Imag(in)ing Jamaica: Visual Imagery of Jamaican Postcards

Here's a welcome to the tourists
On this fair West Indian Isle,
May you find the skies above you
Just one bright eternal smile;
May the mountains and the valleys,
And the climate, and the sea,
Prove as full of balm and beauty
As you fancied they would be.

Meet the Eden of Jamaica,
With an Eden of the mind. - Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Images do not merely reflect the world but mediate,
even create, what we believe to be reality. - Beth Fowkes Tobin

Photographic postcards have been in circulation since the beginning of the 20th century (Snow 6), and since then have gained significance as not only souvenirs, but more importantly as "records" of travel and the people and places one might encounter in "distant" (or not so distant) lands. As "records" of these people and places, postcards lay claim to "truth": that these images were real and could therefore be defining of their subject matter. Knowledge represented by images functioned, and continues to function, within discourses of power that shape the ways in which images are created, and simultaneously exert the ability to influence the viewer. The

1My emphasis.


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intricacies of this process, where multiple discourses encounter the differing individual 
subjectivity of every viewer, produce images that, in the words of Spitznik, “are at once cultural 
products, social processes, as well as extremely potent areas of...struggle” (303). The distinction 
between discourse about and record of, when considering the images of postcards is an 
important one to make (Lucien Taylor 83). This point provides a framework for 
discussing the imaging of Jamaica both through colonial postcards and the mass produced and 
disseminated postcards of recent times that have circulated through the increasing flows of 
tourism in Jamaica.

At present tourism makes up Jamaica’s largest industry, bringing in over one million 
visitors each year (Jamaica Tourist Board), to an island with a population of slightly under 2.7 
million people (CIA World Fact Book 2003). The prominence of tourism in Jamaica increases 
the mobility of postcards as a consumed good that is spread to people all over the world. In this 
way postcards make up part of the globalization\(^4\) of media flows, especially since they are now 
also available on the internet for viewing and purchase.

Within these contexts this paper looks at some of the popular images\(^5\) of Jamaica through 
the mass media\(^6\) of postcards. More specifically, the way in which these images are socially and 
culturally constructed and the power implied in the processes of creating and viewing these

\(^4\)Globalization here is being described as the increasing (though not new) 
interconnectedness of people around the globe through international flows of goods, services, labor, 
technology, travel, and communication (Porter).

\(^5\)Image, for its use in this paper, will focus on visual representations, however, it may 
also include the textual forms that appear alongside these visuals, including captions on postcards.

\(^6\)Mediums of communication that operate on a scale such that they are able to be 
disseminated to a large audience, which includes (but is not limited to) cinema, television, print media, and 
radio. For the purposes of this paper the mass media will be looked at specifically in terms of postcards, as 
a form of visual and textual media.

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images. The discourses that emerge from the imaging of Jamaica through postcards consist of:
1) An emphasis placed on the Jamaican landscape to the exclusion of the Jamaican people. 2) A racial representation of Jamaicans that shows women of various races, while images of men tend to concentrate solely on African-Jamaicans. 3) An imaging of Jamaican women that sexually posits them in an objectified and “exotic” manner, and concentrates on their “closeness” to nature (which is not altogether separate from ideas of exoticism) through their labor or visual placement alongside tropical fruits, flowers, or landscapes. 4) An imaging of Jamaican men that concentrates primarily on their positions of service within the tourist industry, or an emphasis on dreadlocked men and possible references to Rastafarians, in particular Bob Marley, as icons of Jamaican society and culture.

I will be focusing on images of Jamaica from postcards currently in circulation; however, the historical imaging of Jamaica through postcards will also be referenced to draw on similarities and historical shifts in overarching patterns of representation. Imaging Jamaica and Jamaicans as “other”, “exotic”, and “erotic”, as well as the racial and gender dynamics that play into these forms, will be examined as functioning within power/knowledge dynamics, that affect both their creation and consumption. The body of this paper presents a content analysis of a

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7Race is being defined as the socially constructed meanings used to classify people with shared national origin, geographic distribution, and/or history (The American Heritage Dictionary of English Language). Often times race, though not an objective biological fact, is socially constructed around phenotypic traits such as skin color and physiognomy. The use of race throughout this paper also refers to Alexander’s observation of the function of race in Jamaica as

Establish[ing] the historical rootedness of the society and its members’ place in it. It refers them through their bodies to a historical hierarchy and solidarity of races that have been constantly fragmented by historical processes of mixture. (79)

Also to be taken into consideration with these definitions is Kuper’s explanation of race as “a complex symbol for status and related values in contemporary Jamaica” (Smith 83). This interpretation leads to the conclusion that in the context of Jamaica, race is closely bound to issues of socio-economic status.

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variety of postcard imagery, with explicit links made to the functioning of these images within the context of tourism. As will be discussed in conclusion, the discourses that emerge as dominant do so both because they lay claim to representing “truth” and because those who consume them are in part reinforcing those “truths” by literally giving currency to their creation and dissemination. However, these practices of looking are never monolithic. There is no “correct” or fixed interpretation of an image. Still, the viewer’s subjectivity is informed through their experiences and education concerning the peoples and cultures represented within these postcards, and of course their exposure to the images themselves.

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework of this paper consists of a visual cultural theory, a communication theory model, and a gender perspective. These frameworks guide my research due to their relevance in dealing with visual imagery and social/cultural constructions. In addition, these frameworks have been placed within the socio-cultural and historical specificity of Jamaica so as to make them more effective and applicable to researching the role of the visual mass media in connection with socio-cultural (re)production and values.

Michel Foucault, a French philosopher of the 20th century, developed a theory for explaining the contexts and frameworks through which power is exerted and reinscribed into societies. Foucault’s ideas concerning the relationship between images and power are premised on his notion of “discourse”. As Foucault explains, discourse refers specifically to groups of statements that give form to the way in which people conceive of things, and how, in turn, these same perceptions influence the way in which people act and interact with one another.
(Cartwright & Sturken 93-94). This paper examines discourses in terms of visual images projected through postcards, and how these images influence, and are influenced by, society. In this process the viewers of images are not passive subjects, but participate in (re)inscribing meaning into the images they view.

This aspect of mutual influence, whereby images simultaneously affect the ways in which people interpret the world around them, and also are influenced by people in their very creation, is important. It relates to Foucault's idea that power is inscribed into all discourse, both in the ability of an image to exercise power and to function as an instrument of power (Cartwright & Sturken 93). That is, power is reflected in the ability of these images to be created and also in the socio-cultural effects they produce. However, this does not occur in a top down fashion; instead, power is dispersed through the multiplicity of discourses which exist throughout the world. Discourses may operate that are antagonistic to one another, which makes visual imagery a site in which meaning and identity are negotiated and continually reinvented and interpreted. Nevertheless, certain discourses are dominant because they function through socially powerful institutions. Such institutions are powerful precisely because they conceive of the images they produce as "truth" and are able to communicate them as such (Rose 137-138). This idea of "truth", as presenting knowledge of the actual, is inherently connected to photographic visual images, which are often taken to be evidence and records of reality. The particular claims of "truth" provided by images, however, shift historically to reflect the influence of those socially powerful institutions which are shaping their production (Rose 137-138). This paper will show how this power/knowledge function of discourse is evidenced in postcards through processes of creating difference whereby people and places become conceived.

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of as “other”, “exotic”, or “erotic”.

Within this paper the socio-cultural and historical development of Jamaica is also treated within Foucault’s ideas concerning discourse. This enables an examination of how claims to visual representation of “truth” have shifted historically in terms of how Jamaica has been visually imaged in the mass media. With regard to this, global flows of visual imagery are inherent to how discourse functions in terms of the imaging of Jamaica through postcards. Also, the factors that have historically influenced the production of these images, and the context in which they are produced in more recent years, are both examined within this paper.

In connection with Foucault’s theory of discourse, I approach his ideas specifically in terms of Dickerson and Ziegler’s theory of mass media enculturation, which functions under the rubric of communications theory. Mass media enculturation is defined by Ziegler as “the influence of mass media on individual perceptions and attitudes formed from information, symbols, and ideas received during a transmission of culture” (160). These influences can take different forms depending on the extent to which an individual has other means, outside of the mass media, from which to draw knowledge and experience about the images being transmitted (Dickerson & Ziegler 160-161). For example, a person who receives information about a country and its people primarily through the mass media, without ever having direct experience with someone from that country or education about the subject, might be more disposed to form her/his perceptions around the influence of the mass media. However, if one has other sources of knowledge about this country from personal experience or education, the influence of the mass media is more easily placed within a broader context of interpretation. Thus, mass media enculturation theory highlights viewer response to show how images are mediated through Scarbrough 6
personal and socio-cultural frames of reference.

Another key feature of this theory is the idea that, as Dickerson and Ziegler state, “information received depends on the arrangement and packaging of the message” (160). This notion incorporates the aspect of commodification of culture inherent in postcards as mass media forms (souvenirs/commodities) and advertisements (sending a postcard to another person, or viewing/purchasing them over the internet). In this way, the ability to “buy into” culture by purchasing a postcard or downloading them off the internet, demonstrates the appeal of the images produced to the public viewing audiences, to the extent that these images are popularized through consumption.

In combination with this specific tailoring of Foucault’s, and Dickerson and Ziegler’s theories to a Jamaican context, this paper also examines visual imagery through a gender perspective. Wallach Scott’s construction of gender as explicitly linked to socio-economic status and race, focuses my research on how visual images invoke and reinscribe understandings of gender through the communication of explicit and implicit messages about men and women (154-174). This type of gendered analysis takes notice of not only how images of Jamaican men and women are presented in postcards, but also why these images take the forms they do. For

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3 A socially constructed category imposed on people of different sexes to emphasize the systems and relationships, which may include sex, but is not necessarily the sole product of sex or sexuality (Wallach Scott 156). I also use gender here in place of women in the sense that the study of women necessarily implies the study of men also, which is to say that the sphere of both men and women are deeply interconnected.

9 I have chosen to use the term ‘socio-economic status’ instead of the Marxist concept of ‘class’ (as devoid of racial and cultural differences); however, I am also not using the term in a strictly Weberian sense of ‘status groups’ with shared living and behavioral patterns (Smith viii). Socio-economic status, in my own definition for the purposes of this paper, encompasses the segmentation of the Jamaican populace through both economic variables (wealth, and the concomitant prestige, power, and leisure patterns), and also societal variables or race and color which are, according to M.G. Smith, “profoundly important and pervasive in Jamaican society, socially and culturally”(62).

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this purpose, gender is also looked at through the lens of Jamaica’s cultural history to determine the causality of gender images and the power dynamics behind their production. By utilizing this gendered approach, along with the other theoretical frameworks mentioned, this paper takes a multi-faceted approach most suitable to a study of the visual imagery of Jamaica in postcards.

Postcards from Paradise

One of the most popular images of Jamaica (and the Caribbean in general) is its tropical landscape. The fact that ideas of Jamaica as constructed around its climate, geography, and natural bounty (as opposed to its people) are so prevalent is in itself a powerful indicator for perceptions of Jamaica. One of the prominent icons of Jamaica is beautiful beaches lined with palm trees, which is a major feature of tourism marketing that advertizes the island of “sun, sand, and sea”. In “Cocoanut Palms” (Image 1, Appendix) the viewer is confronted with a visual of the palm tree that dominates the postcard. The Jamaicans in the picture are dwarfed by the size and centrality of the palm tree image, which subverts the viewer’s gaze to the image of the coconut palm. This postcard from the early 20th century demonstrates the iconographic importance of the palm tree in the imagining of Jamaica. In a more contemporary representation (Image 2 “Sunset”) the coconut palm again dominates the landscape. In this image the sun setting on the ocean casts a shadow which reveals a couple sitting in a hammock between the two palms in the foreground. Significantly, the shadow also renders these people unrecognizable, which allows the viewer to imagine that she or he could possibly be one of those people enjoying this tropical sunset.

This technique of coaxing the viewer into projecting themselves into the images is also

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seen the postcard simply captioned as “Jamaica” (Image 3), which shows an empty boat tethered in the open waters of the ocean. The duality of this image features a small green and yellow boat that is photographed at close range so that it almost completely fills the width of the postcard; however, the space that the boat occupies is itself overtaken by the emptiness of the boat’s bowel. This emptiness allows the viewer to imagine herself or himself sitting in this boat. In contrast, an earlier image of boats (Image 4) does not cater to a tourist desire as intensely geared toward “selling” Jamaica as a travel destination. In this postcard the distance of the boats from the viewer produces a less direct association between these ships and their availability for the viewer. The fact that people are occupying the ship in the foreground, and the contextualization of the water within an urban location, also contributes to this literal and figurative distancing of the viewer from the imagery.

In a more recent postcard (Image 5), a boat again appears distant from the viewer by the angle of the photograph; however, the items that contextualize this image do not reference an urban landscape, but rather a tourist playground of trampolines and innertubes. The availability of large trampolines floating in the ocean is made apparent by the absence of anyone using them. While the people, who are undoubtedly tourists, floating in the innertubes and passing by on the boat in the background are onlookers in this image who implicitly manifest (through their proximity if nothing else) a desire to enjoy the fun that is to be had on this resort setting.

The centrality of the tourist experience is also directly stated in postcards that present images of hotels. Tourism and travel to Jamaica is not a new phenomenon, and neither are images of the hotels in which tourists are invited to stay. Postcards of hotels, as representative images of Jamaica, can seen in the photograph of the Constant Spring Hotel (Image 6), a

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historic hotel located in Kingston that is still in operation today. However, in the image of "Jamaica, Can’t Beat the Feeling!" (Image 7), which also features hotels, the imagery takes on a noted exotifying effect. The high rise hotels on the beach in the distance are foregrounded by a tropical landscape of lush green vegetation, and most prominently the bright fuchsia and white flowers that fill the bottom third of the image. The camera angle locates the gaze of the photograph behind the flowers looking out onto the hotel-filled beaches in the distance. The effect creates an intriguing distance that invites the viewer to come and find out exactly what is going on within the hotels and landscape of their gaze. This in turn, invites the imagination of the viewer to invent what lies beyond.

The contrast between these two postcards is an important one, because while hotels invariably invite the viewer to visit Jamaica, the tropical landscape creates an “exotic” feel that clearly differentiates the Jamaican tourism experience in a “paradise” setting. This “kind of idealism...a nostalgia for a place that does not exist” (Taylor 59), according to Ayoung is the notion that both created these images and makes them appealing to people even today. By removing or distancing Jamaicans in postcard landscapes, and emphasizing tropical characteristics and tourist experiences, these image circulate within a discourse that presents Jamaica as exotic and available, or even waiting, for tourists to arrive.

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16 Todd Ayoung is a Trinidadian-American artist, curator, and theorist whose works address issues of identity and difference within the interplay of texts and images from a historical, social, cultural, racial, ethnic, and gender standpoint (Taylor 54). His works also deconstruct the historical imaging of the Caribbean and its peoples and the influence of these images and the power embedded in them.
Images of the “Natives”

When people are inserted into these landscapes they often continue to appear within tourist settings. Jamaicans, and specifically dark-skinned African-Jamaicans, often appear in postcards in various types of work and labor. Within postcard imagery this often places them in service to tourists or inserts tourists -usually white tourists- into staged portraits alongside them, or in voyeuristic and explorative narratives. However, this increased explicit presence of the tourist in postcards marks a historical shift in relation to the imaging of Jamaicans in positions of labor.

Although uniquely oriented to tourist consumption, images of Jamaicans participating in labor took form early in the 20th century. They were often pictured in connection with foreign luxury goods such as tropical fruits, sugar, and coffee. The imaging of African-Caribbean peoples in positions of labor connected to these items lead these tropical and foreign “commodities [to be] associated with the dark ‘others’ of the world” (Tobin 20). The term “others” specifically references the historical category of “other” created by the European imaging of inhabitants of non-European countries, and particularly those in European colonies, in negative constructions of identity that represented everything not European as distinctly “other” (Laforest 33-34).

In the postcard entitled “Banana Plantation” (Image 8), from the earlier part of the 20th century, a Jamaican man and boy appear standing in front of a banana plantation. It is significant to note that the textual identifier on this postcard makes no reference to either of the people in the picture. What is clear, however, is their supposed connection (through presence and proximity) to the harvesting of bananas, a tropical and foreign commodity. This connection

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is also made apparent by the Jamaican women who bring food items to market, known as 
higglers, who appear in "‘Greetings from Jamaica’ Going to Market with Yams and Canes, Constant Spring Road” (Image 9). Yet, this caption does not mention who exactly is going to market. In the process these people become the “dark others” associated with the tropical commodities that are pictured. This postcard image, like the preceding one, is staged because everyone in the immediate foreground is looking at the photographer and has been placed together. Another key feature of this image is the use of color, added after the black and white photograph had been taken, to emphasize the exotic feel of the postcard. The bright hues draw attention to the tropical landscape and the tropical fruits that the women and the young boy seated on the donkey are carrying. In addition, all of the people are rendered in the same shade of brown skin tone, creating them as unified and monolithic or “typical” category.

The process of “typing” Jamaicans occurred alongside that of “othering” them, but sought to further classify them into groups or “types” of “natives”. Siegel explains that 
in representations of the colonized, people of color were displayed in a ‘natural habitat’. ‘Natives’ came from a variety of colonized and exoticized places over which Europeans and Americans exerted dominion including places in...the Caribbean[.] Postcards featuring ‘natives’ displayed them in their ‘natural habitat’ by showing harem scenes, landscapes and huts. (863) “Boy and Donkey” (Image 10) is an example of such typing, in which the photographer chose the setting of the “natural habitat” and also the props and costume of the photographed subject.

Another postcard that illustrates this process is “Native Family At Home, Jamaica” (Image 11). However, these portraits do not completely succeed in imposing a fixed identity onto the people they image. The aspect of performance inherent in posing for a photograph allow for a certain degree of resistance to the imposed identities (Tobin 15). Performance in this sense can include

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the manipulation of clothing and props provided or selected by the photographer, countenance, and pose. The act of taking someone’s picture, in and of itself, implies a sense of empowerment towards the subject, that they are “worthy” of being photographed. These forms of resistance function, however, within the extent of the photographer’s own control over the rendering of the image. (Tobin 17). And too the level of complicity of the subject in the process of posing for a portrait in which, according to Phelan, “one performs the identity that one believes others expect to see” (Tobin 16).

The insertion of the tourist into postcards alongside Jamaicans then necessarily creates a dynamic in which the viewer of such postcards is invited into these experiences. This is done to the extent to which s/he identifies with the image of the tourist as markedly distinct from the “natives”. This distinctness and “foreignness” is rendered not only through dress and position, but noticeably also by race. In the image of “Visit of a Missionary and Wife to a Plantation Village” (Image 12) the missionary and his wife, both of whom are white, appeared seated while the Jamaicans leave their huts to come and bring them food. In contemporary Jamaican postcards, the relationship between the white “visitors” and dark skinned Jamaicans is more pronounced in terms of positions of service, which directly relates to the relative positions of power in these images. The hotel beach scene (Image 13) in which a group of female tourists are sunbathing while, a dark-skinned Jamaican man brings them drinks is a powerful example of this relationship of service. The women lie in their bathing suits in sexually suggestive poses, with gaze diverted (either by closing their eyes or laying on their stomachs or sides, so as their faces cannot be viewed). The man, on the other hand, is fully clothed, to the point of absurdity (considering he is on the beach in a tropical climate), by wearing a long-sleeved collared shirt,

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pants and bow tie. His clothing, along with the tray of drinks he carries, make it clear to the viewer that he works for the hotel at which these women are staying. His gaze, however, is not diverted, but is fixed squarely ahead at the sexualized image of the tourist women. The image suggests that the women are unaware of his gaze, at least at present, however, the viewer, who becomes the voyeur, is able to recognize this situation. The viewer, through the purchase of this postcard, is invited into this sexual voyeurism. Underlying these voyeuristic gazes of both the viewer and the man in the postcard is the desire of both the Black Jamaican man for these tourist women and the desire, as manifested by the consumer, to be desired by such a man. This visual subtext plays on the sexual tourism prevalent in Jamaica, which largely involves white female tourists from Europe, Canada, and the United States and African-Jamaican men (de Albuquerque 50). As de Albuquerque succinctly states in his essay concerning Caribbean sex tourism entitled “In Search of the Big Bamboo”, “these works of culture [imagery], high and low, ‘signify’ on the exoticist tropes of the racial imagination. But if this sexual exaggeration is ironic, it is nevertheless ubiquitous in the Caribbean” (50).

This sexually explorative narrative exists alongside visual imagery of “exploration” that has less to do with sexuality, but still manifests voyeuristic gazes and relationships of power. The image of a dark-skinned Jamaican man paddling a bamboo raft (Image 14 “Rafting”) carrying a white tourist couple participates in this explorer narrative. The tourists’ gaze falls on the tropical scenery that surrounds them. The man paddling the boat faces forward, so that his back is to their gaze, and he can be watched by them, but he is not able to counter this gaze. The distance between the man paddling and the couple sitting at the back of the raft, also intensifies this power dynamic. By inserting tourists into postcard images, it makes viewers, as potential

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tourists, become more comfortable with seeing themselves in these contexts. The white tourist couple who appear out "exploring" the island (backpack and map included) (Image 15) are seen crossing paths with a Jamaican woman carrying a basket on her head. The gaze of the tourists in the image, which is emphasized by the shadows on the ground that draw out their line of vision, is fixed towards the Jamaican woman, while her gaze remains straight ahead. The power implied in practices of looking, both of the subjects within postcards and the viewers of these images, relate processes of voyeurism and exploration.

"Come On Down": The Sexual Voyeurism of Jamaican Women as Exotic/Erotic Objects

These practices of looking when applied to sexually suggestive or explicit images of Jamaican women objectify and exotify, and to a degree commodifies them as another feature of what Jamaica "has to offer". This conflation of Jamaican female subjects with the natural commodities of the island is exemplified in "Made in Jamaica" (Image 16), which shows a woman carrying a basket of flowers. The woman's shirt strap is suggestively falling off of her shoulder, inviting the viewer to continue this undressing in their imagination. The title of this postcard also references sexual themes, by implicitly posing the question of what or who was made in Jamaica? It then answers this question by presenting an image of a Jamaican woman and flowers, both of which must be "products" of the island. Her features appear to identify her as either Indian-Jamaican, or of at least partial Indian descent. The combination of her projected race, along with her bright clothing, the use of tropical flowers, and the sexually suggestive pose all contribute to a viewer conceiving of her as "exotic".

More highly sexualized images of Jamaican women appear in the images of postcards that invite again invite a voyeuristic gaze. As in the previous postcard, "Come on Down" (Image

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17) also shows a sexualized image of a Jamaican woman whose gaze focuses at the viewer, inviting him (and I say him because these images imply a male gaze through both the position of the photographer, and the viewer of the image) to look at her in a sexual manner. The power dynamic does not, however, shift because the static nature of a photograph does not allow her to view him at the same time or in a similar fashion. The title of the postcard reinforces this visual-sexual relationship by leaving an open invitation for the male tourist to “come on down” and experience what is being “offered”, which is in this case the African-Jamaican woman’s body. In “Gimmie Some Skin” (Image 18) the theme is identical, including the exotification of the woman by putting her in a tropical location and a highly sexualized context. The title once again reinforces the message being communicated, which is that these women are waiting for a man, and through the consumption of postcards this would imply a male tourist, to fulfill his sexual desires. This apparent sexual relationship is again seen in postcards like “No Problem” (Image 19), which plays on the popular tourism slogan of a Jamaican saying. A Jamaican woman, possibly of European descent or at least partial European heritage, appears sexually objectified in this image as well. Her gaze is directed away from the viewer, yet, as her emphasized sexuality and as the title of the image implies, if you want her it is “no problem”.

If the hyper-sexualization, objectification, and exotification of the imaging of Jamaican women in these postcards was not pronounced enough, then it is made abundantly clear in “Wet & Wild” (Image 20). The pose is sexually explicit, as the woman appears naked, except for the starfish and seaweed placed carefully over her vagina and breasts, on her knees with her legs spread apart. Her gaze is completely subverted by the positioning her head so far titled back that her eyes are no longer visible to the viewer. These effects produce in an intensified form the

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imaging of Jamaican women as both exotic, erotic, and sexually objectified. This process is also racially marked by the preponderance of images of Jamaican women of color. As Siegel notes in tracing the historical imaging of female subjects of the British colonies in the Atlantic World, postcards drew upon the naturalization of certain types by fixing the place of the "other" as naked, waiting, and sexualized. Symbols of exoticism and fertility distinguished the represented person as close to nature at the same time that the camera's gaze and the sale of these cards fixed those image represented in the realm of objects. These cards reinforced the social hierarchy by making women into objects for men's perusal and by baring "colonial" subjects to the imperial gaze. (868)
The images of Jamaican women presented clearly continue in this capacity, with historical shifts. The subjects are no longer part of a British colony, but their qualities of "other", "exotic", "erotic" and their contextualization and view as objects continue, with the dominant consumer now the tourist.

**Bob Marley and Dreadlocks: Icons of Jamaican Men**

Images of African-Jamaican men with dreadlocks have become another prominent feature of Jamaican postcards. Most noticeably, Bob Marley has become an icon in representing Jamaica. The images of Bob Marley in postcards reflect his worldwide popularity as a musician and Rastafarian, surfacing in themes of reggae music, marijuana use, and African pride. Dreadlocked Jamaican men found on postcards (who cannot be assumed to be Rastas since the wearing of dreadlocks has now become fashionable among some non-Rastafarian) are, however, able to evoke connections to Rastafarianism for viewers, and are especially linked with

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*Rastafarianism as 'livity' (life force, lifestyle, culture) took root in the 1920s and 30s in Jamaica. Rastafarians proclaim the divinity Ras Tafari Makonnen, crowned Haile Selassie I, and former emperor of Ethiopia (Mordesci 47). Rastafarians also reinterpret the Bible through a doctrine of Black pride, Pan-Africanism, and Ethiopianism (Chevannes 33 and 39). The use of *ganja* (marijuana) within the Rastafari livity is both permitted and ritualized. The incorporation of the wearing of dreadlocks appeared in the 1950s, which is now a recognizable feature of the Rastafari. (Chevannes 145-171)*

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marijuana use. These images also participate in part in an exotification discourse that has ties to the “rent-a-dread”
phenomenon of sexual tourism on the island.

“Smoking” (Image 21) presents an African-Jamaican man with dreadlocks, which is such a prevalent image of Jamaican men that it often excludes the imaging of Indian-Jamaican men, Chinese-Jamaican men, and mixed race individuals. The man in this image is seen puffing out a stream of smoke from his mouth. The framing of the image does not permit the viewer to see exactly what he is smoking, but the inference, while not a necessarily true deduction, might be that his dreadlocks (if taken to indicate that he is a Rastafarian) are meant to lead the viewer to assume that he is in fact smoking marijuana. The use of marijuana, a culturally accepted activity for Rastafarians, is still illegal in the island. However, the implication here is that it is a readily available commodity, which is for sale to tourists as well. Jamaican men with dreadlocks also create an exotifying effect through postcard imagery. The aesthetic quality of dreadlocks as connoting a sense of difference, which is more easily conveyed to a viewer who has less knowledge about Rastafarians and the spiritual and symbolic value of dreadlocks, is in this sense “exotic”. A more sexual reference can be made through the extension of this notion of “exotic” to incorporate ideas about sexual tourism in Jamaica, and in particular the “rent-a-dread” experience for female tourists.

The image of a dreadlocked Bob Marley makes more explicit connections to his identification as a Rastafarian than it does to any kind of sexual narrative. Because he was so

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12 This term, coined with particular reference to Jamaican sex tourism, is used to describe the companionship or sexual liaisons the occur between tourist women and dreadlocked Jamaican men (de Albuquerque 52). The tourist woman in a sense is able to ‘rent’ such a man by paying his way (drinks, gifts, accommodations, etc.) while he accompanies.

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highly identifiable as Rastafarian, which he communicated through his songs, social activism, and lifestyle, images of him are able to include additional symbolic references to Rastafarianism beyond dreadlocks that might be recognizable to viewers. At other times, his worldwide fame as a reggae superstar is more directly employed in postcards. In “Spliff”\(^{13}\) (Image 22) Bob Marley is pictured in similar vein as the dreadlocked man in “Smoking”, but in the image of Marley the inclusion of the actual spliff into the image draws clearer lines between the use of marijuana, its relation to Rastafarianism, and its availability in Jamaica.

A powerful image is created in the appearance of Marley’s face overlaid with the colors associated with African pride against a black background (Image 23). Rastafarian culture and lifestyle promotes a firm identification with African pride and heritage. The green, yellow, and red colors that symbolize this sense of solidarity between people of Africa and those of African descent in the diaspora are used by Rastafarians to align themselves in this process. Rastafarianism is again referenced in the form of lions\(^{14}\) that appear both in the landscape and on the text at the top of the postcard (“Bob Marley, The Legend Lives On” Image 24). A guitar and the image of Marley singing with microphone in hand add the feature of his international reggae fame into the picture. With “Bob Marley” boldly stenciled across the top of the postcard and the caption “the legend lives on” across the bottom, his status as a reggae icon and influential figure are made clear. The location of this imagery within a distinctly tropical landscape also seeks to make clear his iconographic status identified with Jamaica.

\(^{13}\)Marijuana joint.

\(^{14}\)The Lion of Judah is a Rastafarian symbol; mention of the Lion of Judah appears in the Bible with references to Africa.
Conclusion: Postcards in the Age of Globalization

Distant lands, and in particular the Indies, strike the judgement of those who encounter them at a distance as very strange... From this it follows that when they recognize that what is in them is new, it is as if, in reality they passed over into another world.14 - Antonio de Ulloa17

When I hold the postcard in my hand the paper is weighty and sturdy as if to remind me of its materiality. I study the image on one side and then turn the card around, consciously or unconsciously acknowledging through this act that the image is also an object. - Elizabeth Snow18

Our otherization is not lost on us.
We read rejection in an empty smile,
in weak acknowledgments of our
presence - Marie-Helene Laforest19

The imaging of Jamaica through postcards creates and reinforces powerful conceptualizations of the country and its people, an imaging directly tied to both projecting the fantasies of the tourist, and at once aiding in their creation. Through the increasing capacity for international travel and availability of internet access, postcards have become a multi-billion dollar industry. As Edwards notes, "as the availability of long-haul travel to 'exotic' locations increases so does the dependency on 'ethnographic' imagery to sell the product" (197). As a visual medium, postcards lend themselves to presenting imagery in a static and iconographic manner. In a general sense, they serve a purpose as souvenirs, with an implicit or explicit role in

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15 My emphasis.


17 Spanish explorer.


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tourism advertising, which function to sell locations by playing into popular perceptions and creating notions of difference that are appealing to viewers. This function is part of the inherent commodification process in which postcard imagery is presented and packaged for consumers. However, this does not exempt postcards from the power discourse through which they function. Instead, their fundamental role as commodities (souvenirs/advertisements) reinforces and recreates perceptions of the people and places within their subject matter. The ability to operate as instruments of dominant discourses and to exert influence themselves makes postcards a powerful medium in the formation of perceptions for the viewer. In this vein, the dominant discourses of “other”, “exotic” and “erotic” may be a common feature of postcard imagery.

However, the peculiar way in which they function in a Caribbean context, with the historical and socio-cultural specificities of the region, presents racial, ethnic, and gender dynamics that are unique. And too, certain images, such as Bob Marley and dreadlocks, are extremely specific to Jamaica itself.

As has been presented in this paper, the imagery of Jamaican postcards is in part filled with representations of African-Jamaican men, specifically those with dreadlocks. The connections made to Rastafarians with this imagery is more explicit when the focus is placed on Bob Marley as a recognizable Rastafarian and reggae star. However, images of Rastafarian (or even dreadlocked) women are clearly absent. This is perhaps reflective and reinforcing of certain patriarchal tones within Rastafarianism itself. Another possibility could be that dreadlocked women are not frequently perceived as sexually appealing to tourists, which would point towards European ideals of beauty (as in hairstyle) as predominant. A racial preponderance of African-Jamaicans is not as dominant in images of Jamaican women, however. The postcards of

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Jamaican women present them as sexual objects that are “exotic” and erotic. Overriding these images of Jamaican men and women, however, is the preponderance images of Jamaica without reference to its peoples. The tropical landscape of “paradise, as devoid of Jamaicans, is presented as both “exotic” and waiting for tourists to “explore” and enjoy.

Postcards, as a socio-cultural commodification, lay claim to “truths” through their appearance as both photographs and advertisements. They communicate to the consumer that these images are both “real”, through the use of photography as popularly conceived of as a “record” of reality, and available for the tourist to experience. As a form of advertisements, postcards then necessarily play on the pre-existing conceptions, desires, and fantasies of its target audience (tourists and potential tourists) by giving them visual form (Jhally 251). This process is mediated by viewer subjectivity, however, to the extent that one’s knowledge or experience of Jamaica is limited, these images may potentially have a larger impact on the viewer. The tourism industry in Jamaica (and tourism in general) then complicates this effect of media enculturation as negotiated by viewer subjectivity. Through catering to the desires of tourists, and in some sense seeking to fulfill the visions of their imaginations, tourism can reference and create the same perceptions that may have already been informed by the prevalence of commercial media, postcards included. These processes are both reinforcing and powerful in the amount of influence they are able to exert. The increasing mobility of travelers as the pace of globalization quickens has been coupled with the effect of media globalization that has culminated in the domination of commercialized media (Herman & McChesney 136). In terms of the imaging of Jamaica through postcards then, this globalizing process and the imagery it produces and disseminates is underpinned by powerful discourses that influence the way in

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which people “make sense of distant places” (Louw 200). It creates a space where “reality” is shaped, notions are reinforced, and identities are contested.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

A broader analysis of the visual imagery of Jamaica in the mass media could also include news media, movies, advertising, and music videos, in addition to postcards. Of particular interest might be how these images function in countries, such as Great Britain and the U.S., where large populations of Jamaican immigrants and people of Jamaican descent reside. This dynamic would also then incorporate discourses that function through realms of popular culture, and the developments in this area which have specifically contributed to the popularization of Jamaica through music videos and movies. This popularization could be looked at in relation to the imaging of Jamaica through the news media, which in the U.S. has tended to project images of poverty and violence, or has focused on the island as a tourist destination.

In addition, a more in-depth look could be given to how the cultural visual conceptions of tourists, as influenced by postcards, impact the tourism industry in Jamaica. This would include analyzing in what specific ways the tourism industry caters to tourist desires and perceptions, and also how it can possibly challenge preconceived notions. In Jamaica, where all-inclusive hotels are extremely popular, this dynamic of “enacting” and providing what the tourist wants (or any negotiation of their perceptions) is largely contained within the hotel atmosphere itself. The role of hotel entertainment, service, atmosphere, and especially the “cultural performances” that are acted out for guests of all-inclusives could be looked at in relation to the imagery of Jamaican postcards.

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A comparative study could be also done concerning the imaging of different Caribbean islands through postcards in relation to that of Jamaica. Such a study could illuminate common themes is the imaging of the Caribbean, and also differences due to ethnic and racial make-up, historical, cultural, and societal variables. Also the respective role of tourism in various Caribbean islands could be assessed in relation to their imaging through postcards.

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Works Cited


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Bibliographic Essay

In considering the visual imagery of mass media flows, globalization becomes an integral part of such an analysis because of the global nature of the mass media itself. For postcards, in particular, travel and tourism also become part of the processes of globalization, as people across the world are more readily coming in contact with one another. However, imagery is also able to flow across national borders through mediums such as television and film, all of which contributes to the increased accessibility and dissemination of visual imagery though globalization. For a basic definition and brief discussion of globalization the article “Globalization: What Is It?” (Porter, Keith. “Globalization: What Is It?” About, Inc. 2003. <www.globalization.about.com/cs/whatisit/htm>) offers a broad conceptual understanding. Globalization is also contextualized with historical relevance to emphasize its increasing prominence at present, which operates within economic, social, and cultural spheres.

Globalization is explored more in-depth in Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization by Arjun Appaduri (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.). In this book Appaduri offers a cultural study of globalization within a firm anthropological grounding. The main cultural dimensions of globalization which are examined include, mass migration, electronic mediation, popular consumption, and ethnic violence. Within all of these areas the construction of identities which are alternative to the nation-state are explored through the new resources of the social imagination that globalization creates. Anthony D. King deals with similar ideas of cultural globalization in his book Culture, Globalization, and the World-System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.). This book focuses on the effects of globalization on cultural practices

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and production throughout the world. Within this scope, race, gender, ethnicity, class, and nation
are looked at in the increasing tendency of these cultural dynamics to reach across traditional
nation-state boundaries. This book also provides a cultural studies framework for a study of
social systems in looking at how cultural meaning and representations are created.

More specifically, the mass media's role in global cultural flows is dealt with by Herman
and McChesney in their book *The Global Media: The New Missionaries of Global Capitalism*
(London (UK): Cassell, 1997). This book dissect the inner workings of the international mass
media industry, one in which trans-national corporations and international conglomerates are able
to exert enormous amounts of power over global media flows. A strength of this book is its focus
on telecommunications, and in particular the internet, as the forefront of mass media globalization.
The rise of commercial media and the relative U.S. domination of this area is considered in its
mass media effects, and also the ways in which local, national, and global resistance to these
forces are been formed.

This negotiation of representation and production in the media is further explored in
California: Pine Forge Press, 2002). In this book, Croteau and Hoynes investigate the sources
and influences that produce media images and what these images mean to the audiences that
receive them. This is one of the strengths of this book because it is able to break from the one-
dimensional view of how media influences society, and looks at how society in turn responds to
the media, and then comes to influence the production of media images themselves. This principle
also carries over into ideas of cultural globalization and the impact of the media on social
identities for viewers around the world and the extent to which they internalize the imaging of

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themselves and others. Spitulnik also treats the importance of mass media images, but through an anthropological viewpoint. In her article “Anthropology and the Mass Media” (Spitulnik, Debra. Annual Review of Anthropology Vol.22 (1993): 293-315.) she looks at the mass media as a simultaneous collection of artifacts, practices, experiences, and processes and the way they shape our cultural lives. This article also spends considerable time explaining mass media theories and how these methods of understanding can give deeper insight into the role of the mass media in culture. Globalization is also dealt with in the ways in which Western media plays into social relationships and social identities on national and international scopes.

Keeping within the realm of mass media and culture, John W. Ryan and William M. Wentworth look at the effects of the media on society in the creation of social perceptions and roles in their book Media and Society: The Production of Culture in the Mass Media (New Jersey: Pearson Allyn and Bacon, 1998.). Factors that influence media content are also evaluated for their contribution to social values and perspectives within this text. A strength of this book is its grounding in communication theory, which provides a framework for analysis of the influence of media sources and images on society. In relating to globalization this book also examines the pervasive effects of mass media communication in its ability to travel across national boundaries, and in the process influence social perceptions around the globe. The connection between media power and cultural production is also treated in The Media and Cultural Production by Eric Louw (Thousand Oaks (CA): Sage Publications, 2001.), in which the ways that meaning is created and contested in the media constitute the focus of the book. Communication theory is referenced in this book, along with a cultural studies framework, both of which assess the ways in which cultural industries operate and the impact of globalization in their functioning.

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A more nuanced cultural approach to examining the mass media is offered in *Gender, Race, and Class in Media* (Dines, Gail and Jean M. Humez, eds. California: Sage Publications, 2002). Issues of hegemony in media production and media consumption are used to explore the ways in which the mass media comes to frame the social realities of those who produce and receive its imagery and information. This book also does a good job of locating these issues within a socio-historical framework whereby it shows the mass media’s role in creating and perpetuating stereotypes of historically marginalized peoples. Appearing within this same vein is *Images That Injure: Pictorial Stereotypes in the Media, Second Edition* (Dente Ross, Susan and Paul Martin Lester. New York: Praeger Publishers, 2003). This book looks at the effects of deceptive and oversimplified media images of distinct groups of people. A strength of this book is its ability to effectively look at media sources that are relevant to a current study of visual culture in the 21st century, including internet, film, music videos, books, news media, advertisements, and television. This contemporary focus also reveals aspects of globalization that are necessarily a feature of the mass media today and its impacts worldwide on cultural conceptions.

In line with the role of the visual mass media in creating popular imagery of people and places, “Iconophobia” (Taylor, Lucien. *Transition* No.69 (1996): 64-88) examines the frequent occurrence in anthropological photography and film of making people and places into iconographic representations. This process is examined within the article as a limiting and potentially misleading communication of identity, which is affected by the photographic/film medium itself, as well as the photographer or film maker. Lucien does a good job of comparing and contrasting visual ethnography and anthropology with the textual counterparts of these areas of study to demonstrate the intense impact of visual iconography in one’s conceptualization of

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"others". The subjectivity of an artist, anthropologist, or ethnographer form one country to create images of people form another country or culture is shown to lead to a globalizing force of "static" images that become tools for people to create their perceptions.

The role of 'ethnographic' imagery also played a large role in the way in which the Caribbean, and other non-European countries, came to be imaged by European colonial powers. Alissandra Cummins investigates this theme in her article "Imaging the West Indies: Visual Iconography as the language of The Colonial Discourse" (AICA Southern Caribbean, Barbados (1998): 25-36), in which she examines the process of self-ascription whereby the Caribbean was imaged by Europeans in relation to the colonial discourses they espoused. The objectification and ethnographic categorization of people, places, and things in the Caribbean is revealed in the first images of the New World brought back to Europe in the form of print-making and later through photography. This article provides a basis for any study of Caribbean visual production in terms of its historical grounding and the origin of the colonial influences that have permeated such imagery. Colonial influences in pictorial imaging is carried through by Beth Fowkes Tobin's examinations of this theme in her book Picturing Imperial Power: Colonial Subjects in 18th Century British Painting (Durham (NC): Duke University Press, 1999). The processes of "extoityfying" and "othering" colonial subjects are explored within the social-cultural dynamics of colonialism, and its consequent impact on the visual representations of British colonies. Tobin is able to astutely draw links between these cultural discourses and the economic underpinnings of colonialism to reveal the multi-faceted insertions of power into the imagery. Within all of these processes special attention is paid to the Caribbean in its colonial imaging and the inherent suppression of subjective identities involved in a process of categorizing people and places into

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supposedly representative “types”.

Simon Taylor extends the anthropological images of Caribbean “types” into a discussion of the impact of such images on viewers. In his article “Todd Ayoung: Decolonizing the Mind” (Third Text (1995): 53-66), Taylor describes the reification process in which colonial visual art was able to objectify the people of the Caribbean within narratives that created difference in the mind of the viewer between themselves and the people in those images. This feature of exoticism is explained in terms of the resultant constructions of identity, race, gender, and sexuality which formed in the process of creating and viewing this imagery. “Filth in the Wrong People’s Hands: Postcards and the Expansion of Pornography in Britain and the Atlantic World, 1880-1914” (Sigel, Lisa Z. Journal of Social History Vol. 33 No.4 (Summer 2000): 859-885), presents a further investigation of these dynamics within the medium of colonial postcards. The focus of this article is primarily concerned with the objectification of women in visual imagery of the mass media, which is looked at in one of its earliest phases. A strength of this article is the locating of feminine imagery within a colonial discourse that links the objectification of women with the creation of cultural notions of “exotic” and “other”, which Siegel describes as the “imperial gaze”. This article also deals with issues of cultural globalization in that it looks at postcards as a medium of communication between Britain and the Atlantic World.

Although in a less Caribbean specific approach, “Postscript to a Postcard” by Rachael Snow (Afterimage Vol.29 No.6 (2002):6) continues in a discussion of the explicit and latent messages that are communicated through visual imagery, which within this article is looked at specifically in terms of the medium of postcards. Snow holds viewers of postcards as active participants in deriving meaning from the images that confront them, and in this way they are able

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to create meaning. A key feature of this article is looking at the way in which postcards are consumed, which is often in a decontextualized manner that allows one to make implications and assumptions about the people, places, and cultures represented in these images. This also ties into ideas of globalization because these images are circulated around the world and viewed as representative or even definitive of the people and places they depict.

When looking at the mass media forms that have been mentioned thus far, it is relevant to look at them within theories of visual culture that are able to integrate these various forms into cohesive conceptual frameworks. Lisa Cartwright and Marita Sturken provide such a framework in the book *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture* (Oxford (UK): Oxford University Press, 2001) in their treatment of the relationships between the mass media and the public sphere in looking at how visual culture is created and viewed by the public. Within this approach, power relationships between producers and viewers are also explored to show how the potential impact of visual culture can be manipulated and (re)interpreted. A strength of this book is its ability to locate its arguments within a contemporary framework that relates visual culture to the development of pop culture and postmodernism. In this regard, the book also deals with cultural globalization and the process by which global flows distribute visual images of diverse peoples that affect the “cultural imaginings” of their viewers.

Gillian Rose offers another conceptual framework to mass media imagery in her book *Visual Methodologies* (London (UK): Sage Publications Ltd., 2001.). The focus within this book is on methods of visual analysis, which incorporates compositional interpretation, psychoanalysis, and discourse analysis. These approaches to looking at visual imagery help to decipher the meanings and power of images. However, when interpreting images it is also important to use

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cultural frameworks. For a specific discussion of mass media images in Jamaica these frameworks must also address the racial, class, gender, and identity politics of a Caribbean context. In *Race, Class and Gender in the Future of the Caribbean* (Greene, Edward J, ed. Mona (Jamaica): The University of the West Indies Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1993) these social factors are considered both in their historical development and how they have been reshaped over time to organize Caribbean society. This book provides background into the internal and globalizing forces that have, and continue, to shape the construction of race, class, and gender in the Caribbean. M.G. Smith, in his book *Culture, Race, and Class in the Commonwealth Caribbean* (Mona (Jamaica): University of the West Indies, 1984) also provides an examination of the ways in which these factors inform Caribbean society. This book also serves as good source for a cultural approach to interpreting the functioning of visual images in their representations of identity.

Race, gender, class, and sexuality are looked at in *Feminism and History* (Wallach Scott, Joan, ed. New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 1996) as interwoven dynamics in a feminist perspective. This book provides essays on these topical areas that also develop their definition as useful and important categories of analysis. This book does an especially good job of stressing the interconnectedness of all of these socio-cultural constructions and locating them within historical, national, and international frames of reference.

Marie-Helene Laforest touches on similar issues of identity politics, however, with a specific focus on the Caribbean and the Caribbean diaspora, which appear in the book *Diasporic Encounters Remapping the Caribbean* (Napoli (Italy): Universitario Orientale, 2000). The approach to Caribbean culture that appears in this book emphasizes the aspect of hybridity.
through a socio-historical lens to explain how Caribbean culture is shaped and reshaped by the multitude of influences that encompass a ‘remapping of the Caribbean’. In relation to globalization, Laforest, devotes considerable attention to discussing the Caribbean as a “traveling culture” that is carried through movements of people, information, and ideas.

Moving from a Caribbean context to a specifically Jamaican one, the areas of culture and tourism figure prominently into discussions of the visual imaging of Jamaican through postcards. *Culture and Customs of Jamaica* (Mordecai, Martin and Pamela Mordecai. Westport (CT): Greenwood Press, 2001.) provides a background to the country and its people. This book touches on some of the main areas of Jamaican culture, such as music and religion, however, it serves best as an overview of these areas, rather than giving in-depth discussions. For a extensive discussion of historical and cultural developments with relation to tourism in Jamaica, *To Hell With Paradise: A History of the Jamaican Tourist Industry* by Frank Fonda Taylor (Pittsburgh: The University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993) provides a detailing of the foundations of the tourism industry through its present day role as the largest industry on the island. In this capacity, postcard imagery (examples of which are offered with this book) as part and parcel of tourism can be traced through Taylor’s critical examination of the social, cultural, and economic impacts of the industry.

Sex tourism, as a component of the Jamaican tourist experience, is dealt with in “In Search of the Big Bamboo” by Klaus de Albuquerque (*Transition* No.77 (1998):48-57). In this article the construction of Jamaican male masculinity in the Caribbean is looked at through the lense of sex and sexuality. The article investigates the reasons behind perceptions of Caribbean men as sexually virile on a national and international scope, focusing to a large extent on the prevalence

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of sexual tourism in the region. Although, not the main vein of this article, it does give mention to forms of mass media representations that reinforce and aid in creating tourist perceptions. An essay by Elizabeth Edwards entitled “Postcards: Greetings From Another World”, which appears in *The Tourist Image: Myths and Myth Making in Tourism* (New York: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 1996) draws attention to postcards and other forms of tourism advertisements that operate within discourses of power that tend to exotify ethnographic images. This process is discussed within the critical role of postcards within the politics of representation. Within this line of discussion postcards appear in their ability to create images which at once confront the viewer and seek to convince she or he of the ‘truth’ of their representation. This discussion of postcards is then also applicable to the imaging of Jamaica, and the impact of postcards as a representational form that are consumed and distributed around the world through the increasing mobility of people and media in the globalizing conditions that permeate the world.