

Paper Abstract

This paper seeks to demonstrate how queer black bodies are archived and *language*d by *sex*, a term coined by Faith Smith, that alludes to the multivalent discourses (i.e. political, economic, cultural, racial, legal, etc.) that surround “legitimate” sexualities and the back-and-forth flow of ideas that serve as notions of identification for who Caribbean people are and who they can be.¹ This paper uses four case studies to achieve this aim: how “Quasheba” women in post-slavery Jamaica operationalized black motherhood as a political weapon; how black masculinity was refracted through colonial notions of racial hierarchies and militarism following the Haitian Revolution; the invasive “Touristic” foreign gaze levelled at the “exotic” black people of Haiti and Jamaica during the early twentieth century; and, Jamaican ragga women’s subversion of “proper,” colonialist femininity through the sexual and suggestive gyrations of their dance. This essay refracts these individual categories through the prism of (sexual) citizenship: this category examines the positions of free subjects, freed women and men of the African Diaspora, who at times had to (indeed, want to) perform normative scripts of this kind of citizenship such as the good mother, the respectable woman, the worthy Christian, or the father of the family. Freedom for these children of the diaspora was often a precarious enterprise, one that was informed by conquest and colored by its aftermath. In other words, Afro-descended Jamaicans, Haitians, and other black Caribbean peoples were compelled to adopt or modify colonialist conceptions of citizenship and civilization to survive, even as slavery was dismantled as an institution. This paper proposes a comparative component between Jamaica and Haiti, and the accompanying models of citizenship that brokered inclusion or exclusion for queer black people in these two countries. I define queerness as an oddity, a discomfort, a non-programmatic interruption of the “normal” (too often conditioned and arbitrated in and by society) that demands to be met on its own terms and merits its own discourse. In destabilizing the notion that the African Diaspora was (mostly) a movement of enslaved and forcefully/voluntarily removed peoples, this essay argues that black people are a *queer* people, in general, in their ontological conception courtesy of European hegemony and racial theories that invariably made Afro-descended people an “other,” an inferior, specimen of indeterminate status that could never correlate with being fully human, and therefore, fully valued.

¹ Faith Smith, ed., “Introduction: Sexing the Citizen,” in *Sex and the Citizen: Interrogating the Caribbean* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 1.