

Proceedings of the Ninth Annual Gilder Lehrman Center International Conference at Yale University, co-sponsored by the Yale Center for British Art

The Legacies of Slavery and Emancipation: Jamaica in the Atlantic World

November 1-3, 2007
Yale University
New Haven, Connecticut

Accessory/Accessories: Or What's in Your Closet?

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Available online at <http://www.yale.edu/glc/belisario/archerstraw.pdf>

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'I'm gonna wear you to the ball tonight, put on your best dress tonight...'

U Roy (1972)

In this paper, I respond to the aesthetics of dance hall, its crude cultural dissonances, its ambivalent male posturing and violent outpourings, as part of a larger discussion about caricatures, stereotypes and travesty using a handful of images for support. I want to briefly question why relationships between blacks and whites are stereotypical and unchanging and the way that they are still shaping our discussions about identity. To do this, we need to 'sample' visual culture like a game of hide and seek, dodging between eras and styles to reveal how issues of identity linked to power, place, sexuality, and violence have been consistent within Caribbean history. Regularly our national institutions tell us that Jamaicans did not figure in our art until modern times, but I believe we have been searching in the wrong places. Images proliferate within popular culture and despite their vulgar and pejorative nature we must begin to track and reread them. It's a trail that spans past and present and calls for an examination of both the black and white psyche, but more importantly, it calls for an examination of our sense

of loss and desire for otherness.

I want to briefly question why relationships between blacks and whites are stereotypical and unchanging and the way that they are still shaping our discussions about artistic identity. "Accessory/Accessories", explores this issue of repetition making links between slavery, Belisario, Jamaican dance hall culture and dress. Through a truncated discussion about the body, clothing and race, I want to suggest that legacies of slavery are still playing themselves out in dynamic and queer ways. Like your jacket and tie or my uniform black garb, I want to show that we all participate in rituals of dress and forms of public performance. As we explore trace the history of certain stereotypes within New World and Caribbean history from the 15th century through to present day and the outrages of Jamaican dance hall, I want to ask the question, what's in your closet?