

REVIEW

Empire and Indifference

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Tim Barringer and Wayne Modest, eds., *Victorian Jamaica* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).

Christopher Taylor, *Empire of Neglect: The West Indies in the Wake of British Liberalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).

THE Caribbean's middleness within anthropological literature has been recognized and progressively untangled by scholars like Sidney Mintz and David Scott. The dialectics that figure the Caribbean as a perennially contingent space, always embodying too little and too much of the values that bound discourses of colonial modernity, frame the arguments in both *Victorian Jamaica* and *Empire of Neglect*. Both books respond to the problem of an ill-fitting Caribbean, especially after the formal abolition of slavery gave way to apprenticeships and inaugurated an uneven process of gaining political freedoms. Victoria's six-decade reign over the British Empire witnessed the expansion of liberal capitalism, reformulations of state and planter relationships, and movements for political rights under empire. Insurgencies and rebellions dotted the landscape of empire, from India (1857–59) and Jamaica (1865) to the Zulu territories (1879) and Alexandria in Egypt (1879–82). Empire responded to subjects who exposed its shaky footings through greater repression, social reform, and ballasting the civilizing mission from above. From below, colonized subjects inhabited empire in resistant, calculative, and often contradictory modes that revealed the undoing of imperial ambitions in practice. The Caribbean's marginalization in post-emancipation political economy, as the British Empire occupied more territory in Africa and Asia, produced many such complex habitations of

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empire that superficially may appear, *pace* Mintz, to be culturally midway between there and here.

Victorian Jamaica's authors introduce empire studies to the visual and material archive of nineteenth-century Jamaica to argue how Crown Colony status, new artistic and architectural developments, and science and technology aided a multifocal co-production of British state power and Jamaican subjectivities. The volume illustrates in graphic and rigorous detail how visibility and material objects helped embody rapidly transforming racial and gendered subjectivities. In *Empire of Neglect*, Christopher Taylor theorizes the economic neglect of the British West Indies in the interregnum between abolition in 1838 and the return to a protectionist federated empire by the 1880s as generative of hemispheric trans-American modes of relating to the present. Using the Caribbean's discursive middleness as a productive fulcrum, Taylor extends the scope of literary analysis of economic thought to foreground neglect as a lens that captures the incongruity between what West Indians desired and what British governance decided to provide. Together, the volumes provide exceptional analytical resources to better understand the heterogeneous derivations of Jamaican cultural history and modern West Indian political selfhood.

Victorian Jamaica opens its consideration of the visual culture of post-emancipation using the layered and contrasting representations in Adolphe Duperly's famous lithograph commemorating the abolition of the slave trade. For Tim Barringer and Wayne Modest, the reconstitutions of African practices of dress and performance, the contingencies of creole subjecthood, and the uncertainty underlying jubilation together frame the many disjunctures defining Duperly's Kingston. The discourse of ruin and misery following emancipation contrasted with the possibilities of free black humanity make Duperly's painting an apt lead-in to the collection of twenty-two short analytical pieces and twenty-three separate historical essays on material and visual culture in Jamaica.

Each short article takes up a single object to draw out a "history from things" that complements the textual archive and signals the gaps that exist due to lack of archival preservation. These "object lessons," despite their brevity, successfully announce the multiple genealogies of Jamaican cultural history and speculatively place their respective items in wider networks of empire. The similarity of Cruickshank's lock with locks from Mali and Burkina Faso in Wayne Modest's chapter, and the hanging seeds from a child's lace-bark outdoor cap in a fashion reminiscent of Yoruba beaded headdresses in Steeve Buckridge's piece, illustrate the

materiality of African craftsmanship in colonial Jamaica. The short pieces also reflect fascinating biographies and possible avenues for research. Two paintings by Mrs. Lionel Lee, the elusive wife of Clarendon's tax-collector who won several awards for her illustrations in 1892, get their own chapters in the book. Erica James's contribution explores *Fatima*, an oil portrait by Mrs. Lee of a creole working woman with rebellious African hair. Lee was the only portrait artist from Jamaica exhibited at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition in London in 1886. The cultural biography of her portraiture furnishes convergences between histories of art and women's education and the transnational imperial politics of gender and representation. In Petrina Dacres's piece on Mrs. Lee's pencil-and-ink drawing, *Queen Victoria*, she highlights the artist's gestures to render the monarch's otherwise short stature into an imposing haloed disposition. Such gestures reproduced Victoria's image as a benevolent empress in Frank Cundall's *Historic Jamaica* (1915), where the engraved drawing served to demonstrate Jamaica's commemoration of the queen's diamond jubilee. Dacres's subsequent chapter on the antecedent history of the statue of Queen Victoria compellingly shows how Jamaica's colonial officials scrambled to put together an appropriate contribution to the diamond jubilee celebrations. Their faltering "statuomania" divulged the limits of spectatorial power as well as the interconnections between Jamaica and British colonies in Asia. The ultimate marginalization and disfigurement of the Geflowski statue of Victoria in Kingston, together with Mrs. Lee's portraits, indicate possible histories of art and architecture that can simultaneously index fraught desires of imperial belonging and anticolonial sentiment in the Caribbean.

The following twenty-three historical essays explicate themes cataloged in the section on specific objects. Together labeled "Making Victorian Subjects," the first eight essays substantiate the book's title by laying out Jamaica's place in nineteenth-century British imperial history using key themes like colonial botany, sport, industrial education, and medicine. In particular, Shani Roper's chapter on the development of industrial schools and reformatories for orphaned children and juvenile delinquents sheds light on state-led processes of youth resocialization into ideas of thrift and self-sufficiency. Similarly, Julian Cresser's insights into the Lucas Cricket Club's successful role in expanding black participation in the class structure of colonial cricket and the creolization of the sport through anti-imperial practices of black and Indian spectatorship evidence important ways in which Victorian cultural values came undone on the ground.

Subsequent essays on visual and material cultures unpack critical problems of race and racialization in Jamaica. Anna Arabindan-Kesson's chapter on photographs of South Asian indentured families, which began arriving in 1845, elucidates how European photography had gradually positioned Indian immigrants as both foreign and "native" to the culture of Jamaica. Colonial racial fictions meant to hierarchize black and Indian labor scaffolded the rise of celluloid photography. Indo-Jamaicans were perceived to embody a more authentic connection with their Indian "home" as opposed to Afro-Jamaicans who had supposedly lost their pasts to the Middle Passage. Connoting rustic simplicity, the body of the adorned Indo-Jamaican woman in such photographs complemented Victorian myths about the docility of Indian labor. On the other hand, the proselytizing ambition of missionaries in post-emancipation Jamaica explicitly undergirded representations of Afro-Jamaican peasant dwellings as signs of increasing Christianization. While Gad Heuman's essay historicizes how the attention of the colonial office shifted from the plantation to the black peasantry, Elizabeth Pigou-Dennis argues in her examination of vernacular architecture how rural Afro-Jamaican built environments were identifiably creole in aesthetics and spaces like verandas revealed complex layers of African spatial memory and the contingencies of creatively adapting to tropical climate.

The strategic discourse of brownness in the Victorian period brought to light other modes of refashioning racial hierarchies in Jamaica. The prominence of brown political culture in Jamaica by the 1890s, Belinda Edmondson's essay shows, emerged through a deliberate association with Jamaican nationalism and conscious pursuit of consumerism and upward mobility. Spanning the nineteenth century, the term "brown" had initially signified poor men and women from various mixed ethnic backgrounds, even including Jewish ancestry. However, in the Victorian era, decisions by elite white fathers to socialize their mulatto children into upper-class Jamaican society and the simultaneous promotion of Englishness performed through consumption and fashion recast brownness in class terms to embolden brown society's position as a barrier class against black political organization. *Victorian Jamaica* amasses such vividly rich perspectives to occasion the importance of material culture studies that situate the island within global British imperial history. The collection's traversal of photographic, sculptural, architectural, and artistic evidence that has been previously overlooked in narrative cultural history animates existing studies of race, gender, and class in the nineteenth-century colonial Caribbean.

The mutual co-constitution of Jamaica and Victorian Britain in Catherine Hall's formulation also receives critical exploration across the volume. Post-emancipation Jamaica wasn't a mere object of neglect, as Diana Paton's essay argues. Following the Morant Bay rebellion, Jamaican state formation consolidated imperial knowledge from governmental practices derived in post-1857 colonial India. The expansion of the state's repressive apparatus, new sanitary and public health laws, and the development of carceral institutions under successive governorships in Jamaica after 1865 kept pace with similar developments in Britain and India. The retreat from a dependent economic relationship between Britain and Jamaica after the abolition of slavery did not preclude a new colonial political community from being shaped. Catherine Hall's essay in the volume similarly recounts the disavowal of Jamaica by English historians and the willful forgetting of slavery in Whig history writing. By casting Jamaica, and the wider Caribbean, as an unnecessary appendage and yet a token reminder of the supposed moral benevolence of Britain's abolition of slavery, historians like Thomas Macaulay and J. R. Seeley materialized newer versions of masculine and white British imperial identity. However, Hall argues, *pace* Toni Morrison, that Jamaica's absence or marginalization is an ever-present aggravation within the canon of Whig imperial history, constantly troubling imperial "habits of disavowal."

In what ways was such disavowal or neglect incommensurate with West Indian desires and the promises of liberal freedoms, especially from the vantage point of British Caribbean subjects? How can one read a West Indian literary archive generated in response to the cultivation of British imperial indifference, and through which texts did such vexed cultural negotiations register their imprint upon historical memory? Taylor's *Empire of Neglect* probes West Indian literature following abolition for what it wants to convey about the political economy of neglect and the discursive incertitude of imperial racial belonging. The book blazes a trail through formative West Indian works like Michel Maxwell Philip's *Emmanuel Appadocca* and Mary Seacole's *The Wonderful Adventures* as well as commentaries and articles by George Numa Des Sources in *The Trinidadian* to establish literature's confrontation of liberal political economy's consciously indifferent dénouements. West Indian, an asymmetrical but historically apt category of self-identification, allows the book to disentangle contesting notions of colonial value. Taylor even reads white planters' manuals and stories, which archived more valuable iterations of worth for the empire than black or creole subjects like

Seacole and Philip, as archives of abandonment. *Empire of Neglect* thus proportionalizes the negotiation of imperial disavowal across race and class by critically relaying Eric Williams's attention toward how black, white, and creole West Indians faced and came to terms with the burden of neglect in discordant yet correlative ways.

Taylor models a provocative constellation of arguments. Reading with and against empire as the normative horizon of political belonging in the post-emancipation British West Indies, he situates the relative deficit of nationalist sentiment among West Indian writers as testimony to their desire to "reanimate the empire as a political world." The liberalization of the British imperial economy following the loss of the thirteen colonies, the Haitian Revolution, and the popularity of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* had made the Caribbean economically disposable. The desired political horizon of empire, Taylor argues, wasn't willful subjection or imperial collaboration. Instead, the claims upon an empire attentive to the needs of the colonies worked as catachresis to force empire to reveal its conceit and thus maintain a "political relation to the present." Notably, such iterations involved refusing to purchase the promises of black republicanism inaugurated by the Haitian Revolution. For Trinidadians like Philip and Des Sources who doubted whether the Westphalian expression of the state would deliver meaningful black freedom, alternative political affiliations and fantasies held new potential. For Philip, the buccaneering world of the older Spanish empire and, for Des Sources, a utopian perception of emergent Venezuelan postcolonial republicanism upon a socialist template, where the poor would possess capital, overshadowed Haiti's anti-imperialism. *Empire of Neglect* interprets the materiality of such fantasies as a window into hemispheric iterations of political subjectivity centered on the Americas that developed in tandem with the renegotiation of British imperial relationships in the aftermath of abolition.

The Americas, Taylor posits, helped creole writers coordinate the feeling of being imperial subjects without an imperial polity and more proximate relationships with the United States and the Spanish Empire. Such exacting improvisations required intellectual and physical labor. Taylor's interpretation of Mary Seacole's work furnishes the most remarkable example of the gendered labor buttressing an emergent hemispheric consciousness. Anthony Trollope, deputed to Jamaica in 1858 to build its postal system, found a culture of hospitality, previously braced by white planter considerations, ebbing with the economic decline of the island. Black and mulatto bodies working in hotels

granted Trollope room to situate black subjectivity in commercial hospitality as rightfully but still inadequately capitalist. Hotels, temporarily sheltering transitory commercial actors, captured how diplomatic negotiations between Britain and the United States aimed to keep Central America as a dually managed space of transit for commodity networks. Trollope himself personified British accommodation of emergent U.S. expansionism in the Americas and advocated the gradual “letting-go” of the empire. Contra this, Mary Seacole’s life in the Panama transit zone after leaving an impoverished Jamaica provides Taylor with evidence of nonliberal social logics stemming from histories of black women’s labor under slavery. Refusing prefabricated homes imported by the Panama Railroad Company, Seacole’s reliance on affective relationships of gifts, favors, and mutual trust with Americans and Panamanians to build the British Hotel are emblematic of what Taylor calls nonmarket modalities of transacting with Britishness.

Indeed, Seacole inverts tropes of an inhospitable Central America that underlay Anglo-American desires for the region’s economic geography more than its actual people. Seacole’s understanding of hospitality in the recently formed Republic of New Granada acknowledged Chinese and Jamaican workers and fugitive slaves from the U.S. South. For Seacole, the political economy amplified through the figure of an exploitive mineral-rush Yankee in Central America could be kept at bay by a watchful British presence. Conceiving empire in this vein, she mobilized the values that such a presence might embody. Her caregiving labor, given to all in need yet remunerated according to one’s ability to pay, within an always elastic time period, enables Taylor to theorize how reciprocity and redistribution reinforced an alternative embodiment of empire built on logics of care. After leaving Panama for Crimea, Seacole’s fame derived from her caregiving campaigns was still not enough to endear her to Queen Victoria and allow her to serve the British Army in India. She returned to Kingston, disallowed from continuing to postrebellion India with its proliferating moral panics around white female sexuality, despite her previous performance of imperial loyalty. Her writing catalyzes what Taylor calls an “impossible dialectic” that deemed her blackness apt for imperial inclusion in one context and her femininity too risky in another.

Together, *Victorian Jamaica* and *Empire of Neglect* signal how the relationship between indifference and empire is fertile ground for rethinking Victorian studies. The British Empire’s global struggle to stay upright by repressing dissent and generating imperial belonging

through exhibitions, scientific collections, and art and architecture unfolded within a laterally entangled world. Cartographies of proliferating Victorian values of civilization and government, and the challenges mounted by imperial subjects wrestling with the politics of colonial difference, bound many parts of the world into overlapping histories. Iterations of such challenges, whether archived in the damaged bust of Geflowski's Victoria or the buccaneering fantasies of Michel Maxwell Philip, reveal fruitful ways of theorizing how colonized subjects co-constituted, inhabited, transgressed, and made meaning of empire. Even as Victorian Britain cultivated an indifference to the demands of West Indians, they hailed past claims of belonging to hold Britain to account as well as articulated newer worlds in the Americas that weren't moored within a British territorial imaginary. Historicizing indifference and empire from the vantage of literature produced in the colonies or intimate visual objects used by common people can rightfully situate the polyvocality of the nineteenth-century Caribbean. Faith Smith's concluding essay in *Victorian Jamaica* suggests the urgency of remapping the "contours of modernity across the Caribbean and the Americas in the context of multiple imperial registers and *within* Jamaica's own multi-textured landscape." Historically contouring the modern by centering the heterogeneous impulses and genealogies of the colonies as opposed to the homogenization of difference by the metropole can render normal and obvious that which superficially seems culturally midway and never fully complete. Intervals and middleness, in fact, can be generative of alternative historical imaginaries, no matter how fleeting. *Empire of Neglect* concludes with the decline of the Americas as a contrapuntal utopian site as nationalist sentiment rose among Caribbean writers and British imperial governance intensified at the close of the nineteenth century. Such ephemerality nonetheless delivered the affective investments and valuations of West Indians into an archive of neglectful economic divestment. As counterpoints to the cruelties of Victorian indifference and liberal political economy, such imaginaries can render legible how the intellectual and physical labor of colonial subjects constituted the British Empire from below by virtue of transgressing its ambitions articulated from above.