval officers 'who stopped for lodgings, food and drink and even medical care, and who left little evidence of their presence in the records. The main seaport towns of Kingston, Montego Bay and Falmouth experienced droves of visitors in transit.<sup>37</sup> Towns such as Moneague saw travellers daily as they moved from Spanish Town to the North coast and vice versa.

Planters, merchants, jury men, suitors, government officials and businessmen who stopped for a night or for a meal or a drink;<sup>38</sup> visitors who found no planter's residence nor overseer's house to shelter in or who simply had no letter of introduction to any one of importance; all contributed to the clientele of these establishments.

There were many overseas visitors to lodging houses. Among those who recorded their impressions were James Anthony Froude (historian and writer), Anthony Trollope (novelist), Richard R. Madden (Stipendiary magistrate), Joseph Sturge and Thomas Harvey (Humanitarians), Benjamin Scott Moncrieffe (attorney, planter and horse-owner) and Lady Maria Nugent (wife of Governor Nugent).

All classes made use of inns and taverns. There were people who belonged to the

upper class, for example, planters, merchants, government officials and some important visitors from abroad; middle class people including lower-middle class persons, for example, navy officers and white and coloured clerks; people of working class origins, for example, sailors and seamen.

As non-guest customers, there were upper-middle class planters and merchants attending balls, a few middle class coloured women, businessmen using rooms, government officials ordering dinners, people attending balls, election victors celebrating their triumphs.

If the clientele was varied in its class composition, it was far less so in its racial and gender components. Overwhelmingly, the customers were white males, with some coloured males, apparently more coloured females (as non-guests), and a sprinkling of blacks. Trollope noticed one black man, in the Wellington Inn in Spanish Town, talking politics.<sup>39</sup> White women as guests or non-guest customers were rather few. The record of women's use of these establishments might, however, be very incomplete.

Black people were rarely guests; black working class people, for example higglers and cartmen, travelling across the island and in need of shelter for a night had to make other arrangements, perhaps taking shelter in 'negro yards.'<sup>40</sup> Most likely there was a colour restriction in most of these taverns and inns; since the clientele was predominantly white, it would have been bad for business to have any but selected members of other races as guests. As institutions, the inns and taverns were typical of their times: they preferred white customers, allowed some selected coloured customers and mostly kept away black people, even those who might have been able to pay. However, inns and taverns presumably were of different standards and those at the lower end of the scale might have had little or no colour restrictions. Surely some blacks must have stopped at humble taverns and inns for a drink.

From all indications, certain lodging houses attracted a specific clientele.<sup>41</sup> There was an inn which received the patronage of legal personnel on their way to country assizes. Lady Nugent and her guests made use of some inns. Certainly she would never visit a second-rate

inn; nor would she send her guests to a lodging house which attracted the lower classes. Charles Day, a visitor to Barbados writing in the 1840s, said that visitors to some inns were

...usually shopmen, tradesmen and generally of the most inferior classes. The females are not very reputable and the low Irish visitors...the habitudes of the house are very offensive in their habits and conduct. Altogether it is a very unfit place for any gentleman.<sup>42</sup>

Mary Seacole's house, like others, attracted ailing seamen and army personnel because of its nursing services. Most of the lodging houses in major seaport towns like Falmouth, Montego Bay and especially Kingston, were frequented by numerous sailors in transit. Some of these places attracted disreputable females as well, who certainly gave favours in return for money.

There remains the question of possible sexual relations between customers and owners of lodging houses and taverns. It has been established that in Barbados taverns and lodging houses were notorious for prostitution.<sup>43</sup> Travellers complained about this aspect of the business in Barbados. In Jamaica no such direct accusation has been noted in the books or diaries of travellers, even when they were men of known morality like Sturge and Harvey. Brothels existed in Jamaica and most were operated by free black women;<sup>44</sup> there is little indication, however, that houses of prostitution operated under the guise of lodging houses. But this does not rule out paid-for sexual services within these establishments. It would be remarkable if, for example, sailors and seamen, after months at sea, visited inns and taverns without expectations of sexual intercourse. And it would be foolish to believe that these lodging house keepers did not capitalise on the gains which could be accrued to them by offering sexual favours at a price.

The many glowing tributes paid to these female owners by gentlemen from abroad may have had something to do with sexual services or, at least, emotional stimulation beyond the bounds of unimpeachable business. This might be what Trelawny Wentworth meant when he spoke of necessities needing 'anticipating' and 'appetites' requiring coaxing or stimulants.<sup>45</sup> At the same time, some allowance should be

made for the growth of Christian morality and education in the community over time. A change in the morality of coloured owners might have been expected in the later nineteenth century, unlike during the era of slavery when the influence of Christian missionary activity and schools was minimal.

It seems, therefore, that there were sexual contacts between some owners of lodging houses and their customers. Certainly this would have been on a scaled down, very selective basis. It is also likely that many owners did have very amiable non-sexual relationships, but might have offered prostitutes in their establishments. Certainly those women who organised special balls for whites offered what Boa calls 'a more transitory form of prostitution,'<sup>46</sup> where the coloured women moved from house to house. And there were owners who might have been 'madames,' the 'fat, middle-aged' type referred to by Trollope who had permanent female employees offering sexual favours.

How independent were those owners of the white men who not only were their main customers, but might also have been instrumental in getting their business off the ground? One view is that they had the upper hand in their relationships with their male customers and were not subservient to them. This might be what Wentworth had in mind when he wrote of a lodging house keeper that 'her amiable familiarity places you upon a footing of equality in a moment, which seldom fails to give assurance that obligation on both sides reduced.'<sup>47</sup> Possibly Cynric Williams's inquisitive landlady was the sort who smartly gathered more information from customers than the amount she provided. The services offered were important, and white men might even have come to see them as indispensable. In addition to bed, board and liquor, the lodging house was also, at times, a sort of community centre carrying out a number of functions.<sup>48</sup> Hence the female proprietors might have gained a place in the white establishment and in the hearts of white men which gave them some 'power' over the relationship. Their 'power' might even have sprung from their apparent weakness. They were, after all, not in the fight for political and social rights, and therefore did not offer a threat to white dominance of the society.

On the other hand, there were reports of lodging house keepers whose sole aim was to please the customers, not to assert their own personality, like Monk Lewis's Judy James who 'did everything with such good will and cordiality no quick answers, no mutterings.'<sup>49</sup> It would have been interesting to hear directly from the female coloured owners about their customers, instead of always hearing what the customers said about the owners. Perhaps the women owners flattered their customers and hence gained a large reputation for caring and loyalty. As Boa noted, coloured inn keepers turned a blind eye to the indiscretions of their clients.<sup>50</sup> Their aim was to earn a living and a good one and in their dealings with their clients they planned the type of relationship which would ensue. They appeared to be subservient, but they were silent victors, strategising their next move on unsuspecting white males.

## Conclusion

This chapter has tried to take a new approach to lodging house keepers who formed part of a larger group of nineteenth-century coloured Jamaican women who were despised and victimised because of their race and their colour. They were rejected by coloured men, hated by black women and scorned by white women. As coloured women, their opportunities were severely limited and they were kept in check by white males. The analysis seems to suggest that the main area of their victimisation was their subservient and seemingly dependent relationship on white males for whom they were mistresses, lovers and prostitutes and who attempted to keep them in that bind by 'allowing' them to enter the occupation of lodging house keeper. They would be kept in the traditional sexist role of domestic and more importantly giver of sexual favours, thereby maintaining the status quo which concubinage had entrenched. These women were allowed only because they would remain in the domestic sphere and not in the public arena. They were therefore marginalised.

What resulted from this was indeed an empowering of these women, as Errol Miller suggests would have happened. However, contrary to Miller's views, this empowering was mainly the result of planning on the women's

part. These women used what would have been negative, that is, their victimisation and marginalisation, for good. They turned their weakness into strength by exploiting the white man's need for them. Their lodging houses became places 'flocked to' mainly by white males who sought them for sexual favours and more. They diversified their services so that they not only increased their incomes but eventually became women of importance.

These women demonstrated advanced business strategies in deciding on the location of their lodging houses in the busy port towns and on the established interior routes. They expanded their services so that the lodging house became a kind of community centre. They ensured that the services offered were in high demand and would ensure high remuneration. Some, therefore, did not stop short of offering prostitutes, since they would bring increased income. Their customers found them amiable because they decided to be amiable to maintain their business. They set the tone for the relationships which they enjoyed with their clients. They gained a reputation for caring and loyalty and had the upper hand in the relationships.

The lodging house keeper of the nineteenth century chose to be a strategist rather than a victim of her situation. From a position of male victimisation and marginalisation she emerged independent and powerful, mainly by her own planning.

## Notes

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1. Lucille Mathurin Mair, 'A Historical Study of Women in Jamaica from 1655 to 1844,' PhD diss., University of the West Indies, 1974, 415.
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3. Hilary Beckles, *Natural Rebels: A Social History of Enslaved Black Women in Barbados* (London: Zed Books, 1989), 144, 150.
4. Gad Heuman, *Between Black and White: Race and Politics and the Free Coloured in Jamaica* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1981), 9.
5. Aleric Josephs, 'Mary Seacole,' *Jamaican Historical Review*, XVII (1991): 50.
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10. Matthew (Monk) G. Lewis, *Journal of a West Indian Proprietor* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1929), 302, 135, 313.
11. Phillip Wright, ed., *Lady Nugent's Journal of Her Residence in Jamaica from, 1801–1805*, revised edn, (Kingston: Institute of Jamaica, 1966), 168.
12. Robert Madden, *A Twelve Month's Residence in the West Indies During the Transition From Slavery to Apprenticeship* (London: James Cochrane and Co., 1835), 199.
13. Jamaica Archives, A/S No. 26, Grand Court, Journal of Benjamin Scott Moncrieffe.
14. Jamaica Archives, Private file 4/47, Diary of Thomas Davies, Special Magistrate for St Mary, 1837, and St James 1834.
15. The Jamaican Census of 1844 and 1861, a new edition derived from the manuscript and printed schedules in the Jamaica Archives, edited and with an introduction by B.W. Higman (Social History Project, Department of History, University of the West Indies, 1980).
16. *Falmouth Post*, July 21, 1854.
17. *Ibid.* January 21, 1854.
18. Wentworth, *The West India Sketchbook*, 308.
19. Anthony Trollope, *The West Indies and the Spanish Main* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1867), 195.
20. Michael Pawson and David Buisseret, *Port Royal, Jamaica* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), appendix 12.
21. B.W. Higman, *Slave Population and Economy in Jamaica 1807–1834* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 72.
22. Boa, 'Freed Women's Economic Contribution,' 3.
23. Heuman, *Between Black and White*, 11.
24. *Lady Nugent's Journal*, 287.
25. Trollope, *The West Indies*, 23.
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27. Miller, *Men at Risk*, 204.
28. Waller, *A Voyage*, 6.
29. Gisela Eisner, *Jamaica 1830–1930: A Study in Economic Growth* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1961), 35.
30. Sheena Boa, 'Free Black and Coloured Women in a Whiteman's Slave Society,' MPhil thesis, University of the West Indies, 1988, 84–85.
31. This information is derived from various sections relating to specific towns and parishes in *Jamaica Directory 1878*.
32. Jamaica Archives, 1B 113, vol 100, Inventory of Elizabeth Sutton.
33. Jamaica Archives 1B 113, vol. 132, Inventory of Susanah French
34. Philip Wright, *Exploring Jamaica* (London: Deutsch, 1969), 66.
35. Jamaica Archives, 1B 113, vol. 127, Inventory of Ann Fraser.
36. Boa, 'Free Black and Coloured Women,' 77.
37. *Ibid.*, 76.
38. *Ibid.*, 78.
39. Trollope, 23.
40. *Report of the Commission into the Conditions of Juveniles in Jamaica 1879*, 166, quoted in Erna Brodber, *A Study of Yards in the City of Kingston* (ISER, University of the West Indies, 1975), 7.
41. Joseph Sturge and Thomas Harvey, *The West Indies in 1837* (London: Frank Cass and Co., 1968), 1.
42. Charles Day, *Five Years Residence in the West Indies* (London: Colburn ad Co., 1852), 62.
43. Charles Day (62–63) mentioned about six establishments in Barbados where prostitution was carried on. John Waller said that the houses were houses of debauchery where there were 'a number of young women of colour always being procurable for the purpose of prostitution' (6). Hilary Beckles reported that 'the more developed

- institutional aspects of prostitution were centred in the taverns, bars and inns' (144).
44. B.M. Senior, *Jamaica As It Was, As It Is and As It May Be* (New York: Negro University Press, 1969), 122.
  45. Wentworth, 308.
  46. Boa, 'Free Black and Coloured Women,' 100.
  47. Wentworth, 309.
  48. The author's MA thesis, 'Lodging Houses in Jamaica, 1800–1881' (University of the West Indies, 1992), gives details on the various functions ranging from post office and court house for trials of petty offences to a place for weddings and christenings, as well as hospital.
  49. Lewis, 63.
  50. Boa, 'Free Black and Coloured Women,' 234.