

Among Her Kinswomen: Legacies of Free Women of Color in Jamaica
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Abstract:

Property ownership enabled free Jamaican women of color to shape the contours of their commercial and kinship networks even as they perpetuated the bondage of others. In this slave society, the liberties free women enjoyed rested upon the subjugation of others, whom they held as property. Free women of color profited from the slave economy. Yet their wills demonstrate that working within the system of slavery also enabled them to resist it, creating zones of enslavement that were at odds with the expectations of white rulers in order to free and protect kin. Property ownership and control over its distribution allowed free women of color to carve out an autonomous space for themselves and their heirs in an otherwise hostile white supremacist society. Using this space, they actively constructed an alternative political reality that, over several generations, whittled away at the parameters of white hegemony. Analyzing what slave ownership meant for women of color and how they successfully navigated within the system of slavery to liberate and protect their kin and friends adds complexity to scholarly understanding of free people of color's politics, black resistance, and the role of people of African descent in the process of emancipation across the Americas.