

# ABSTRACT

## Contesting Society's Sensibilities: Exploring Female Criminality in Jamaica, 1885-1914

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This study is an investigation into the motivations and strategies behind female criminality in Jamaica during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Through research and analysis on the crimes primarily perpetrated by and against women, the study examines the general nature and pattern of crime in the island and the place of women in the society. The study further explores some of the laws, legal mechanisms and societal responses to what was considered inappropriate female behaviour, as evidenced by women's participation in criminal activities.

The analysis has primarily been based on court and newspaper reports during the period. Using the evidence obtained from these sources, the study has situated this within the context of the changing socio-economic factors in the larger environment in order to assess how and why female criminality emerged within the island.

The work concludes that the pattern of female criminality in the island throughout the period was correlated to different individual and societal challenges. Some persons therefore chose to commit acts of illegality as a means of alleviating personal distress, or as a means personal gain, while others resorted to such behaviour due to the broader socio-economic conditions which had resulted in undue hardships. The study also demonstrates that a number of different approaches were taken by the ruling forces in their attempt to curtail unlawful behaviour, but shows that overall these were unsuccessful as a means of deterrence.

Key Words: Shakira Mytia-Ann Maxwell; crime; women; criminality and Jamaica.