

Jamaican Women and the World Wars

Dalea Bean

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On the Front Lines of Change

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To the foremothers who knew that the sky was no limit

FOREWORD

I am honoured to have been asked to contribute in this small way to Dr. Dalea Bean's first book. It is always pleasing when professors see their former students and research assistants progress in their discipline and make the transition from graduate students to published authors. Dr. Bean has made this transition. I watched her at every step of the way, especially as I eventually joined her (as her Director this time), in the Institute for Gender and Development Studies, where we continued a relationship that started in the Department of History and Archaeology at the University of the West Indies. She spent a considerable time furthering her original Ph.D. research, inspired by work done by her history teacher mother, until she was satisfied that she was ready to share with the academy the output of her research on a comparatively under-researched topic in Jamaican, wider Caribbean and above all, British history. The result is a fine exposition of the participation of Jamaican women in a near global struggle that some refer to as 'Civil Wars with the European community of nations', most as World Wars I and II. This is not just a history book though; it represents the intersection of military history, gender studies and feminist discourse, located within the broader discourses of colonialism and decoloniality.

The participation of Jamaicans, in particular African-Jamaicans, in armed conflicts as combatants or in non-combative war efforts is not new. The pages of Jamaica's history are dotted with accounts of the island's peoples participation in various wars, be they anti-conquest, anti-slavery, anti-colonial or pro-colonizer. It is no secret that anti-slavery

wars, for example, were the staple of the colonial experience from 1655 to 1832; and they were not exclusively male battles. Enslaved African women were a part of the eighteenth-century Maroon Wars as well as the 1831–1832 Emancipation War and were also a part of Paul Bogle’s army in the 1865 Morant Bay war. They were as exploited as men, although in different ways, and were as insistent that liberation and justice were their right. Some of these men and women even fought on the side of Britain during these conflicts, earning small rewards, signalling that loyalty to Britain was not confined to the post-slavery period.

Within the pages of Dalea Bean’s *Jamaican Women and the World Wars: On the Front Lines of Change*, is yet another account of how the island’s men and women were caught up in a war, this time a global struggle on the side of a country they regarded as the Mother Country, however uncaring and promiscuous she may have been, leaving her exploited ‘children’ all over the region and abandoning them once they had provided what was needed. One would have expected a people emerging out of slavery and still oppressed in the pre-independence period by the same enslaving nation to have been loath to get involved in a war on the side of that nation, especially as it the battles were far removed geographically from their own space. But it is a curious part of Caribbean history that there have always been, and no doubt still are, those who have loyalty to Britain. The author in fact addresses it this way: ‘Given the long history of British colonisation of the island and the conflict-ridden nature of the relationship with Jamaica up to independence, it is curious that Britain would expect loyalty from her colonial subjects’. But Britain not only expected but received such loyalty, much to the chagrin of others who thought it possible to exploit the colonial past to their advantage. Indeed, there appeared to be no need to enforce conscription. Those who were loyal were not only men; and Dr. Bean uses gendered lens to explore the differences and similarities in participation and the gendered rhetoric of loyalty.

The author examines the context of women’s participation, the ways in which Jamaican women helped to mobilise support for the wars, the nature of their support (cash and kind), their actual role on the side of Britain (combative and non-combative), and the inevitable fall-out that their experiences abroad created, described by the author as ‘a complex milieu of burgeoning nationalism, race consciousness and at times, out-right dissent against the British Empire.’

The book answers questions such as which women volunteered for action? In other words, how did class, race and gender intersect to determine who served? Chap. 4 is intriguing. It not only provides a chronology of recruitment events; it analyses the gendered rhetoric that became a very real part of the movement to motivate men to enlist, including feminizing them to shame them into enlisting. The book also looks at the impact of the war on Jamaica during the conflicts as well as in the post-war era. After 1938, the political landscape clearly changed, reflected most palpably in the franchise movement. If women could go to war they could surely vote; and universal adult suffrage did allow women excluded from the early twentieth-century vote on the right of elite women to participate fully in the political process. But as in the debate over whether or not women should go to war and whether, once they actually joined the war effort they should fight or be confined to domestic roles and provide ‘comforts’ for the men in combat, the local suffragette movement was affected by gender discourses about women’s ‘proper role’ in society. These debates did not end in 1945 but continued way after the conflicts ended. Indeed, the book provides the historical background and context for the contemporary discussions about gender equality/equity/parity, patriarchal ideology and the so-called ‘male marginalisation thesis.’ So, in the end, the big question posed by the author is ‘Did women’s experiences in the period 1914–1945 represent continuity or change, liberation or new constraints?’ The process of finding answers makes for a fascinating read in a work that is methodologically rigorous and grounded in sound archival and secondary sources.

I have no doubt that this will only be the first of several books to be written by the author. She is passionate about her discipline, has a veritable archive of works in progress and is determined to ensure that under-represented aspects of Caribbean history are excavated, exposed and, above all, subjected to clear gender analysis.

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PREFACE

In 2002 as a new M.Phil student in the Department of History and Archaeology at the University of the West Indies (UWI) Mona, with a passion for the past and no research topic to speak of, I went on a journey to ascertain what aspects of Jamaican history still lay buried in dusty archives and private recollections. After many weeks at libraries and reading countless volumes of history books, I found that the answer was sitting at home all along. Ten years prior, my mother, Gloria Bean, produced a masters thesis on the ways in which the *Daily Gleaner* shaped Jamaica's response to World War II. After reading the work it struck me that she mentioned women a total of five times throughout the work; all critical points, but made in passing. Was there more to the story of women making bandages, knitting socks and sending men off to serve in armies? Indeed there was and, as the saying goes, the rest is literally history. From those points a proposal emerged for a study, which was eventually upgraded to a PhD completed in 2007. A decade of gender and development experience later, that study, which built on my mother's arduous work has evolved into the book *Jamaican Women and the World Wars: On the Front Lines of Change*.

The process regarding the evolution of this area of study closely mirrors the way Jamaican women responded to the wars. Faced with new, frightening and exciting opportunities provided by 'white men's wars', many Jamaican women made deliberate decisions to prove their worth to a fledgling Empire and a burgeoning nation, building on the work of women before them to create an army of women who wittingly and (and

sometimes unwittingly) utilised the wars as their foundation for empowerment. Predicated on the notion that warfare has historically been an agent of change, I contend that traces of this truism were in Jamaica and illustrates that women have historically been part of the war project, both as soldiers and civilians. The book identifies the nature of involvement of Jamaican women in the conflicts and argues that the conflicts undoubtedly positively influenced the changing roles and status of Jamaican women as part of the wider processes of change that occurred in the twentieth century. By presenting a nuanced view of Jamaican women and their relationship to warfare, the work reveals that Jamaican women's involvement and experiences during World Wars I and II are crucial to any examination of the factors that influenced their status during the twentieth century. The work not only highlights the work of women in relation to the wars, but also assesses ways in which race, class and gender shaped Jamaica's place in the transatlantic prosecution of war.

Jamaican women's contribution to the war efforts and to their own empowerment was buried deep in the annals of history; in reels of old (and sometimes illegible) newspapers, private colonial correspondences, in personal accounts and in answers to questions no one thought of asking. The result of the years of excavation is an analysis of the response of Jamaican women to World War I (1914–1918) and World War II (1939–1945) in eight chapters. These chapters assess the response of Jamaica to the conflicts, the organisation of women's war work during World War I, the importance of gender in the recruitment of men for the British West India Regiment and the rocky road to enfranchising women in the post World War I era. Specific to World War II, the work addresses continuity and change in women's roles between 1939 and 1945 and assesses the experiences of those who served in the British Army. The work closes with a conclusion, which pulls the main themes of the book together while making the claim that Jamaican women were not the same in 1945 as they were in 1914 and that wars contributed greatly to the substantial shifts. The original thesis also investigated the ways in which some women's bodies were policed and branded as dangerous to military efficacy because of the assumption that they spread venereal diseases to 'innocent' soldiers. However this has been omitted from this text to facilitate an independent yet parallel investigation into wartime sexual liaisons in the circum-Caribbean after suitable time has passed to ensure recovery from the assorted hazards of historical research and manuscript writing.

It is hoped that my humble attempt to unearth new information about Jamaican womanhood will enlighten, spark debate and rekindle interest in the experiences of those who served causes greater than themselves, whether we believe these causes were just or not. College level students should find it useful for history, women/gender and development studies, international relations, and social policy post-graduate and undergraduate degrees. It is also aimed at scholars and intellectuals who keep up to date with work that revises or seeks to destabilise previous notions about Jamaican history. Perhaps most importantly, it is my hope that the work will be of great interest to those thousands of Caribbean nationals who either served in the wars, or whose relatives were involved with the efforts at various levels.

As adage goes, ‘no man is an island’ and while women do sometimes exhibit superior qualities to men; indeed, no woman should stand-alone. I certainly have benefitted from a community of love and encouragement as well as moral and financial support, without which this work would not have seen the light of day. I owe a debt of gratitude to my parents, Errol and Gloria Bean whose unfailing love and earnest prayers are my main sources of strength and inspiration. Thanks also to Professor Verene Shepherd who not only agreed to supervise the PhD thesis when I met her in the Department of History at UWI Mona, but who has continued to be a chief mentor and supporter of my academic career as the University Director of the Institute for Gender and Development Studies, where we serendipitously continued our journey. A special thanks to my many friends and family whose faith in me has been invaluable and who have offered useful opinions on the work. These include: Dr. Nicole Plummer, Joan Vaval, Dr. Chantal Dufreny, Jonathan Vaval, Diedre Callam, Debbie Harris, Diana Spencer, Kamoy Douglas-Clarke among many others. Special thanks to Dr. Andrew Spencer, whose encouragement pushed me to continue when quitting seemed like the most viable option. Special mention must also be made of Dr. Reena Goldthree with whom I often navigate the world of world war scholarship and who has afforded me many academic opportunities at various universities. I will be forever grateful to the six brave women who served in British and Canadian armies and graciously shared their stories of service with me: Ena Colllymore-Woodstock OD, Norma Wint, Doreen Rickards, Olga Shervington, Beverly Marsh and Kitty Cox.

I must thank the Department of History and Archaeology, UWI Mona who greatly supported the PhD from which this work emanated as

well as the Office of Graduate Studies and Research, UWI Mona which offered me a scholarship and access to the Research and Publication Fund which facilitated an invaluable research trip to London. I am also grateful to professors and colleagues at the regional Institute for Gender and Development Studies who have shaped my understanding of critical Gender issues. I am also grateful to the staff of the following institutions: Imperial War Museum, (London), National Library of Jamaica, Jamaica National Archives, British Library, The UWI Mona and St Augustine Libraries, CODESRIA Senegal and Palgrave Macmillan.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ATS	Auxiliary Territorial Service
BBJ	Blue Books of Jamaica
BITU	Bustamante Industrial Trade Union
BWIR	British West Indies Regiment
CO	Colonial Office
CSO	Colonial Secretary's Office Records
CWAC	Canadian Women's Army Corps
FANY	First Aid Nursing Yeomanry
HBJ	Hand Book of Jamaica
IWM	Imperial War Museum
JDP	Jamaica Democratic Party
JLP	Jamaica Labour Party
JPL	Jamaica Progressive League
KSAC	Kingston and St Andrew Corporation
LAB	Labour and Employment Records
MBE	Order of the British Empire
NAAFI	The Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
OD	Order of Distinction (Jamaican National Honour)
PNP	People's National Party
RAF	Royal Air Force
UNIA	Universal Negro Improvement Association
USO	United Service Organisation
UWI	University of the West Indies
WAA	War Work Association
WAAF	Women's Auxiliary Air Force

WLC	Women's Liberal Club
WO	War Office
WRNS/WRENS	Women's Royal Navy Service
WSSC	Women's Social Service Club
WVS	Women's Voluntary Services

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