“Black Skin, Blue Eyes”: Visualizing Blackness in Jamaican Art, 1922–1944

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“Black Skin, Blue Eyes”:
Visualizing Blackness in Jamaican Art, 1922–1944

Krista A. Thompson

From the opposite end of the white world a magical Negro culture was hailing me. Negro sculpture! I began to flush with pride. Was this our salvation?
—Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

I think that when any country is struggling out of colonial rule—and this is a political battle as well as a human rights endeavour, this struggle is almost the sole concern of the artist until this freedom has been achieved. So that the struggle for freedom was the concern of all the artists of those days . . .: the values, the recognition of the image—our image—as a people and a country played a tremendous part in the art movement of the early days.
—Edna Manley, “The Fine Arts”

In the 1940s, as artist Edna Manley walked around an art exhibition filled with work by black Jamaican schoolchildren, she confronted several curious images. A student had created familiar enough pictures of local market women with “bandanas and the tucked up skirt at the back,” yet had depicted the crayoned female figures as white, with blond hair and blue eyes. Manley recalled some decades later that it was an experience
that she “never got over.” “I learnt so much from it. . . . They were dressed absolutely correctly as market women and yet they had blond hair and blue eyes. I was fascinated because, of course, no market woman in Jamaica had blond hair and blue eyes. And I wonder[ed] what had happened.”¹ For Manley this visual racial hybrid signaled a wider crisis in self-perception for the black population in Jamaica in the early part of the twentieth century, one brought on, she suspected, by “the glorification of the white conqueror” in the British colony.

Albert Huie, another Jamaican artist, recalled comparable instances when he first pursued a career as a painter in the 1930s. He encountered incredulity from black Jamaicans whom he approached to model for his paintings. One market woman, or “higgler,” who stood out in Huie’s recollections immediately assumed he made his request in jest. She responded by listing an inventory of her aesthetic defects, including the black color of her skin, her nose, and hair, which, she concluded, made her ineligible for artistic representation.² In addition to Huie and Manley, other artists who started working in Jamaica in the 1930s and 1940s recounted similar tales about the difficulties of working during the first stages of the decolonization process.³

In this article I aim to examine the early artistic production of Manley and Huie, two artists commonly identified in art historical accounts as pioneers in the development of a national Jamaican art.⁴ They were, as many art historians and the artists themselves have elaborated, two of the first artists working in Jamaica to introduce black subjects into the realm of painting and sculpture. While descriptions of these artists’ works abound, I want to pay particular attention to the artists’ narratives about the obstacles they faced making “blackness” representable. How did these artists’ beliefs that black Jamaicans could not imagine and depict themselves as representable subjects inform their artistic missions? What unique challenges did this pose to them as artists working in the colonial environment of Jamaica? Manley, for example, recognized that while the blue-eyed market women were likely a symptom of British colonialism, “it was [also] tied up with this totally confused idea of what does, or doesn’t make a picture . . . she

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3. See Karl Parboosingh’s discussion of the Jamaican child who has “not been taught to see himself” in Manley, Parboosingh, and Verity, “The Fine Arts,” 67. Carl Abrahams shared a story with me about learning to see the market woman as appropriate subject matter for his art. Carl Abrahams, interview by author, Kingston, Jamaica, 8 July 2000.
[the little girl] knew what her mother and grandmother looked like but she also knew that she was supposed to be making a picture!” As an artist working in colonial Jamaica, Manley would have to reconstruct fundamentally who and what constituted the subject of art. She and her contemporaries not only introduced black subject matter into art but also had to encourage the local populations, particularly the island’s black majority, to learn to see themselves as representable in the realm of art and as worthy of artistic representation. It is precisely the strategies these artists used in this double-pronged task that are under investigation in this essay. I also explore the local and international social and political events and movements that charged these artists to tackle these challenges in the 1930s.

The problem of race and representation in Jamaica, as Huie and Manley perceived it—the reason that blacks could not imagine themselves as representable—stemmed from a long history of visual images in the colony. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries producers of colonial representations seldom framed blacks as subjects of art. Both artists would have to engage with and transform these colonial images and their legacy. They would have to “take possession,” to quote Pat Mohammed, of the “symbolic references to empire and colonialism”⁵ and imbue them with new content and form, pouring new wine into new bottles. To examine this process it is useful to return to the figure of the market woman recalled in both artists’ accounts, as this character, which held a particular representational significance for Huie and Manley, was also one of the most persistent icons in colonial Jamaica. Indeed, by the end of the 1920s the market woman figuratively embodied Jamaica.

**The Market Woman and the Colonial Imaging of Jamaica**

Throughout the period of slavery in Jamaica, black market women pervaded the economic and physical landscape of the island.⁶ Yet in eighteenth-century and early-nineteenth-century representations made by artist travelers, market women played only a peripheral role. Artists expressed a singular interest in the island’s “tropical scenery,” or plantation estates and their proprietors, with comparably little attention paid to the island’s black inhabitants. The British artist James Hakewill, for instance, in his

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Picturesque Tour of the Island of Jamaica (1825), offers only one instance of a black female figure, possibly a market woman, who is situated far into the background. This lone figure’s presence, which had as much representational particularity as an ant trailing along a landscape, served primarily to emphasize the scale of the surrounding environment. Subsequent representations persisted in imaging market women as subsumed by and even as a part of the landscape. As the British artist Marianne North aptly put it, “Black people . . . seemed in character with the scenery.”

It was not until the late nineteenth century that the market woman assumed a prominent position in representations of the island. The rise in the market woman’s popularity in images was directly related to two imperatives: the tourist trade and the civilizing mission. In the late 1880s the British colonial governor, Henry Blake, along with other colonial administrators and British and North American corporations, took the first steps to promote the island as a winter resort. They hoped that an influx of tourists would encourage capital investment, trade, and (white) migration. Tourism supporters recognized, however, that to promote the new industry they had to refashion potential tourists’ notions of the island. As one advocate of the industry recognized in 1892, since the decline of the sugar plantation system in the 1830s, “the popular idea of Jamaica at home [in Britain] is of an island ruined by emancipation, a region of derelict estates with a scattered population of negro squatters, paying no rent, living in squalid huts, supporting life on yams and bananas.” To counteract this idea of squalor and ruin and promote tourist travel, industry benefactors hired local and foreign photographers to create a substantial new repertoire of images of the island. Through photographs, lantern lectures, and colonial exhibition displays they aimed to reinvent the image of Jamaica. In this new image world, the market woman occupied the representational foreground.

Many tourism-oriented advertisements, postcards, stereoview cards, and photographs centrally featured the black market woman. Within these representations an iconography of the market woman as a type emerged, one that emphasized her tropical,
primitive, yet industrious characteristics. One postcard, captioned simply “Market
Women” by the photography firm A. Duperly & Sons, provides an early example of this
conscious effort to construct the black Jamaican market woman within the visual econ-
omy of tourism (as the words “Greetings from Jamaica” on the card remind us). (See
figure 1.) In the postcard image two young black females are dressed in head scarves,
hats and long apron-covered skirts. They are barefoot, and, balanced on top of one wom-
an’s head is a basket. This same figure also is depicted with her arms akimbo, perhaps in
an effort to represent a recalcitrant pose of a market woman.

The photographer goes to some length to add to the visual texture of the studio
image, surrounding the young women with additional accoutrements of their premod-
ern trade and their tropical surroundings, further dressing and identifying them as
island market women. Most remarkably the photographer took the unusual measure of
bringing a live donkey into the studio, at potentially great risk to his atelier. Visual props
of nature also surround the women. Grass or hay covers the floor, stones are strewn on a
simulated path, and a painted studio backdrop of nature cloaks the entire scene, all pro-
viding a visual supporting cast to the market women. Although photographed indoors,
in keeping with earlier images of market women, the photographer had to situate them
within nature. The image recalls Malek Alloula’s assessment of the overly laden studios
and bedecked female models of French photographers in colonial Algeria. It was not suf-
fi cient that postcard makers photograph Algerian women, but they had to drape them in
easily recognizable and stereotypical signs of what colonists believed to be their identity.
In this way the “exotic postcard [became] an art of the sign. . . . The few signs distrib-
uted here and there over the re?ective surface of the postcard . . . are its true subjects.”¹¹

Through the saturation of the sign, through visual excess, the postcard imaged racial
and cultural difference. Similarly, packing the studio with props—a donkey, a “natural”
backdrop, and a costume of poverty—gave representational texture or photographic
realism to the “colonial phantasm” of the backward, tropical, and picturesque native
black Jamaican woman.

In connection with tourism the new representational interest in the market woman
was intrinsically connected to the island’s developing fruit trade. Many companies
involved in tourism, most in?uentially the American-owned United Fruit Company,
also cultivated and shipped fruit, particularly bananas, on the island. The companies’
ships, which brought tourists, became new destinations for the island’s market women.

They transported the fruit to the vessels for distribution to international markets. While both men and women earned an income from the “tally-man,” many representations and supporting commentaries singularly stressed the importance of female laborers.¹²

The market woman then stood at the representational crossroads of the tourism and fruit trades. Frequently represented with tropical fruits balanced on her head, she proffered the island’s newest tropical commodities, especially bananas, to US and British consumers. Simultaneously, her quaint tropical image formed another commodity for tourists to consume, through photographs or scenic tours. Perhaps not to disrupt the traveler’s pleasure and leisure at watching market women work, a United Fruit Company stereoview card emphasized that a “Jamaican Negro thinks nothing of walking...

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¹². As the accompanying text on a stereoview card picturing black women loading a United Fruit Company ship purported, “Negro women do most of the freight handling here—they are strong and robust, and in fact much more willing to work than the men of their own class, though men are employed largely in gathering the fruit.” The card, numbered 8130, was published by a London company, Underwood and Underwood.
twenty miles a day with such a load.”¹³ In this and other representations, photographs of laboring black market women became central commodities in the new leisure industry.

The image of the black Jamaican going to market also counteracted the “popular idea” in Britain that “Negro squatters,” who idly lived off the fruits of the land, populated the island. Through the image of the market woman the colonial government could cultivate an image of the island’s population as hardworking and industrious. Such a representation would resonate favorably with potential investors but would also speak to the government’s success in civilizing black subjects and to the continued necessity of British colonial rule in the post-Emancipation era.

While colonial authorities and fruit industry promoters had an investment in presenting images of the island’s inhabitants as industrious, these representations maintained a primitivist view of the island’s black population—a perspective that highlighted the importance of British colonial rule in rearing the island’s black population. The Duperly photograph of the market women speaks to the latent potential of the Jamaican black. Although the caption describes the female figures as market women, they are clearly very young girls dressed in the garb of women. The girls, although they appear equipped with the necessary tools to be productive subjects, have not yet reached maturity. While the characterization of blacks as children was widespread in colonial image making across different empires, in the context of the developing fruit industry in Jamaica such an image also spoke to colonial and imperial appraisals of the island’s black population as in need of the guiding hand of imperious interests.

The representation of the island’s inhabitants as children also rendered blacks non-threatening and even charming to potential travelers. A stereoview card picturing black market women, for example, stressed that “they are childlike, ‘happy-go-lucky’ folk, very kindly and polite, full of queer superstitions, but honest and industrious according to their lights.”¹⁴ As the text reveals, the image of the market woman frequently embodied seemingly contradictory ideals. Due to competing colonial and imperial interests in the market woman, she could be described as both “happy-go-lucky” and “industrious” at the same time.

Even well into the first decades of the twentieth century, the iconicity of the market woman remained entangled in the objectives of colonialism, imperialism, and tourism, as the appearance of a Jamaican woman dressed as a market woman at the Jamaican pavilion at the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley in 1924 attests. The young

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¹³. This description appeared on Underwood and Underwood’s stereoview card, 6617.
¹⁴. Ibid.
woman, who became known as “Sunny Jamaica,” was the darling of the exhibition. A photograph taken of “Sunny Jamaica” next to Queen Mary evinces the market woman’s significative role within the constellation of colonial representations of the island. (See figure 2.) “Sunny Jamaica” was as representative of Jamaica as Queen Mary was of Britain. Her appearance with the British monarch confirms how the market woman icon became synonymous with the colonial and touristic (her name is “Sunny,” after all) imaging of Jamaica.

**The Jamaica Portrait and Picture Gallery: The Subjects of Art in Colonial Jamaica**

Although images of black Jamaicans gained currency in visual representations generated for the tourism industry, in venues devoted to painting and sculpture in the island they were not framed as worthy of “art.” One of the most important exhibition spaces for academic forms of art in Jamaica in the late nineteenth century was the Institute of Jamaica, a museum, library, and public lecture venue. In 1879 Governor Anthony
Musgrave founded the institute “for the encouragement of literature, science and art.” The institute’s mission was the encouragement or resuscitation of British forms of art, culture, and society in the colony. In the institute, legitimate “art” remained the preserve of white colonial elites. These hierarchies of representation served an explicit role in the imperial mission.

In 1891 Frank Cundall, the Institute of Jamaica’s own institution (he was the secretary for almost fifty years, from 1890 to 1937), established the Jamaica Portrait and Picture Gallery, the first permanent display of art on the island. When the gallery first opened it contained portraits of British governors, “other persons celebrated in the colony’s history,” and Britain’s monarchs, who, as Cundall acknowledged, had never “set foot on Jamaica [sic] soil.”¹⁵ Through the portraits Britain’s monarchs became present on the island. The collection was composed of both painted portraits and photographic reproductions of well-known personages. Many of the images portrayed the island’s colonial notables in the tradition of British portraiture, with sitters depicted with accoutrements of their status and stature. While over the decades the portrait canon expanded to include more than colonial officials, recognizing local notables and even two black Jamaicans by 1904,¹⁶ anyone entering the gallery in the early twentieth century would have been greeted almost entirely by a pantheon of white countenances and, more specifically, by white male faces, and would have seen the history of the island as one of colonial achievement.

The contents of the gallery provide a striking representational contrast to the other sphere of public representations in the island, postcards and photographs, particularly in relation to race and gender. The realm of colonialist and tourist photography was dominated by black women, and white men ruled in painting. Certainly some representations transcended such dichotomies, but for the most part racialized subjects belonged in their separate mediums of representation.

These genres were also distinguished by their intended audience. Images of “tropical” black women in need of civilization circulated for the consumption of viewers outside the island, offering support to the colonial cause. Portraits of distinguished white men served the same purposes, but for local audiences. According to an 1891 edition of the *Journal of the Institute of Jamaica* (published the same year the gallery opened), the

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¹⁵. As Cundall notes, only “William IV and his present Majesty” had visited Jamaica. Frank Cundall, *Catalogue of the Portraits in the Jamaica History Gallery of the Institute of Jamaica* (Kingston: The Institute of Jamaica, 1914).

¹⁶. The two black Jamaicans who made it into the gallery in 1904 were “Cudjoe,” the leader of the Maroons, and Mary Seacole, the nurse and travel writer. In 1914 the collection grew to 240 portraits.
power of art, especially in the colony, lay in its ability to “ennoble the people. . . . The power which art possesses over the minds of even the most unread and unthinking is remarkable.”¹⁷ The description singled out painting as more influential than architecture and sculpture because “painting appeals more forcibly to the majority of laymen than do the other sister arts.” These words, viewed in the context of the opening of the gallery, belie that paintings served to enforce colonial hegemony, to possess “the people” with a sense of loyalty to distant monarchs and to local arbitrators of British colonial rule.

In addition to the representational absence of black subjects in art, artists working on the island more generally disqualified local subjects from artistic consideration. Expatriate and local white elite members of the St. Andrew Sketching Club and of the watercolorist movement in the parish of Manchester looked to England for their artistic inspiration. One artist in the Sketching Club actually imported flowers from England to use as the subjects of her paintings.¹⁸ No wonder Manley accused local artists of suffering from “daffodil syndrome”—an inability to see and represent the native populace and the island’s environment on their own terms. Typically, she encountered “images of snowy Christmas cards in a land with no winter, blond Christs in a country of black congregations, daffodils and tulips in a land of ram-goat roses and Poinciana trees.”¹⁹ Their work reflected, in Manley’s appraisal, “nothing virile nor original, nor in any real sense creative and above all that is an expression of the deeply rooted hidden pulse of the country.”²⁰

Manley suspected that these images were not only popular with the island’s white elite but with its black population.²¹ While further research needs to be done on how the island’s black inhabitants appraised, used, or dismissed these representations of blond Christs or daffodil-populated landscapes, they certainly encountered these images. Throughout Jamaica, from academic forms of art to Christmas cards, England became the island’s representational mirror. When many viewers across race looked at visual representations in the island, they literally saw pictures of British landscapes or monarchs or

¹⁸. Mrs. Frank Cundall had flowers sent from England and reproduced them in her work Gladioli. Frank Cundall, Fine Art Exhibition (Kingston: The Institute of Jamaica, 1892), 10.
²¹. Manley felt that the little girl’s picture of the market women likely reflected this phenomenon. “Perhaps in the little homes there were calendars or religious pictures of angels or saints or you know, the pretty girl, with blond hair and blue eyes so the girl associated a picture with a certain type of image.” Manley, Parboosingh, and Verity, “The Fine Arts,” 68.
colonial ways of viewing the island, as epitomized by the market woman. It is precisely against this entrenched visual legacy of colonial representations that Huie and Manley had to struggle, seeking to forge a counter visual culture, one reflective of the “pulse of the country.”

The Politics of the Image: The Role of Visual Representation in Garveyism, Rastafarianism, and Cultural Nationalism

Huie prides himself on being one of the first black Jamaicans to take up a career as an artist in Jamaica, a professional choice that seems all the more extraordinary given the rarity of blacks as subjects in art, much less as its producers. Huie came from a part of the island many Jamaicans would describe as “the country,” the rural community of Falmouth, as a youngster of just eighteen. He moved to Kingston, Jamaica’s capital, in 1936, at a time when several international and local developments challenged the colonial and imperial stronghold politically, socially, and importantly, for our consideration, culturally on the island. In the 1930s Ethiopianism, Rastafarianism, Garveyism, and cultural nationalism dramatically transformed the island’s social and political landscape.

Huie’s career choice and the subject of his work must be contextualized in light of these movements. More specifically, Huie’s directives should be examined in the context of the specific use of images and “art” within these movements. While the political challenges that Rastafarianism, Garveyism, and nationalism posed to a prevailing colonial order are well known, visual images and visuality simultaneously played a not insignificant role in these challenges to colonialism and in the formation of a black and nationalist consciousness. The politicization of representation in this era would inform Huie’s work and how he decided to participate in these currents.

In the 1930s Kingston was “alive,” as Huie recalls it, with the new spirit of anticolonialism and nationalism. He would venture to Victoria Park (a physical space stamped with the nomenclature of the monarchy), where orators fueled the flames of anticolonialism. Some of his earliest sketches captured the atmosphere in the park in the 1930s, portraying animated speakers surrounded by captive audiences. As part of this audience Huie became introduced to many of the new ideas and ideologies of the day. Huie stresses that he would listen attentively to all the speakers regardless of their political persuasions. Collectively, these new movements promoted a black (African) consciousness, delegitimized British colonial rule, and promoted the idea of black Jamaican culture and art, in part through a challenge to the symbols of imperial power and the creation of an alternative image world.
Rastafarianism, Garveyism, and cultural nationalism all influenced a new representational landscape in the island and shaped the social role of the artist in Jamaican society. In the 1930s a new religious ideology, Rastafarianism, gained popularity among working-class Jamaicans inspired by the coronation of Ras Tafari as Emperor Haile Selassie in Ethiopia in November 1930. Three religious figures, Leonard Howell, Joseph Hibbert, and H. Archibald Dunkley, viewed the emperor as the leader of the “people of Ethiopia” (people of African descent generally) referred to in the Old Testament and began a religious movement with Selassie as its figurehead. Visual images played a role in the appeal of the faith generally, as Howell used pictures of Haile Selassie to popularize the movement. According to local newspaper accounts, he sold the likenesses of the emperor for a shilling each, collecting donations sometimes of three to five shillings for the images.²² In an island dominated by representations of white monarchs and even white market women, a picture of an African emperor, whether the image was a photograph or painted work, provided a new way of visualizing African people in colonial Jamaica. The very existence of the picture may have added to the sense of awe, legitimacy, and power of the black emperor and the movement founded in his name. Only the most powerful resided regally in the world of representation. By setting Africa (“Ethiopia”) up as the motherland of blacks in Jamaica, crowning Selassie as their emperor, and distributing representations of him as such, Rastafarians saw themselves as loyal heirs and descendents of another imperial genealogy, one that opposed the idea of Mother England celebrated and reinforced in the Institute of Jamaica.²³

Garveyism, tied to yet distinct from Rastafarianism, also informed Huie’s political and artistic awakening. Marcus Garvey, the Jamaican-born political leader, editor, and businessman, returned to Jamaica in 1928 after an absence of thirteen years, bringing his fiery brand of black nationalism and his regal pageantry, which made him (in)famous in Harlem, to the island. The following year he founded the People’s Political Party. St. William Grant, an influential labor leader and a longtime supporter of Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), was particularly instrumental in piquing Huie’s interest in Garvey’s philosophies through his public orations in the park. Grant, who frequently dressed in the regalia of the UNIA’s African legion or in an assortment of costumes, embodied in his appearance a new black (African) subjectivity, a position he also preached.²⁴ Garvey and champions of his cause positioned Africa as

²³. Ibid., 166.
²⁴. Ibid., 219.
the homeland of blacks. They also emphasized the common struggles of people of African descent across the diaspora, particularly their collective fight against colonialism. In 1914 Garvey founded the UNIA to organize and empower blacks through economic development. By the 1930s the association had chapters throughout the Caribbean and across three continents, (Sub-Saharan) Africa and the Americas.

Visual images had long been part of the UNIA’s antiracist political critique. As early as 1915 the association kept a watchful and “resentful” eye, to quote a local paper, on the colonial and touristic imaging of black Jamaicans.²⁵ In 1915, at a UNIA meeting, the mayor and Garvey supporter Hon. H. A. L. Simpson²⁶ delivered a lecture entitled “Signs of the Scandalmonger,” which was about the representation of blacks in postcards and written sketches. He charged that “when those things went abroad, they tended to reflect discreditably on the people of this country.” As a report on the meeting detailed, “Mr. Simpson went on to speak on how photographers by paying people in different parts of the island, got them to pose in almost any manner they (the photographers) wanted, and when the photographs were sent abroad, foreigners get a bad impression of the inhabitants of the island.” Simpson was acutely aware of how photographers constructed photographs with “signs” of degeneracy and how these images created a bad impression of the “race,” “nation,” and “nationality” abroad. While Rastafarians offered a new image of blacks through representations of a black emperor, the UNIA attacked the legitimacy and representativeness of colonial and touristic photographs of black Jamaicans. More generally, by the 1930s the UNIA had greatly transformed colonial stereotypes of blackness, instilling a new pride in the black race. In these ways anticolonial and black nationalist struggles were fought in part in the realm of visual representation.

Huie was also influenced by a new interest in cultural nationalism among the island’s “brown” middle classes, which promoted the idea of a uniquely Jamaican culture. They shifted the frequently bipolar emphasis of the Garveyites and Rastafarians on Africa and of British colonialists on England onto the cultural offerings of Jamaica. Toward this end a small group of middle-class Jamaicans and an Englishman, O. T. Fairclough, Frank Hill, and H. P. Jacobs, established the journal Public Opinion in 1937 to showcase and encourage the island’s art and culture. These cultural nationalists would influence Huie and form an important support base for his art.

An article in the inaugural issue of Public Opinion entitled “New Wine in New Bottles” encapsulated the ambition and challenge of the journal and cultural nationalists

26. In 1930 H. A. L. Simpson contested the general election on behalf of Garvey’s People’s Political Party.
generally—to redefine (and even invent) Jamaican culture on its own terms.²⁷ In particular they turned to the island’s black inhabitants as the source of Jamaica’s cultural specificity. They believed, however, that local black cultural materials had to be “elevated” to form the island’s culture. The island’s slave-derived culture, as Jacobs articulated, was “altogether on too low a plane—even materially—to be regarded as the culture of the future. . . . If it is to be transmuted by a culture common to all classes . . . that culture can be produced only by an educated class which is Jamaican at heart.”²⁸ Cultural nationalists thus saw Jamaica’s black population as a wellsprings for art but positioned themselves as the channel through which this source would have common national currency. If black culture was the wine, the middle classes were its bottlers.

This position and the role of artists in nationalism generally was underscored on stage in an important play of the period entitled *The West Indian* (1936), which starred an Armenian-born artist, Koren Harootian, who would become Huie’s first art teacher. Esther Chapman, another British-born cultural nationalist, directed the production. As the art historian Petrine Archer-Straw describes it, the play opens with Black Man, a black slave character, “cursed for his colour and told of his sins, while a dirge of woe is sung.”²⁹ In the second act Black Man meets the Painter, a colored artist (played by Harootian). The Painter attempts to liberate the slave from his fear of rejection through the gateway of art and the intellect.³⁰ The play concludes when the Painter invites Black Man to an upper-class function where white guests greet them both with hostility. The Painter realizes that he shares a common predicament of enslavement with the slave. The play ends on an optimistic note, with, as Archer-Straw describes, “the coloured artist’s decision to ‘turn his back on white company’ and exit with the Negro slave.” The two become allies in the political battle against colonial society.

*The West Indian* points to several aspects of the emergent cultural nationalism on the island and the role of the middle classes in its formation. Most transparently, the play positions the Painter, the embodiment of the middle class, as a central mediating figure in the island’s racial and class hierarchies and as an essential key in the realization of national culture. Such a script naturalized the position of the brown middle classes in an increasingly African-centered society, stressing their kinship with the black population.

Moreover, and more significantly for Huie, the production also attempted to create a social role for the artist in Jamaica through the character of the Painter. In a country

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²⁸. Ibid., 217.
³⁰. Ibid., 124.
where few artists had previously expressed a commitment to the island’s physical environment and its local population (much less the cause of cultural nationalism), the play also promoted a new type of artist in Jamaican society, one engaged with the island’s inhabitants and joined in arms with the nationalist and anticolonial movements. Written during the same historical moment that Howell distributed new images of a black emperor, the Painter stressed the importance of local artists as producers of representations.

The play also pointed to the unique mission of the Painter in colonial Jamaica: to reverse the legacies of colonialism that had negated “proper” black self-perception. This project was profoundly important in an environment where colonial representations had woven a distorted sense of black Jamaicans’ representational existence. As Huie explained in my interview with him, for “ordinary black Jamaicans . . . until that time [the 1930s] the only time you saw a black person was in the form of caricature, in newspapers and postcards.”³¹

Black Jamaicans’ self-perception and sense of representational absence recalls Frantz Fanon’s oft-cited analysis of the psychological impact of colonial representations on local populations in the Caribbean. In Black Skin, White Masks (1952) Fanon examines black Caribbean people’s complex relationships to visual representation and visuality generally, especially as they relate to colonial constructions of race. He concludes that colonial representations had “fixed” the Antillean from the outside, “overdetermin[ing] him from without.”³² Inflecting the Hegelian master/slave dialectic into the colonial Caribbean context, Fanon argues that black Antilleans experience themselves and their subjectivity through the gaze and recognition of the colonizer. As Stuart Hall puts it, “Not only is Fanon’s Negro caught, transfixed, emptied and exploded in the fetishistic and stereotypical dialectic of the ‘look’ from the place of the Other; but he/she becomes—has no other self than this Self-as-Othered.”³³ In other words, black Antilleans experience themselves only as negation. The “consciousness of the body [is] solely a negating activity.”³⁴ Unsurprisingly, therefore, black children in the Antilles who gaze upon their reflections during the formative mirror stage disavow their own blackness. Fanon uses the term epidermalization to characterize how the colonized internalizes notions of racial difference inscribed from the outside.³⁵ The little girl of Manley’s

34. Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, 110.
recollections and Huie’s prospective model exemplify this psychological disavowal of the black body that Fanon describes, in that they both could not visually imagine their racial identities. The play charged the Painter with the awesome task of reconstructing the bodily schema of the Black Man through the gateway of art.

Albert Huie’s Early Artwork: From “Asphalt Black” Depictions to Portraits of Black Jamaicans

Within this social scripting of the role of the artist in colonial Jamaica, which responded to the political challenges of Garveyism, Rastafarianism, and cultural nationalism, Huie became an artist. He started taking classes in watercolor offered by Harootian in the mid-1930s. Huie subsequently received informal training from a small group of artists who started to gather at Edna Manley’s residence.³⁶ Huie painted most of his early paintings, the work considered here, before he attended art school at the Ontario College of Art and University College of Toronto, in Canada in 1944.

In his earliest work Huie devoted himself to representing black subjects. More specifically, he created portraits, frequently concentrating squarely on the face of his sitters. This intimacy forced viewers to confront the subjectivity and humanity of his models. As art historian Edward Lucie-Smith points out, Huie’s depictions communicated “a more direct insight into the character of his sitters. For him they are not a manifestation of an exotic culture but people whom he knows almost as well as he knows himself.”³⁷

In *The Counting Lesson* (1938), one of Huie’s earliest paintings, he offers an intimate portrayal of a black female. (Figure 3.) The work pictures a young black girl, dressed in a polka-dotted frock, in the process of a counting lesson. We see a finger poised in midair to stress the young sitter’s mental calculations. On its surface the work is fairly unremarkable and seems in fact the product of an artist new to the medium of painting. Within Jamaica in the 1930s, however, such a work presented the black Jamaican and, more specifically, the black female, in a subtle new way. Huie presented the girl through an art form and style—portraiture and oil painting—reserved for white subjects. Unlike the pictures of Emperor Selaisse, which had started to challenge representational hierarchies in the island, Huie’s painting presents an “ordinary” black figure in portraiture—a young black girl with whom any black viewer could identify and imagine their own

35. Ibid., 11.
37. Lucie-Smith, *Albert Huie*, 16.
visage in her place. By fitting the girl into the frame of art, Huie provided a rare representational mirror of black Jamaica, allowing black viewers to attribute to themselves the signs of distinction, prestige, and selfhood formerly reserved for the white colonial elite. In this way Huie’s use of portraiture recalls Lisa Lowe’s observation that “a sign that is in one social context part of an apparatus of exclusion may be appropriated and rearticulated as part of an enabling formation.”³⁸ The form of portraiture was itself a sign of status.

To appreciate the novelty of such a work it is also useful to recall the more popular representations of black Jamaican women (girls) in colonial and tourism-oriented representations. Ironically, the painting appeared in the New York World’s Fair in 1939, an exposition venue similar to where “Sunny Jamaica” made her debut. Huie’s painting presented a very different image of black Jamaicans to international audiences. The work conveyed a personalized depiction of the island’s black population in contrast to the anonymous “Sunny Jamaica” images popularized in past expositions. Huie’s depiction of the girl in a domestic setting also interiorized the representation of a black Jamaican female; many photographic images had characterized them only by their external lives, picturing them outdoors (even if inside in a studio). In contrast to the market women

Fig. 4. Albert Huie, *The Vendor*, 1939. National Gallery of Jamaica, Kingston.

Fig. 5. Albert Huie, *Woman in the Sun*, 1940. Wallace Campbell Collection, Kingston.
postcard, the girl in Huie’s painting also appears dressed in new signs: those of social status. The polka-dotted dress, the large bow crowning her head, and her very activity of counting pointed to the girl’s class, education, respectability, and civility, flying in the face of primitivist representations of blacks.

The following year, Huie turned his attention to the icon of the black Jamaican, the market woman, in the painting *The Vendor* (1939), but precisely “de-exoticizes” and “de-primitivizes” her by capturing a sense of the woman’s inner character and external hardships (see figure 4). Through a close-up view of the vendor, his attention to the soft expression on her face and her pose, which is both tensed and relaxed at the same time, Huie conveys a sense of the woman’s individual character. This subjective or internal focus is echoed in the interior space that surrounds the figure. The splintered walls also point to the economic hardships that affect the vendor. However, for all of Huie’s visual cues into the individual qualities and personality traits of his model, the work’s title seems reminiscent of many postcard captions that stress “type” rather than “individual.” *The Vendor* stands as an early attempt to take national possession of the market woman and imbue her with traits that transcend the notion of representational type common to touristic and colonial images of the island.

In subsequent portraits of black subjects, Huie also paid attention to, in his words, “the reflection and radiation in dark skin,” in contrast to more popular uses of “asphalt black” in touristic representations.³⁹ In his paintings he attempted to capture the seemingly infinite variation of black skin tones. The work *Woman in the Sun* (1940) illustrates Huie’s sensitivity to skin color, as he portrays how light reflects off of a black woman’s face by using orange, yellow, and purple tones. (Figure 5.) The play of light and color becomes a central focus. The painting also evinces the artist’s interest in French impressionism, as he uses wide brush strokes across the surface of the canvas to capture the fleeting appearance of his sitter.

Huie’s concentration on skin color makes sense in light of his story of the higgler’s bodily disavowal and Manley’s description of black girls drawing white market women. Huie seized on the unimaginable and the unrepresentable subject of art, the black body, and not only represented it but made it the subject of his work. He doubly “saturated” the painting with signs of blackness, portraying a black subject and emphasizing the external signifiers of blackness (as historically defined in colonial Jamaica and elsewhere largely through skin color). Recalling Fanon’s discussion of epidermalization, Huie

belabored over the locus and surface of racial othering. Such artistic strategies, a layering of the black subject with signifiers of blackness, countered the “asphalt black” images that portrayed blackness as negation and the absence of visual signification.

The use of Western academic art historical styles and genres by local artists working in Jamaica in the 1930s and 1940s has drawn criticism. Some art historians complain that despite the air of nationalism and anticolonialism in Jamaica in the 1930s and 1940s, artists remained confined to traditional and even outdated trends in European art. Petrine Archer-Straw, for instance, notes that although “Negro portraiture” represented a distinct break with “Caucasian influenced portraiture of an earlier period . . . the form through which this new subject matter was communicated was distinctly European . . . for all its revolutionary content, in hindsight [it] appears staid and rigidly academic, in essentially European Post-Impressionistic styles.”⁴⁰ While such critiques have been levied across the postcolonial world, in Jamaica in the 1930s, artists’ adoption of “staid academic forms” served potentially subversive political purposes. Local artists’ use of the colonial canon of “art” furthered rather than truncated a colonial critique and aided the cultural nationalist project. By infiltrating the world of art with signifiers of blackness, artists challenged many of the ideologies associated with and maintained by “art” in the island. As an axis where colonial authority met black dependency, where white prestige met black primitiveness, where presence met representational nonexistence, where historical subjects met visual objects, “art” became a medium through which artists could destabilize the hegemony of the colonial state. These colonial forms provided artists with a recognizable form through which to unpack and undermine these ideologies. Academic art, in essence, worked in concert with the aims of the various anticolonial and nationalist movements active in the period.

It is likely that Huie turned to postimpressionism because it was one of the few European traditions with a short but well-known history of representing “brown-skinned” people. French artist Paul Gauguin’s portrayals of Martinican and Tahitian women in the 1880s and 1890s popularized this style of painting in turn-of-the-twentieth-century France and England. Gauguin also used a wide range of expressive colors to represent these subjects. It is not surprising then that Huie, given his larger aims of trying to “see beauty in blackness in its broadest sense,”⁴¹ would insert black figures into this acclaimed style of painting.

Huie gained viewership and patronage for his work through the auspices of Public Opinion. The journal issued prints of his work for four shillings a copy, capitalizing on

a new market for local representations, particularly among the middle classes. Huie’s prints circulated publicly in the way that earlier postcards or pictures of Selaisse did; however, they were “art” circulating outside of the representational domain of the Institute of Jamaica.

While Huie did have some support for his work, not all Jamaicans readily accepted his radically new presentation of black subjects. As a result some of his work provoked criticism and calls for censorship. Although I do not have the space to explore this theme in length here, it appears that there were limits on the form through which new black subject-matter could be presented. Indeed, when black subjects appeared in genres that did not closely adhere to the “colonial” model presented in the institute—a naturalistic academic style of portraiture—they drew criticism in the local press. If artists, including Huie, veered from this standard they invariably caused public outcry.

In 1961, for example, on the eve of Jamaica’s independence, Huie created a painting of a black nude entitled Miss Mahogany. (Huie’s sustained interest in skin color seems evident in his choice of model, a beauty pageant queen, and the painting’s title.) The reclining black female body immediately met with disapproval in daily newspapers. Local viewers protested that “the Huie nude [was] not art” and complained that the display of the black body was simply pornography.⁴² It is possible that such protests were not simply directed at nudity but at the artist’s straying from the newly accepted way of presenting black subjects (a model Huie likely influenced) first popularized in the late 1930s. These outcries suggest that when local audiences started to accept black figures in art, blackness could only be represented through long-standing colonial signifiers of art, exemplified by the Institute of Jamaica’s portrait gallery. In this way colonial art models provided both a means through which to make black subjects imaginable as art and a canon outside of which blackness could not be visualized.

**Edna Manley’s Art, 1922–1937: From “Market Women” to Negro Aroused**

Working contemporaneously with Huie, artist Edna Manley also challenged the colonial representational order and realized another artistic vision of black subjects, in this instance through the medium of sculpture. Manley was born in Yorkshire, England, in 1900 to Rev. Harvey Swithenbank, a British Wesleyan priest, and Mrs. Ellie Swithenbank, formerly Miss Ellie Shearer from Hanover, Jamaica. In 1918 she began taking art

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classes at the Regent Street Polytechnic, one of four art schools she attended. In 1921 she married Jamaican-born Norman Manley, who was in England studying law on a Rhodes scholarship. The couple moved to Jamaica the following year.

    When Manley first arrived in the island in 1922, she, like earlier travelers, was struck by Jamaican market women. The first sculpture she produced portrayed a local bead seller. (Figure 6.) The sweeping geometric and Cubist lines of Beadseller (1922) marked a departure from the earlier realistic depictions of animal imagery, which she produced as a student in London. Upon her arrival in Jamaica her former artistic interest and style “just dropped off like a skin as I saw the first woman walk up Prince’s Street. . . . I knew that that was the kind of person I wanted to carve.”⁴³ It is notable that even in Manley’s first sculpture produced in Jamaica, her artistic style changed so dramatically. Almost immediately Manley began to reinvent her approach to art making in order to render her new environment and its inhabitants, to overcome the “daffodil syndrome” that affected so many earlier artists on the island.

While the chief curator of the National Gallery of Jamaica, David Boxer, has framed *Beadseller* as the beginning of Jamaican national art in the island,⁴⁴ it is notable that Manley utilized (or took possession of) the quintessential colonial icon of Jamaica, the market woman, in her seminal Jamaican work. Her use of the market woman might suggest that she initially viewed the island’s inhabitants through the eyes of a traveler, as picturesque and even exotic subjects. Despite the similarity in subject matter to earlier touristic representations, Manley’s granddaughter Rachel Manley is careful to stress that *Beadseller* does not present the market woman in a “charming” way.⁴⁵ Unlike postcards, which emphasized the lightness of the market woman’s load, according to Manley’s granddaughter, the sculpture of the bead seller conveys the agony and harshness of the woman’s life. The tautness of the figure’s muscle and bone expressed her suffering and economic desperation.⁴⁶

Wayne Brown, Manley’s biographer, offers another interpretation of the sculpture, which also distinguishes the work from colonial and touristic portrayals. He points out that initially the artist felt very excluded from the black inhabitants she encountered and wanted to represent in her work. When Manley ventured to the market to do her sketches, she often felt shut out and even resented by black peasants, to quote Brown, “for the crime of being white.”⁴⁷ He suggests that Manley’s sympathetic portrayal of the bead seller may have been strongly aligned to her own feelings about and desire to get closer to her black countrymen and countrywomen.

Many of Manley’s works from 1925 to 1932 return to the theme of the market woman or concentrate on female subject matter. From interviews and diary entries it is evident that Manley spent considerable time studying the black female form, noting how market women squatted, moved, or balanced objects on their heads with the “ease of wearing a hat.”⁴⁸ Based on these observations, Manley made further important changes in the style of her sculptures. The artist soon shed the sleek lines of Cubism in favor of a more buxom and voluptuous female form, a style she felt was “more representative of the massiveness of the peasant woman.”⁴⁹ Boxer refers to her work in this style as her neoclassical period (1925–1932). The almost life-size sculpture *Eve* (1929) is an example of Manley’s precursory investigation into representing the “massiveness” of the black

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⁴⁶. Ibid.
⁴⁹. Ibid.
Jamaican female body. (Figure 7.) The work portrays a rounded, corpulent, and voluptuous black woman.

In a similar fashion to Huie, Manley also made a conscious effort to render skin color accurately. Toward this end she began to utilize mahogany (a locally available wood) in her work. *Eve*, for instance, was composed of this wood. She felt that the naturally dark brown color of the wood and its range of tones also made it more suitable for representing black skin. As Manley explained, “I was carving a racial type and white was always wrong for it whereas the wood could be every shade of black, and brown, and yellow.”⁵⁰ While for Huie skin color became the subject of his art, Manley’s interest in representing skin color informed her choice of medium. Mahogany also allowed her to render Jamaican themes in local materials.

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⁵⁰ Ibid.
Manley further posited that wooden sculpture was the most suitable medium for representing black Jamaican culture. To support her use of this medium Manley authored articles on the Negro art of Africa in the *Daily Gleaner*.⁵¹ She framed African sculpture as an artistic precedent for the representation of blacks in sculpture.⁵² Like postimpressionism for Huie, African sculpture and the modernist use of African sculpture in European art provided Manley with an art historical tradition for representing black figures, in a country without such a history.

In sum, in Manley’s work from the 1920s to early 1930s, one can discern a conscious effort not only to include black subjects in her artwork but to transform the means of representation itself. While she maintained an interest in the market woman as the subject of her representations, Manley dramatically changed the ways in which this icon was represented. The market women, who formerly inhabited the black-and-white photographs in the late nineteenth century, came to three-dimensional life through her sculptures. While Huie sought to make black subjects representable by inserting them into established genres and styles—the portrait, the nude, and postimpressionism—Manley constantly changed the form of her sculpture to reflect black subject matter. In her quest to image the black subject, however, Manley’s sculptures may be “guilty” of the “oversaturation” of the sign of racial difference that Alloula described. Her use of mahogany as a signifier of race, her emphasis on a black body “type,” and her summoning of African art as artistic precedent to her work may be interpreted as the oversaturation of her images with signs of blackness. Manley’s employment of these black visual signifiers, of course, aimed to make blackness present in the face of the historical representational erasure of blacks as subjects of art in the island.

Much like Huie’s work, Manley’s new sculptural embodiment of blackness from this period drew public censure, as many local inhabitants were still not used to seeing blacks as artistic subjects. While audiences tolerated *Beadseller* because its abstraction cloaked its black subject-matter, they were less forgiving of works like *Eve*.⁵³ Manley recounts, “In those days people could accept the abstraction of *Beadseller*, but the minute you went into voluptuousness which was an expression of them, they would blow their tops.” The artist “took a beating” over these works as people from different classes, including black Jamaicans, chastised her for her “big-bellied” and “big-busted women” and her

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52. Proponents of the New Negro Movement in the Harlem, most notably Alain Locke, had earlier supported the use of African art in the development of a “school of racial art” in the 1920s.
inclusion of “Negroid features.”⁵⁴ Revealingly, critics recommended that she use a more realist form of portraiture in her sculptures or that she sculpt popular sporting figures (like Milford and Pitt), if she insisted on carving black figures.⁵⁵ Such a recommendation further suggests that for some critics naturalistic and male-centered portraiture remained the ideal form through which to represent black subjects. It was precisely the combination of “black” subject matter, a semi-abstract style, and native materials, which re-presented blackness outside of the colonial model of representation, that elicited criticism.

The next recognizable phase in Manley’s work occurred between 1932 and 1935. The sculptures from this period were “accompanied by a conscious effort to come to terms with a specifically ‘Negro’ physiognomy.”⁵⁶ The style of these sculptures rests somewhere between the early Cubist sculpture and the rounded forms of her neoclassical work. Interestingly, the predominantly female imagery of her earlier work gave way to several muscularized black male torsos—a representational shift we will return to at the end of the essay.

Of all the works in this period the sculpture *Negro Aroused* (1935) has been singled out for valorization almost since the first time it was exhibited in Jamaica, in 1937 (see figure 8). The sculpture portrays a black male subject with his head resolutely inclined, gazing steadily upward. The overemphasized musculature of his upper body, captured at a moment of tensed readiness, propels the figure in an upward and outward direction. Manley followed the sculpture with a succession of black male images: *The Prophet* (1935), *Pocomania* (1936), and *The Diggers* (1936).

Manley created this acclaimed work in the socially and politically transitional period of the mid-1930s. Through both her husband’s political activities and through her own philanthropic work, Manley was actively engaged with the anticolonial, nationalist, and labor movements of the period and, like Huie, was aware of Garveyism, Rastafarianism, and cultural nationalism. Significantly, Norman Manley would enter politics through his involvement with a new association of local producers and banana laborers, the Banana Producers’ Association, which organized to counter the hegemony of the United Fruit Company—the company so influential in the representational and economic makeup of Jamaica at the turn of the twentieth century. The Banana Producers’ Association formed part of a wider organization of labor locally throughout the

⁵⁴. Ibid.
⁵⁵. Archer-Straw, “Cultural Nationalism,” 120.
mid-1930s, which challenged imperial and colonial interests through strikes, social protest, and, ultimately, riots.

In 1938 a riot and strike started by laborers at a sugar manufacturing company, the Frome Estate of the West Indies Sugar Company, led to widespread worker protests, stoppages, and unrest. For Marxist historian Ken Post, the riots, the subsequent political organization of workers, and the resulting concessions from the colonial government were the culmination of the new consciousness brought about by Rastafarianism, Ethiopianism, and Garveyism; racial consciousness translated into action against the colonial state and capitalist interests.⁵⁷ From these riots labor unions and political parties emerged, one led by Norman Manley (the People’s National Party) and another by his cousin, Alexander Bustamante (the Jamaica Labour Party). Although the differences between these parties were, and continue to be, significant, they both advocated on the part of Jamaican workers and helped push the colonial state toward universal suffrage, which was obtained in 1944. Edna Manley was involved both personally and professionally in these political developments. Manley’s (and Huie’s) artwork in the period should

not, however, be viewed simply as reflecting these political currents but as a constitutive part of the changes.

Manley’s figurative male subjects, some of whom she depicts in the process of labor, offered a new image of the black Jamaican male distinct from the world of touristic images, which downplayed and seldom visualized black male labor. Manley’s concentration on these black workers seems even more significant given the imperial and colonial claims purported through touristic images of the market woman—images implying that the island’s inhabitants needed colonial rule and imperial interests to be productive. In contradistinction, the black males of Manley’s oeuvre offered a self-determined vision of black labor and a national future outside of colonial rule, as signified through the upraised eyes and uplifted arms of *Negro Aroused*.

Manley’s work was also likely influenced by international developments, which stressed the importance of black mobilization against colonial rule. In 1935 the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, a country that had previously remained unscathed by the far-reaching tentacles of colonialism, brought new immediacy and urgency to the African diasporic fight against colonial rule. Mussolini’s imperialist ambitions offended and violated “Africans” in many parts of the black world. It represented more than an invasion of one nation by another. It was symbolic of wider struggles of blacks against imperial powers.

Since Manley’s *Negro Aroused* and her other male worker sculptures predate the riots of 1938, some art and cultural historians view the work as prefiguring the workers’ uprising.⁵⁸ This is a view that Manley herself perpetuated, and it may even be true. Manley’s narrative of artistic clairvoyance, however, likely also aimed to carve a social role for artists within the nationalist project and anticolonial movements. In a society where artists had no national investment in the island, Manley’s task was not only to make work that reflected black subjects but to make audiences view artists and art as parts of the process of national development, indeed to see artists as prefigurers of the nation. The narrative of the little girl who could not portray her racial identity may also have been an extension of this nationalistic self-fashioning of the artist in the name of the island’s black inhabitants (much like Chapman’s character the Painter). In other words, by emphasizing the problem of black representational absence, artists like Manley could legitimate the significance, indeed the necessity, of their roles in the nationalist movement.

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⁵⁸. Almost every account of Manley reiterates this narrative. Nettleford, for example, characterizes the sculpture as the “highly symbolic master-work . . . which was carved out of mahogany in 1935 in prophetic celebration, as it were, of a soon-to-be-aroused Jamaican collective consciousness against the debilitating ills of a rotting colonial order.” Rex Nettleford, *Caribbean Cultural Identity: The Case of Jamaica* (Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center Publications, 1979), 210–11.
Manley exhibited many of her male sculptures locally for the first time at a show held at Jamaica Mutual Life Assurance Building in 1937. After energetic promotion and careful setting up of the exhibition in the local paper by Chapman, the show reportedly drew eight hundred people. Unlike the critical reception of some of her earlier works, many local newspaper accounts supported the exhibition. Only five days after the opening, an unidentified writer in the Daily Gleaner made the unfathomable suggestion that Manley’s work belonged in the Institute of Jamaica and starting a public fundraising campaign to acquire the work. “Why cannot Negro Aroused which is perhaps the finest example of her work be purchased by the Jamaica Institute before it is snapped up in England?” Brown details, “And although the Institute’s directors themselves made no move, by the 28th the Gleaner was able to report that ‘a most praiseworthy move [is] now being made among patriot lovers of art in the island to acquire this glorious piece of statuary for presentation to the Institute of Jamaica, so that it may form the nucleus of a permanent gallery.’” The institute’s (reluctant) acceptance of Negro Aroused marked a significant moment in the official acceptance of a black presence in art on the island and, more specifically, a black presence in a new bottle.

The only market woman to make an appearance during the middle to late 1930s was Market Women (1936), a work that is diminutive in size when compared to sculptures like Negro Aroused. The increasingly masculinized image of the awakening black nation in her work at this time and its acceptance are significant. If, as I have argued, Manley’s sculptures since her arrival to the island were invested in progressively rendering black subjects on multiple levels, was blackness and Jamaicanness also being further articulated as masculine in her Negro Aroused phase? If we look back at Manley’s work from the 1920s we can discern several significant phases in Manley’s artistic “literalization” of blackness and Jamaicanness: the introduction of voluptuous black body; the use of dark-colored native mahogany; her attempts to legitimate the presence of blacks in sculpture through her discussions of African art. In light of these various stages, can her change to male images also be considered a continuation of her visualization of blackness?

It is difficult to provide definitive answers as to why Manley’s works became focused on male imagery. In light of the literature on the gendering of colonies as female and

59. Brown, Edna Manley, 212.
60. Daily Gleaner, 23 January 1937.
62. Negro Aroused was 25 inches high. The Prophet was 30.25 inches high, and Market Women was about half the size, 16 inches.
nation through male signifiers, it is tempting to suggest, given the prevalence of the market woman in colonial representations of Jamaica, that Manley chose to abandon this icon in her search for a national art capable of reflecting black subjects. Maybe in order to overcome the negation of blackness in the visual arts, to break the dialectic of dependency Fanon outlined, she turned to the new visual icon of the black male worker. Such an explanation, however, seems like an oversimplification of a very complex social, political, cultural, and representational landscape. Manley’s focus on (and the wider acceptance of) her male figures must also be contextualized within the particular gendering of different types of representation in Jamaica. She had to negotiate both colonial icons of Jamaica and colonial hierarchies of art.

Regardless of the reasons behind this masculinized representational shift, in closing I want to raise a question about Manley’s relationship to these black male images of Jamaica, a query perhaps for future research: How did Manley relate to or fit into this vision of the masculinized black nation? Tellingly, in the 1950s, Manley continued her investment in fashioning blackness on a very personal level. In a newspaper article from the period she claimed a colored racial identity. “I may be technically British in English Law,” she explained to a local reporter, “but whatever the legalities I’m Jamaican and coloured and proud of it.” In such statements Manley also started to downplay her British citizenship and purported to have no memory of growing up in England. In a seeming reversal of the scenario of the little black girl in the classroom recounted at the onset of the essay, Manley’s own self-representation by the 1950s stressed her “colored” roots and the local constitution of her identity. Her comments suggest that cultural nationalists, Garveyites, Rastafarians, and political parties, with the aid of artists, had so successfully remade or reimaged the social, political, and racial landscape that Manley moved to disassociate herself from signs of whiteness and Britishness. The former signs of prestige, authority, and legitimacy had no purchase in the emergent black nation. In the new nation, which she claimed to have prefigured in her art, “whiteness” had as little saliency as blackness had had in art at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Significantly, her letters and journals reveal a psychological disavowal which is comparable to that described by Fanon. Manley confessed to her husband in 1937, “I feel that the last couple of years I have been carving for Jamaica and for purpose—dragging


out every ounce of life—I had to achieve a certain purpose—for them . . . the Negro Aroused etc. was trying to create a national vision—and it nearly killed me—it was trying to put something into being that was bigger than myself & almost other than myself. It has taken me weeks to stop—being the Negro Aroused!!”⁶⁵ In the letter Manley describes her work from the *Negro Aroused* period, her “national vision,” in almost a disembodied way, as if a force prevalent in the island had simply moved through her to create the works. Her admonition that the sculptures were “bigger and *other than myself*” also resembles Fanon’s discussion of the black Antilleans’ comprehension of the “self-as-othered.” Manley’s personal proclamation about being “other” than herself, and her disembodied description of creating a national vision, further illustrate that in the island’s nationalist self-fashioning, Manley’s Englishness or whiteness had no stronghold. Manley’s comments also belie a drastically different picture of the role of the artist in colonial society from the one enacted in Chapman’s *West Indian*, where the Painter and Black Man easily become allies in their mutual anticolonial struggle. Manley’s account testifies to another outcome for the artist involved in the process of decolonialization and nation building. As Manley underscored, “it nearly killed me.”

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