

# CARIBBEAN QUARTERLY

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## Unraveling Gender, Development and Civil Society in the Caribbean

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## From Nielsen Estate to Africa House: Ed"we"cation and Male/Female Relations in Rural Woodside, Jamaica

by

CATHERINE JOHN

“Slave before  
mi ben slave before  
mi nuh slave no more  
bury mi foot chain  
bury mi foot chain  
down eena market square”  
- Emancipation folksong

This essay will address the relationship between development and gender relations in rural Woodside, Jamaica. Woodside faces some of the typical issues devastating rural communities globally. These include the decline of agriculture, natural disasters, a narrow range of social and economic options for its residents, youth unemployment and underemployment which may result in teen pregnancy, involvement in illegal activity, depression and/or departure from the family and community. Yet with the help of local historian Erna Brodber, Woodside has struggled to build and sustain some unique village institutions which at least partially respond to these ongoing crises. These include the Woodside Community Development Action Group (WCDAG), an Educo-tourism program, an indigenous Emancipation celebration, an Emancipation Summer School, five or six small businesses and most recently, the You/We Shared Learning Institute. As an outsider who has been semi-adopted by members of the Woodside community I have had the opportunity, during five consecutive summers, to observe the dynamics of male and female behavior between community members, within community organizations, as well as between residents and visitors from outside. This paper therefore, will describe both these gendered behaviors and the logic behind them as I see it, as well as how these dynamics relate to the community's struggle towards self-sustaining cultural and economic development.

### Woodside and Me

I first went to Woodside in the summer of 2000, during a reunion of my mother's extended family in Jamaica. Cousins, aunts, and uncles from all over the island as well as Canada and the U.S. came together for a week of celebration. My sister and I were taken to Woodside by a friend of mine and her husband, in order to introduce me to Erna Brodber, scholar extraordinaire, whose work I was familiar with, and who had made a lasting impression on me some four years earlier. I had migrated at fourteen years of age to

Boston, Massachusetts with my immediate family where I finished high school and college before attending graduate school in California. In 1996 while I was doing a dissertation year fellowship in Santa Barbara, I attended a conference in honor of Rex Nettleford at U.W.I.'s Mona campus in Kingston. There, I heard Prof. Erna Brodber deliver a keynote address entitled, "Re-engineering Black Space." In it, she stated that we as Black people needed to "complete the task of emancipation" and she charged that 'un-schooled intellectuals had done more to further this goal than so-called schooled intellectuals.' She challenged "ivory-towerites" to give our children more than slavery to carve out "a Black space in this white world."

Brodber's speech made a profound impression on me and it shaped the subject matter of the first article that I published three years later. At the end of her speech I distinctly remember half the audience standing and applauding while the other half sat and refused to clap at all. I had attended the talk with a noted female Caribbean scholar who was part of the group who chose to sit without applauding. She told me afterwards that she was disturbed by Brodber's seemingly exclusive focus on Blackness at a time when the creolized nature of Caribbean populations was being championed and celebrated, as she saw it, in academia and elsewhere. A year after hearing Brodber speak, I was in the throws of writing my dissertation when I finally read her short text *Perceptions of Caribbean Women: Towards a Documentation of Stereotypes*. This study was published by the Institute of Social and Economic Research with a poignant introduction by Trinidadian writer Merle Hodge. Despite having read what I felt were hundreds of essays dealing with feminism and gender identity from scholars of all backgrounds, this short text, and Hodge's five page introduction did more than any other single piece of literature that I had read up to that point towards developing my understanding of the relationship among gender, class, and culture on the one hand, and my own social formation as a Black Caribbean woman on the other.

Hodge in her introduction summarized Brodber's research under two analytic categories, presumably of her own creation: "the mores of the tribe" and "the fair lady in a fine castle." Describing white, Black, Indian, and mulatto women in the early Caribbean context, Hodge zeroed in on Black women's behavior and roles as historically the most defiant and uncontrollable. The "fair lady in the fine castle" referred to stereotypical female behaviors coming out of the upper class British colonial context and presumably traceable back to the great house during the period of enslavement. These behaviors included frailty, emotional weakness, as well as marriage to, and financial and psychological dependence on one man. On the other hand, "the mores of the tribe" referred to behaviors that Black women had learned from having to survive life on the actual plantation, during and after slavery. These included, emotional and physical strength, no real dependence on any one man (the suggestion being that no man or several men may be a part of a woman's life at any given time), and an overwhelming focus on the survival of self and children by any means.

Hodge described Black women as struggling between these two roles with the characteristics associated with the lady becoming more dominant as mothers pushed their

daughters towards formal education and social mobility. This meant involvement with an official culture whose mores were determined by and large by European history and traditions rather than by the African background of the formerly enslaved and recently emancipated Black populace. This also meant that Black women would develop a contradictory relationship to the very physical and emotional characteristics of strength that had been their salvation during slavery, due to the colonial and neo-colonial society's definitions of womanhood and ladylike behavior. Further, an anxiety about sexual expressiveness would be linked to the overpowering plantation stereotype of Black women as sexually loose. On the other hand, repression of the corporeal freedom associated with various African cultures would be the price that the middle class Black female would pay to acquire social status on the terms of the colonial and postcolonial society's official institutions of church and school. Corporeal and sexual freedom would therefore be somewhat pathologized and associated with women from the struggling classes.

I saw the genealogy of my own formation in the pages of Brodber's text and Hodge's summary analysis. It explained to me the differences between the social culture of the Jamaican middle and upper middle class and the everyday sufferers and strugglers; the differences between the housewives and working professional women in urban areas and their helpers. It also explained to me the differences between urban and rural space. It helped to explain to me why my mother inadvertently raised me to be coy and sheepish of anything associated with an overt expression of sexual desire but at the same time showed me how to multi-task and successfully handle the multiplicity of roles, chores, and personas that seem to be the rule rather than the exception of Black female survival in societies and contexts that had carved out no real space for our existence. It was these emerging realizations that had shaped the foundations of who I was when I first went to meet Sister Erna.

Woodside community is located in the hills of rural Jamaica, in lower St. Mary, bordering the parish of St. Catherine about twenty minutes drive from the commercial district of Highgate. During the period of enslavement it was one of several adjoining districts that comprised the Nielsen coffee estate. My first impression of Woodside on that afternoon in July was that it was a peaceful place with serene energy. I never grew up in the country and I had hardly spent any substantive time there. In fact I had had a history of being afraid of the dark and of quiet. Erna's expansive brown wooden house sat on a hill overlooking an open field to the right, behind the house there was a mountain range going off to the side. I remember thinking when I sat on her porch for the first time that I needed to stop and take stock of my life. I remember feeling like this was a place where one could get in touch and in tune with one's life and life purpose. And it was this energy combined with the quiet determined presence of Sister Erna that compelled me to return to Woodside the following March for a week and then the following summer for two months.

I had also entered into discussions with Sister Erna and discovered that she and various members of the community had established an educo-tourism program in the 1980s which involved university student visitors from abroad coming and staying for several weeks in the homes of local residents. They paid room and board and learned about the

rural environment while also sharing their culture with the community. This brought a certain degree of income to residents who had homes capable of accommodating students. Other male residents of the community garnered some extra income by taking these students on tours of local swimming holes, rivers, caves and other sites of historic ecological significance within the community. While hosting students had brought certain benefits to the community, the majority of student visitors were white and Sister Erna was interested in developing a program called *black space*, one which would involve interactions amongst those of us who were the descendants of enslaved Africans. I promised to assist her in this venture as well as in the project of helping to teach in the Emancipation summer school which had been established several years before.

### Male and Female Roles in Woodside

"The women of [this community] are very typical Black women. Most of the women in this region of Jamaica are extremely hardworking. The strength and endurance I see in them far surpasses that of [women] who have grown to adulthood in a more comfortable and convenient environment. I hear stories daily of how life was here and how it has changed with the changing times. Walking six miles a day, carrying water to and fro for sometimes miles, cooking, bathing, washing, cleaning, farming, child-rearing, and building; always thanking God. I do not see women rest here. I am sure they do, but all I see are daily tasks being done, not wearily, but with pride and joy. While riding one day we picked up an older woman wearing a long denim skirt, a floral print shirt, [and] sandals, with a machete in hand. I was told that the woman was knocking on eighty years of age and was coming home from her "bush!" With the ease of most twenty-year-olds, she hopped on the back of the truck along with the other men who had been in the "bush" all day. She had no signs of arthritis, back pain or any other element that would have prevented her from clearing the back of the truck. She is no isolated case." - Amber Jackson, Summer 2002

In 2002, I brought four African American students to Woodside, two male and two female, to participate in a month long course practicum that had been jointly organized by Sister Erna and myself. The above is an excerpt from a comparative gender analysis essay that one of the female students wrote near the end of her stay. This student seemed to have developed an appreciation bordering on awe for the strength of the women she encountered in this environment. Although she did not make explicit comparisons between what she saw in the community and the multiplicity of tasks Black women in her home environment probably handle, her statement that these women are "very typical Black women" implies that there are comparable examples of strength.

When I came to Woodside for that first summer in 2001, I stayed with Mrs. P and Mas' B; Mrs. P was the treasurer for the Woodside Action Group and was also the head of accommodations for the educo-tourism program. As long time residents of Woodside, Mas' B had grown up there in a house one hundred feet from the one he built himself while Mrs. P had moved to Woodside as a young woman. As a young man Mas' B had "made life" through a combination of local farming during the era when "banana was king" and participation in migrant farm labour programs in the U.S. during the 1950s and 1960s. He had many stories from his time abroad about race relations, cultural differences amongst

Black people, and the dramas of man/woman relations in that era. Mrs. P, on the other hand was born and raised in Belfield, St. Mary, and had never traveled beyond the boundaries of the island.

Her ongoing tasks entailed running the local shop they owned located under their house, feeding some of the animals, preparing several meals a day and cleaning, attending to Mas' B's health needs, walking deep into the bush to pick herbs to make tea for various ailments, washing clothes by hand, purchasing supplies for her home and shop in Highgate every Friday, walking half mile up the hill at least once a week to attend meetings at the community center, being the "head cook and bottle washer" for food preparation when day-trip visitors came to the community, organizing the householders who accommodated students and other long-term visitors, overseeing the free-will feast that fed the crowd during the emancipation celebration, writing letters on behalf of community members, teaching literacy to young children, rearing and supporting extended family members who stayed at her home from time to time, as well as acting in her capacity as Justice of the Peace within the village.

Mrs. P was a matriarch of sorts within the community and I saw that people both feared and respected her. She was real country woman; she came from a generation that only wore skirts and dresses, never pants, no matter how strenuous and outdoorsy the work became. She also did not drive although she had the opportunity to learn. She told me over and over that she counted women's worth in terms of their ability to do hard work. She was a member of the Anglican Church and a churchgoer but she also told me about river spirits that existed in the community, about men and women who had power, claimed to have power, and how one got power. She told me the names of dishes that dated back to slavery days and how you cooked them. She and Mas' B talked about duppies they had met and duppies they had heard about, old-time African religions, and the songs and dances associated with them. The more they thought you understood the more they told you; conversely, the less they thought you understood the less they told you. They both knew the history of the parish intimately and appeared to have the ability to name every district and hamlet.

Mas' B's days, since his health had deteriorated, consisted of waking up early, taking his goats out to pasture, doing some light farming, getting his insulin shots and eating his meals. He told me that in his more active days, he often cooked dinner for the family when Mrs. P and her niece were out working or busy. Other than that, he frequently sat outside the shop watching people come and go and holding long conversations with men from the community, some of whom he had hired to work on his farm. Big Man, King and Tiny were three such men. Big Man was single and lived up the road. He was a somewhat older man whose strength and physical fitness defied his age. I had seen him do heavy construction on the road through the village when it was rebuilt in 2001, and hard farm labor. He also helped Mrs. P in the house with cooking from time to time if she was short-handed. I realized that unlike men from the elite classes in the urban areas, most country men could cook, clean, wash, and do any of the chores associated with domestic life as well as any woman. They would typically choose to do other forms of labor, however, if

women were available to assist them. The vast majority of Big Man's interactions with me consisted of him telling me scandalous, tall tales about his sexual exploits.

Mrs. P's persona reminded me very much of Hodge's "mores of the tribe female." Although she had never worn pants a day in her life, and to a casual visitor her domestic chores would fit into a traditional division of labor along gender lines, she was no fainting violet. She told me that her street was called "Thatcher Row" because the women purportedly dominated the men. She also told me that it was unwise to marry a man without first trying out the equipment, and I pitied the fool who ended up on the receiving end of one of her verbal lashings. It was also hard to imagine her reduced to tears under any circumstances except maybe the harm or pain of one of her close family members. Tall, full-figured, light brown, with farmland, property, a house, a shop, and a husband, Mrs. P was clearly one of the more privileged members of the community.

The Woodside Community Development Action Group (WCDAG) is organized into the traditional way with positions such as president, vice president, treasurer and secretary. Partially as a result of Sister Erna's suggestions, committees had developed under the official umbrella of the Action Group as various needs arose. By the time of my arrival there was an education committee that oversaw the summer school and the planning of the emancipation celebration, a householders committee to support the educo-tourism program, a care committee to help members of the community going through difficulties, a refreshments committee, a women's group focused on issues of significance to women in the community, and a finance and fundraising committee. From my standpoint as an observer at that time, Mrs. P, Sista Erna, and a Miss V (then president of the WCDAG) appeared to be the most prominent figures in community development at the time. Ironically, neither of the three had ancestral ties to Woodside but both Miss V and Mrs. P had married men who were historically from this district. In a vital, but slightly less prominent role there was the younger single mother, Miss L, who was a farmer, teacher in the summer school, as well as member of the education committee and refreshments committee.

Similar to the female student whose comments were mentioned earlier, one of the African American male students from the summer of 2002 had this to say about Black male roles in Woodside versus his home community.

"First of all the Black male [here] has a better understanding of work ethics. He starts at a very young age with farming in order to help his family make a living. In my community Black males, at a young age, work for themselves to buy material things - not really seen as a means of survival. Males here seem to have a better understanding of their ancestors and celebrate it with historical rituals. The Black males at home are not as conscious as the males here. Hygiene seems to be more important to the males at home in the States. [There] they are well groomed, smell like one million dollars, have all their teeth and many other things. Males here are comfortable with the "natural" smell of mustiness and some are not concerned with personal hygiene - few are. Males [here] don't change their hairstyles as often as the Black males at home." - Christopher Lester, Summer 2002 .

This student's analysis reveals on the one hand his sense of respect for certain qualities that he saw among the young men in the community that he did not see among his own peers back home. At the same time what he views as an issue of hygiene others would view as a difference in social customs between urban and industrial versus rural and agrarian environments. Many of the young men he may have been referring to would take strong issue with view of them as unconcerned with personal hygiene. Cleanliness is highly valued in the community and the student appeared to have confused the low use of cosmetic beauty products, seen as luxuries in this context, with poor hygiene habits.

While there were many men who were prominent as farmers in the community as a whole, at the moment that I arrived on the scene, they seemed less prominent than the women in community development activities. I had heard however that males such as Mas' B, Mas' Bill, Miss V's husband, a former political official in the area, and others had been substantially active in the past and continued to be moderately and occasionally active. However when I arrived, Leon Smith and a Mr. C were the two male farmers who were the most active members of the Action Group and who were also a few generations younger than the senior women. Sister Erna had been somewhat of a mentor to Leon and had garnered him the sponsorship to attend a semester long course at UWI on community development in 2002. One of the elderly men in the community consistently gave walking tours of the historic sites to visitors. Men were also the primary drummers, outdoor cooks and workers, as well as the landscape and construction crew both before and during the two day Emancipation celebration on July 31st and August 1st. While some males substantially participated in the various roles necessary to the survival of the community's ongoing series of activities, it still appeared at the time that I arrived that the leadership was predominantly female.

This imbalance in roles, to some extent dates back to the marginalization of the Black male during slavery and afterwards. In George Beckford's introduction to *Standing Tall: Affirmations of the Jamaican Male*, (Erna Brodber's edited collection of interviews with twenty-four Jamaican men born around the turn of the twentieth century), he describes the challenging economic situation that free Black people were facing in post-emancipation Jamaica. Since that time, Black and brown males from the elite classes have been able to step into the public sector roles previously occupied by a white elite during the times of formal colonialism. The ordinary Black Jamaican male, however, is of particular interest to both Brodber and Beckford, since he has been historically conceived of as both "invisible and inadequate" (ST, p. xix). While the Black female has historically been excluded or marginalized from the positions of real power within the hierarchies of civil society in Jamaica, her dominance within the institutions such as family, church and school is well documented. Brodber's work therefore, in relation to the male, helps to balance the equation. And it is this balance which is of particular consequence and significance within the context of the struggles to achieve various forms of development in Woodside village.

Sister Erna consistently encouraged and urged Leon towards more leadership and organizing rather than simple participation in community activities. In addition to the hierarchy of male and female roles in community activities, and despite the fact that the

organization aimed to be communal and democratically include anyone with an interest in serving no matter their social circumstances, still, power in the Action Group appeared to be most heavily distributed amongst those with property and/or education. It was unclear how much of this was because people with less means felt less entitled and self-assured and how much of this was because people with more presumed their own entitlement and savvy was superior. As George Beckford states in the introduction to *Standing Tall*, "social differentiation within local [communities] was based on the type of housing that people lived in. The better-off ones were able to afford more solid house structures and they had higher status within the community" (ST, xli).

I realized that Carter G. Woodson's 1933 text *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, written for and about the Black subject in the school system in the U.S., was transnational in its implications. Here as there, formal schooling was presumed to trump and outweigh informal schooling. I saw it when I worked among youth in the summer school by the ways in which they hung their heads in shame, for no apparent reason, when they were called upon to make simple statements about themselves. Likewise in the adult realm, I had seen people such as Leon retreat to soft-spoken uncertainty when called upon in an official capacity although his confidence knew no bounds when he was on the street or in his own community of Rock Spring. One of Sister Erna's goals, therefore, was to get people to take themselves and each other seriously; to realize that ultimately they - who were from the community, had vital and central contributions to make to its overall development, and that they themselves, rather than outsiders held the key to solving many community problems.

#### **The Stella Syndrome and Male/Female Social Dynamics**

"Most parents in Woodside don't work. You have mothers who don't have any support from the fathers for their kids. I am very upset with the men for that. I'm also upset with the mothers who go and get another baby after one father has run off. They don't even think of getting a job or money to deal with the first baby. [Some] for instance... say [it] is a mistake. But I say mistakes are made one or two times, not 3, 4, or 5 times. I think there is a major financial problem here. There is no employment and even if there was employment [women] don't have time because they are watching a baby" - Mr. F, Woodside resident.

Woodside resident Mr. F's commentary on the plight of many Woodside families is insightful. He effectively describes how economic entrapment perpetuates cycles of dependency. Young fathers have no sustaining and viable sources of income to support their children and therefore they leave. Young mothers have no time for employment once children are part of the equation so they reach for another man in the hopes that he will commit to supporting the family. Films like Euzhan Palcy's *Sugar Cane Alley* depicted a generation of women coming out of slavery who managed to find a way for their offspring to survive and thrive by any means necessary, now matter how humble their condition. It is interesting to speculate as to how physical and psychological conditions may have shifted to such an extent that the challenges facing current generations are more difficult than in times previous.

In Woodside, the educo-tourism program has been one of the community's internal attempts to create a form of self-sustaining development. It is a unique approach that has combined income for the host families with a shared learning component for both visitors and residents. The idea is that most foreign students get exposure to the island vis-à-vis the decadent and excessive tourist industry or through exchange programs at the university. Few, however, get to go into the country parts and see how the people and the culture function on the core levels. Of the white visitors to the community, Mr. F states:

"They are here so they can learn some culture from [us] and also so that we can dig out something from their culture. And question what they think about their people enslaving us...and let them admit the fact that they were wrong. I think we should get as much as we can out of them. We should get as much as we can out of them."

The extent to which Sister Erna organized the educo-tourism program to address real issues and not just cultural superficialities is clear by Mr. F's statements.

On the other hand, this program has been seen by some community members as a top down model that benefits first and foremost those with the homes and resources to host the students. But what is the effect of students and visitors coming from outside the community and living and interacting with residents for weeks and sometimes months? As a middle class Black female visitor walking through the community on a daily basis and working in the summer school, I received a lot of attention from the men and was treated with moderate suspicion or cautious respect by the women. In general, however, having American male and female students come into the community for several weeks has produced an effect which I choose to call "The Stella Syndrome."

When Terri McMillan's 1996 novel *How Stella Got Her Groove Back* was made into a film in 1998, it brought into the popular imaginary, a phenomenon that had been happening for years on the beaches of Jamaica and one which now appeared to be increasing in frequency - this being the literal acquisition of a romantic relationship and a "man" on the part of foreign females of all races. While McMillan's saga ended in the relative scandal of her "imported husband" declaring his homosexuality, (much to the annoyance of his economically hopeful male brethren on the island), the fact remains that what I am calling the "Stella Syndrome" is one of the various means that the struggling Jamaican male has developed as a response to his own economic entrapment. Louise Meriwether's short story, "A Happening in Barbados" pre-dates McMillan's novel by at least a decade, and similarly showcases the African American professional female going beyond the shores of the continental U.S. in search of dating options. In that story, however, the struggle over the Black male body takes place between a Black and white female who are really in a squabble over their own racial and historical relationship to one another.

In Woodside as the story goes, there once was a beautiful, young, white American woman with olive skin and long black hair that fell to her waist. She originally arrived in the community as a student participating in the educo-tourism program. She loved it very much and apparently already had a pre-disposition towards Rastafari, vegetarian food, and of course, the men. She fell in love with the son of a prominent Rastafarian family in the community and conducted a relationship that brought her back and forth with her spending months at a time in Woodside. At some point she struck upon the idea of forming a female-centered organic farm, and after much labor, the former "women's group" sub-committee of the Woodside Action Group became the "Women's Organic Farming Collective." When I met this young woman in 2002, she had acquired a middle-class Jamaican accent, a deep tan, and she mostly wore long skirts and head wraps in keeping with the tradition of female grooming within Rastafari. She seemed to me as if she was trying to culturally if not racially "pass" as Black. In 2005 she gave birth to a baby who was the product of her long time liaison with one of the sons of Woodside; and so it seems that in the end, this tryst benefited the community in more ways than one - child, organic farming collective, *et al.*

When I brought the four African American students to Woodside in 2002, one female student who was the most problematic at the time left the program after a week. As we discovered later, she had not however left the island but had linked up with her "internet squeeze," who, unbeknownst to us she came to Jamaica to meet in person. If he turned out to be a psychopath then the program was her insurance, if not, then the program was the liability; and so she left to be with her man. A year later she married him and within six months the paperwork was complete for his move to Texas where they currently live with their new baby girl. The "Stella Syndrome" then, as it relates to Woodside is the advent of females, mostly in the form of American students, coming from outside, and functioning as economic option number one for men who may be unemployed or under-employed. I have observed six other relationships between American females and Woodside males, with three of the females being white, one being mixed race and two being Black. As of 2005, one white female and one Black female married the young men they were dating, while the three other relationships ended after two to four years of long distance phone calls and visits from the outside women. Two of these relationships were rumored to have ended when the local baby mothers of the men wrote letters and/or made phone calls to the international women informing them that they were still in the picture. In all instances, it was the international women who made the ultimate decision to end the relationships.

So what are the conditions and consequences of these male/female relations between visitors and community members? How does this impact or influence the community's efforts at development? From my observation, these relationships from the perspectives of the Black males in the community represent what I call the three E's - economics, entertainment, and education. In an earlier portion of the interview with Mr. F referenced before, he speaks directly about the fact that males in the community view female visitors as representing the possibility of migration to America for economic gain. He also mentions in the excerpt above that many local young females who do not have the education and opportunity to secure viable work become repeatedly pregnant in the hopes of getting a man who will stay and support them and their children. This means that for the local male,

women in this situation primarily represent more responsibility. Women from the outside not only represent economic options but freedom in the sense of recreation and excitement with few consequences to boot, since they are not permanent residents in the area. Other than the possibility of migration, these women who have money set aside for the sole purpose of enjoying themselves are essentially rich by community standards and usually quite generous. They also may be actively seeking sex and/or romance. Finally, they also represent education in the sense that they are coming from a totally different and, to resident males, somewhat exotic worldview.

For the white females from abroad, these men may be the embodiment of the mystique surrounding Black men in general and the Jamaican male in particular. In the Western imaginary Jamaican males are stereotypically associated with music, sports, and marijuana which represent culture, strength and enjoyment. For Black females, they represent the relationship options that may not be as readily available in the U.S. On the other side of the equation, while Asian and eastern European women are sought after and imported as mates by many American men, Black females in Woodside are not propositioned in the same ways by the visiting men. Woodside females who succeed in getting a "good education" will not doubt leave the community in search of work. For the average white male visitor, the Black women from the community, while exotic, would not be seen as desirable long term mates in a society that idealizes blonde, skinny white women. For the Black males, the trouble of "importing" a bride would not be worth the effort seeing as a wide variety of social and sexual options are usually available to them in their home societies.

The Woodside males who appeal to the visiting women and end up in these relationships are frequently the most enterprising and industrious men in the community. At least two of the men were active participants in community activities and two were fairly well employed by local standards. What this means is that community resources are drained if they leave, and no internal solutions are found for the economic crises facing rural families. There is also a subtle reinforcement of class hierarchy if the woman from outside with more money and social status is always seen as the most desirable.

Welcome to Daddy Rock

"Never forget who we are and how far we done come."

- Nana Pezant, Daughters of the Dust

In the early 1970s Erna Brodber traveled around Jamaica formally interviewing and speaking with elderly residents whose grandparents and great-grandparents were a stone's throw away from the experiences of enslavement. She told me that these old people had "given her an order...and she has been working on their behalf ever since." The order was to never let us forget what they went through in order for us to be here. Brodber subsequently researched the history of Woodside all the way back to its days as the Nielsen coffee estate and in the process she discovered that the names of certain people in the community dated all the way back to the plantation. She discovered that Daddy Rock, a cavernous space secreted in the bushes below the former great house, was the place where enslaved Africans met in secret. In her day growing up, Daddy Rock was associated with

"bad boys" and rebellious youth. She researched and discovered some of the actions and rituals that the newly freed people had practiced to celebrate their freedom. These included a vigil on the night of July 31st, foot stomping and shouting thanks to God for their freedom on the morning of August 1st, marching around the former estate and having a free will feast where everyone brought some food to share. These activities, including an historical play that Sister Erna created, have all become an integral part of Woodside's two-day emancipation celebration. The celebration is thus a re-enactment of this community's literal and particular emancipation history.

Even as an outsider participating in Woodside's emancipation celebration, I have been deeply moved into understanding what slavery most probably meant to my ancestors. Year after year, particularly during the performance of the play, I have seen the eyes of older or younger members of the community light up, as if their spirit finally understands the meaning of what we have been through. The play is all the more profound in sentiment and energy since a good portion of the performers are the actual descendants of the historical people whose lives the play is trying to dramatize. Ultimately it is this, the emancipation experience in its entirety, which is the real foundation for the majority of the development efforts in Woodside village. The two day emancipation celebration begins with a day of discussion and reasoning around an annual theme. On that first year that I visited, the theme was "Emancipate Yourself from Mental Slavery." Each year there is an invited speaker and speech followed by a discussion amongst community members about the meaning of the theme and its significance for us all as descendants of formerly enslaved Africans. Roasted saltfish, yam, and plantain and lots of fresh coconut water is served, and this is followed by the vigil at night which includes drumming, dancing, singing and old time food such as chocolate tea, hard dough bread and fried sprat. On Emancipation day, there is no selling of food from dawn until 6:00pm. This has become somewhat of a source of controversy in the community within the last few years as some in the village see this day as an opportunity to capitalize financially on Woodside's name and growing reputation as it relates to this celebration. However, Sister Erna's position is that it is a sacred day, one in which we should meditate on what our people endured and remember and recall that it was their self-sacrifice and communal generosity that got us through.

Sister Erna began the summer school as a way of educating the youth about the history of slavery and emancipation in general and how it relates to their village in particular. The mission and goals have expanded somewhat to include education about other elements of Black history and the African cultural heritage. When I came in 2001 I taught the students who were twelve to fifteen years of age, and I decided to teach them a little ancient Egyptian philosophy. They were more fascinated than I had expected to learn about these cosmic ways of interpreting reality. We covered quite a bit of ground and from time to time I noticed that youth from the outside community came in to hear what I had to say. I found ways of helping the students to make links between the logic and meaning behind local folk-sayings and the structure of thought in one of the ancient knowledge systems we were studying. I found that some of them asked deeply philosophical questions.

It warmed my spirit to work with them and I realized, somewhere along the way, that we were literally breaking new ground with this school. No matter how few resources we had and how much suspicion it was treated with by certain members of the community, we were trying to put a model of learning into practice that linked the history and the culture of the community with the children's sense of their identity, their self-worth, and who they would become. We wanted to give them a cultural sensibility which would help them to see their own community with new eyes and envision possibilities and options which would show them that real life and all its possibilities were right here rather than always in the city, in the USA, or elsewhere.

We faced a lot of challenges in the form of limited resources, a lack of physical space, an overwhelming student teacher ratio, inconsistent attendance rates, difficulty doing long-term envisioning and planning, and some community resistance to the focus on African ancestral legacies. Additionally with regards to gender issues, there were always lots of boys, particularly between the ages of four and eleven yet our teachers were almost always women. Within the community, teaching seemed to be viewed primarily as women's work and a narrow notion of the ideal male role model being that of the educated gentleman stymied substantial male involvement. Local men who were farmers, craftsmen, tradesmen, musicians, healers, storytellers, fathers, and construction workers underestimated the multiplicity of ways in which they could and should teach the young boys the values, behavior, and responsibilities associated with manhood.

While the girls were fairly attentive and cooperative, without any male authoritative presence, the boys became more and more rebellious. I noticed that the boys who were the brightest were consistently the most troublesome when there was not substantial structure and a course of work that challenged them. While the girls were frequently socialized to maintain certain gender-specific behavioral roles both inside and outside the home space, boys who may have chores and responsibilities at home were totally different beings once they were out and about. Additionally, many of the young boys in single parent households wanted to define themselves as "men." They were not sure how to do this but they knew they were not women and so they may have been subconsciously defining their behavior against female models.

As a young Black middle class woman visiting the community in the summers, I grew close to Sister Erna and her family, Mrs. P and her extended family, and to a lesser extent Miss Linda who also taught in the summer school. Parents of the children who came to the school always addressed me with sincere greetings and respect and various men in the community continued in their attempts to seduce me into friendship or something more. I had not, however formed any substantial female friends in the community, an odd thing for me, given that I made women friends easily in my everyday life. Why this was the case and what it meant did not dawn on me until the summer of 2002 when a Chinese-Jamaican friend of mine, one who had migrated to the states as a pre-teen, came on my invitation, to work for several weeks with the "Women's Organic Farming Collective."

Sharon grew up within an element of Jamaican society that was several strata removed from the world of my extended family and friends. I always jokingly told her that

had we stayed on the island all our lives we would never have met or would not have really become good friends. After her parents divorce and migration from the island she was virtually cut off from her Jamaican heritage. When we became friends she began to reconnect with her Caribbean cultural identity. She came to Woodside in search of a grounding experience. She said that she wanted to work on a farm and/or with women in some way. The farming collective was perfect for her. Sharon came and she worked. I saw her get up early in the morning and go to the community farm to work with the women before the sun came up or she went with the crew to help with the work on the individual family plots of one or another of the members of the collective. She worked in rain, she worked in sunshine, she learned how to "bill" grass with a machete, her hands developed calluses and her back was sore but she continued. She helped Mrs. P around the house in ways I never dreamed of, learning how to make potato pudding over an open flame, as well as killing, de-feathering and cleaning chickens in preparation for cooking. Even Sister Erna was in slight amazement one day when she came and saw Sharon down by the shop, sitting outside with a chicken between her legs, plucking out the feathers.

Within a month, Sharon had formed more intimate bonds with many of the women in the community than I managed before or since. I realized that her willingness to work with people and share their daily tasks had allowed her to develop trust and had made it clear to the women that she was a "doer" not just a "speaker." My "lady in the fine castle" upbringing had never predisposed me to an interest in farming or even garden work. Yet I realized that if outsiders were sincere in participating in community development, particularly if they were coming in with higher levels of education and social status, then finding ways to work with people at their level was a pre-requisite to formulating feasible solutions to the problems being addressed. When the four African American students came later that summer, and the young women began to immediately complain about the bugs and the food while expressing anxieties about the rustic environment and cleanliness, Mrs. P's sole comment to me was, "They are not Sharon."

The year before Sharon's visit a male friend from Oklahoma had come with me to Woodside for a week during the spring. Mrs. P and Mas' B loved him. He spoke with a thick Oklahoma accent and I had to translate what he said to community residents and translate what they said to him. He bonded with the young Mr. F as well as with some of the elders in the community. He sat under the house for hours at a time with Mas' B and Big Man, being entertained by the comedy of their interactions with each other and the folks who came to the store. While the young Black males who came the following year were liked well enough, they were no Walter. Mrs. P spoke on and on about how much the community loved him and once again his comfort with the nitty gritty aspects of everyday country life is what appeared to most influence the community's view of him.

While Sharon and Walter were not extensively involved in any long term development projects, they connected so profoundly in a short time with the average citizens in Woodside, that it made it clear to me that development involved "ed-we-cation" rather than simply "ed-you-cation." Those of us coming into struggling communities need to be aware of how our own gendered behavior is perceived and interpreted. If we choose to ignore and



disregard this issue then our contributions fit into the colonial hierarchies of old, in which formal schooling and status means that you are above certain kinds of work and implicitly above the people who still do them. If those of us coming from the outside into economically down-pressed areas realize that these environments will teach us as much about ourselves as we may have to impart then the learning process will be two-directional as opposed to top down; we oriented versus you oriented.

In subsequent years there have been two other b l a c k s p a c e programs with groups of people ranging from six to twelve who came to the community for a little over a week. Sister Erna restructured the program into a type of retreat in which the descendants of enslaved Africans could come together and do some internal work. She frequently stated that Black people needed a private space to work out their differences. She envisioned these retreats as small affairs which unlike a conference was a space in which we as participants could look internally and take the risk of sharing our struggles and issues from a personal place within a constructed communal safe space. While some people loved it, and thought it was one of the best experiences of their lives, others had great difficulty and became what Woodson referred to in *Mis-Education* as "chronic fault finders."

I was always surprised, if not blindsided by who broke down and I realized after the third time that this happened, that Sister Erna and I had unwittingly created a program in which the participants were confronted with their own self-esteem issues as well as with the possible gap between their rhetoric and their lives. I say this not from a place of superiority, but from a place of being personally challenged by my own issues and circumstances at various points throughout my time in Woodside. Living in the homes of families without the privacy some were accustomed to, eating what was prepared, walking up hills, not for exercise, but of necessity, proved to be more than some of us had bargained for having grown accustomed to more creature comforts and the luxuries of time and space that money can often buy. I saw scholars whose research I respected become temporarily unbalanced at the prospect of having to share bathroom space in households with many people and limited water resources, or emphasize to their status as paying customers, rather than become people willing to pitch in and help if the conditions of the homes of their rural sistren and brethren were not what they expected. I realized it was one thing for us as scholars to talk about the conditions of imperialism and another thing for us to be capable of some of the physical and spiritual work necessary for transformation to occur. The lesson in all of this for me was that formally and informally schooled persons can ed-we-cate each other.

In 2005, one of the b l a c k s p a c e participants was an African American male who had wanted to come to the community for years. He came and was a joy to watch in terms of his work with the youth in the school. He always gave a 110%, waking up early, making it to all of the scheduled activities, as well as toughing it out even when he was unfamiliar or unsure of the unwritten rules and customs. That year, the men in the community decided to build an Africa House; this was a round house with a dirt floor and thatched roof similar to the structures that Rastafari built during week long retreats and meditation sessions. b l a c k s p a c e participants turned out to participate in the "morning

work" and help with the construction. But the young man was there and worked all day and then came on subsequent days of his own accord. He worked closely with Mr. Williams, the architect and builder who was a man from the oldest families in the community. Mr. William's energy in terms of constructing the house was tireless and a thing to behold. That year, continental Africans came and participated in the Emancipation celebration and this seemed to further expand the consciousness of the average Woodside resident about the village celebration and its larger implications.

Over the course of the last year, Woodside's unique approach to its development has continued with the physical foundation for the You/We Shared Learning Center being constructed on the farmland of Leon Smith, whose leadership within the community has continued to increase. Additionally, a Mr. Ryan has taken over as the president of the Action Group, thus increasing male representation and participation.

When all is said and done, rural space is frequently the place where the strength and base of a culture is located. The emancipation celebration in Woodside, reminds both insiders and outsiders to the community of the enormous spiritual strength and internal resources that enslaved Africans brought out of their experiences on the plantation. These internal resources are usually most evident in our songs, dances and ritual drama. This is why these things are more than entertainment and are in effect our culture's life source. If this is true, then any development model or plan of action, if it is to be successful must incorporate the spirit source of the culture, since this is in effect the strongest part of our identities.