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## “THE SOUND OF UNKNOWING”:

### *Theorizing Race, Gender, and “Illegitimacy” through Jamaican Family Photography*

**Karina Smith and Lou Smith**

*This article explores race, gender, and “illegitimacy” in the Jamaican context through an analysis of family photographs from the early twentieth century. The photographs depict the family of Doris Butcher née Benjamin, a Jamaican woman who was born in 1900 and died in 1989. The article argues that Butcher’s status as a light-skinned “illegitimate” woman shows the complexity, ambiguity, and contradictions within race, class, and gender hierarchies in colonial Jamaica.*

I’ve interrupted the stagnancy of history  
unearthed memories from their resting place.

And as I see you now captured in monochrome,  
you are smiling gently, warmly,  
your head held high  
your black hair parted and pinned,  
your gaze longing for something.

The identikit is piecing together slowly  
like the reconstruction of memory in this poem.

Lou Smith, “The Sound of Unknowing”<sup>1</sup>

This article attempts to trace the life story of Doris Butcher née Benjamin—born in Kingston, Jamaica in 1900 and died in Newcastle, Australia in 1989—through an analysis of family photographs. Very little is known about her childhood and adult life prior to marriage; what we do know we gleaned from snippets of oral history, postcards, letters, and birth, death, and marriage certificates and, most importantly, from family photographs. We, the authors, are Doris’s granddaughters, both born in Australia. Karina Smith is a lecturer in literary and gender studies who has published on Caribbean women’s literature and theater; Lou Smith is a poet who publishes creative work on the themes of migration, place, and belonging. First, we wrote this article because we believe our grandmother Doris’s life story makes an important contribution to understanding the complexities of race, class, and gender relations in the Caribbean, especially regarding the fragmented

genealogies that underpin many Caribbean women's lives. Second, it is an attempt to understand more about ourselves as non-Indigenous Australians and our relationship to the three cultural contexts and diasporic spaces from which our family members hail: Australia, the United Kingdom, and Jamaica. Doris's life story shows the impact of migration on family histories, which sometimes become increasingly fragmented as friends and relatives move overseas; it also reveals the way in which family silences were kept, aided by time and distance. Doris was an "outside" child, to use Caribbean terminology, and, as a result, we only have partial knowledge of her family background.<sup>2</sup> The reason we chose family photographs as the basis for piecing together Doris's life is that she rarely spoke about Jamaica when we knew her, and it was only after she died that we gained access to photographs of her Jamaican friends and family. Hence, this article is titled "The Sound of Unknowing," which refers both to our absence of knowledge about our grandmother's story due to her silence and to the name of the poem that we used as an epigraph.

We do not know the reason for Doris's silence, but there are three possible explanations: Jamaican society stigmatized "illegitimacy" when she was growing up under colonial rule and therefore discussion about her Jamaican family members would have inevitably given rise to questions about her paternal line, which she wanted to avoid; she lived in Australia when we knew her, completely removed from Jamaican family and friends who had emigrated to the United Kingdom; and she lived in London for forty years prior to our births and, by the 1970s, thought of herself as British despite the fact that her accent suggested otherwise. Doris's story may be more tied to race and class in the Caribbean and her silence could have represented what the Jamaican writer Michelle Cliff calls "passing" as white: "Passing demands quiet. And from that quiet—silence . . . Passing demands you keep that knowledge to yourself."<sup>3</sup> Although Doris was an avid letter writer who kept in touch with friends and family around the world, she never discussed the race and class of the people she mentioned; perhaps she felt these details were especially irrelevant for two granddaughters who were living so far away and never likely to meet the people anyway. The African American artist Adrian Piper points out, with reference to her own Jamaican mother, that in Jamaica "mixed ancestry is taken for granted. There are a few who proclaim themselves to be 'Jamaican whites' having no African ancestry at all, but no one among the old and respected families take them seriously."<sup>4</sup> We cannot assume that our grandmother was a member of "the few" who did not acknowledge their African ancestry just because she did not discuss this with us. Perhaps Doris subscribed to Jamaican social codes of her generation, which avoided explicitly addressing issues of race and

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class but instead employed such terms as “respectable,” “lady,” and so forth to delineate color and class barriers that were “foreign” to our young ears.<sup>5</sup>

Through investigating our family’s genealogy and analyzing their photographs, we are confronted by the way in which our ancestry, combined with our white skin color, is connected not only to the brutality of slavery and its aftermath but also to the dispossession of Indigenous people in Australia by the British colonizers. As the literary and feminist studies scholar Marianne Hirsch warns in her edited book *The Familial Gaze*, “Those who analyze the familial gaze must therefore be as self-conscious about their own viewing positions as they are vigilant about the postures they analyze.”<sup>6</sup> In both Australia and Jamaica, we are sometimes positioned within the dominant group that is responsible for the destruction of Aboriginal cultures or the last remnants of the colonial elite, the “squattocracy” in Australia or the “plantocracy” in Jamaica.<sup>7</sup> Other times, we are identified as “other” to Anglo-Saxon and Celtic cultures. Claiming a Jamaican ancestry while having white skin immediately places one in the position of the slave owners rather than the enslaved and it is very difficult to convince people, in Australia at least, that our Jamaican family narrative does not conform to this binary. Doris’s family photographs reveal a more complicated history that, through intermarriage with the English and Welsh, does not reveal itself so visibly in our generation. The Jamaican poet and editor of *Caribbean Quarterly* Kim Robinson-Walcott observes that the “othering of blackness is successful, as often with succeeding generations the touch [of African ancestry] becomes progressively fainter, with family members marrying fully white people and thus enabling future generations to ‘become’ white.”<sup>8</sup> Further, the vital statistics recorded on Doris’s Jamaican family’s birth, death, and marriage certificates contest the binary divisions of white and black, rich and poor, slave-owner and enslaved because they demonstrate shifts in class positioning over the generations as well as the mixtures of racial and cultural backgrounds among family members. As the Jamaican Community Arts scholar and performer Honor Ford-Smith suggests, “Discussions of mixed-race people . . . need to go beyond mere condemnation of their collusion with colonial power. It is important to release the mixed-race person from a positioning scripted by the reductive dichotomy of black and white, and the binary polarizations of Europe and Africa.”<sup>9</sup> The descendants of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders also echo Ford-Smith’s call for a shift away from racial essentialism because white Australians repeatedly question their authenticity if they do not fit the stereotypical physicality of an Indigenous person.<sup>10</sup> In Jamaica, some “white” Jamaicans now want to claim their Jamaican-ness, whereas in the past they preferred to call themselves British subjects. This shift is largely because national belonging, since the

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1970s, has emphasized Jamaica's African heritage and, therefore blackness, as the foundation of national identity.

Telling Doris's story is important because, as the feminist theorists Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith contend, women's histories function as counter-histories that restore "forgotten stories to the historical record."<sup>11</sup> The patriarchal family structure, to some extent, has hidden women's stories: fathers, husbands, and sons spoke for women. In the colonial Caribbean, newspapers and other official documents reported on privileged white and light-skinned families while working-class families, which were almost entirely black, remained in obscurity. Moreover, those Caribbean women born outside of the legitimate family, whether working or middle class, did not even have the patriarch's story to claim as their own; rather, women raised them in female headed households, and, as a result, the patriarchy erased them from the historical record because society considered their family structure "deviant."<sup>12</sup> In a conversation many years ago about Doris's life, the Africana studies and English professor Carole Boyce Davies said that the narrative of outside relations is a Caribbean story.<sup>13</sup> Such a narrative is bound up with the legacy of transatlantic slavery and its impact on subsequent generations of Caribbean people from varying positions on the raced and classed social hierarchy.

From the end of slavery in 1838, British authorities and the Church encouraged the Christian family model as an ideal to which all Jamaicans should aspire. Underpinning it were patriarchal gender ideologies that emphasized the "proper" and "respectable" roles for men and women in the public and domestic spheres. Churches considered having outside children, and in many cases more than one, "the source of all other social evils."<sup>14</sup> Although the churches, and to a lesser extent the colonial authorities, pushed legal marriage and public acknowledgement of progeny, the power imbalance in Jamaican society in terms of race, class, and gender perpetuated the incidence of "illegitimacy" despite all efforts to curtail it. Although the colonial authorities knew that upper and middle-class men sired "illegitimate" children, they deceptively and wrongfully labeled it a "black problem."<sup>15</sup> While most Jamaicans did not conform to prescribed European family models and welcomed rather than shunned outside children, light-skinned middle-class families stigmatized illegitimacy.<sup>16</sup> As Ford-Smith states: "Poor single mothers and grand-mother headed households are seen in much of the literature as a sign of social decay and a function of underdevelopment."<sup>17</sup>

As many scholars have shown, the colonizers deemed Caribbean family structure, particularly the number of illegitimate children, "deviant" and "inferior" in comparison with the Eurocentric notions of the nuclear family bound together by marriage and legitimate children.<sup>18</sup> Alissa Trotz

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sums this up well: "It seems fair to say that hegemonic representations of families (as different, respectable, normal) are central to stratification processes and have contributed to the disempowerment of the vast majority of Caribbean people."<sup>19</sup> The legitimate family often compelled outside children not to claim their paternity. It is our argument that illegitimate, light-skinned Jamaican women show the complexity, ambiguity, and contradiction within raced, classed, and gendered relations in Jamaica and the wider Caribbean and show that the disenfranchisement of outside children occurred across color lines; illegitimate light-skinned women were on the margins of "respectability" despite the privilege attached to their whiteness. By looking closely at the family photograph—which the film studies scholar Annette Kuhn suggests "constructs the world of the family as utopia"—we investigate, challenge, and debunk myths about the "ideal" family based on our understanding of Jamaican social relations and point to hidden and suppressed traumas.<sup>20</sup>

Doris's birth certificate records neither a father's name nor a family surname. According to the historian Persis Charles, city officials commonly registered Jamaican children born out of wedlock in the nineteenth century with "two apparent Christian names," a practice that continued into the twentieth century.<sup>21</sup> Doris nevertheless used the surname (Benjamin) of the man who witnessed her birth until she married, signing his name as her father's name on her marriage certificate. She was not raised by her mother but, as is common in the Caribbean, she was initially mothered in what the anthropologist Judith Blake, in her book *Family Structures in Jamaica* (1961), calls a "grandmother family," which is a family that includes a young woman, her illegitimate child, and the child's grandmother.<sup>22</sup> In her recent book *Caribbean Spaces: Escapes from Twilight Zones*, Davies makes the following point about Caribbean family structures: "My friends, relatives, and neighbors were perfectly happy with the extended family lives we lived, full of uncles, aunts, cousins, noise, and excitement." When residing in homes, "fathers . . . were distant or often unavailable, even oppressive."<sup>23</sup> Doris's upbringing, presumably, was happy despite the absence of both her father and mother within the home; she had her grandmother, cousins, aunts, uncles, and friends, and her mother and stepfather lived around the corner. Doris's grandmother was not wealthy, which we will demonstrate via the family photographs; yet Doris experienced privilege by virtue of her light skin color. Due to Doris's illegitimate status, administrators likely excluded her from the schools her light-skinned and white counter-parts attended. That discrimination and her family's poorer status would explain her training as a bookkeeper at Kingston Technical and Continuation School (now Kingston Technical High School), "established in January 1896 as a Manual Training School."<sup>24</sup> Ford-Smith suggests that "the limitation on illegitimate

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children attending high school would have had the effect of preventing the education of black children and children of colour since at the turn of the century illegitimacy was higher among these populations."<sup>25</sup>

This research has gone through many stages. To begin, we relied exclusively on fragments of information without having any "official" documentation about our grandmother's family; the exception was Doris's birth certificate, which raised more questions than it answered. The collection of photographs our grandmother kept of her Jamaican relatives and friends—most without any names attached—has been the most valuable resource for reconstructing the past. The photographs exist as two photo albums compiled before Doris married and an archive of single photographs of Jamaican, Panamanian, English, and Australian relatives. The collection process looks haphazard, as though there was no logic to the sequence of photos. And it certainly does not look as though Doris tried to ensure she passed on her family genealogy to her grandchildren as none of the photographs include captions. In this article, we borrow from the archeologist Michael Shanks' concept of "archaeography," combining photography and archaeology to view sources with an "archaeological imagination."<sup>26</sup> Since Doris' family photographs were taken in Jamaica, we can explore both the contradictions within the photographic archive as well as how they are situated within both raced and classed positions. By looking at the photographs, asking surviving relatives for information, and reading creative works—like Ford-Smith's short story "Grandma's Estate" and her collection of poetry *My Mother's Last Dance*—we started connecting the fragments, photos, and historical situations for light-skinned outside children in Jamaica.<sup>27</sup> Ford-Smith's work was influential to our analysis because it discusses her position and perspective as a "white," outside grandchild as a way to theorize her raced and classed position in Jamaican society, the privileges attached to whiteness, and the decision to align oneself with blackness.

Doris's photographic archive also raised more questions than it answered, particularly regarding her raced and classed background. Outside of the Caribbean she was re-racialized as someone of Spanish background but when placed alongside her Jamaican relatives, in the Jamaican context, she looked like a mixed, light-skinned woman. This surprised us as we were never privy to her collection of family photographs prior to her death and did not meet extended family members until after she died. We knew she looked "different" from Anglo-Saxon or Celtic Australians, but her racial background was only called into question on one occasion (that we can remember): a school friend of Karina's asked if Doris was of Indian descent. The professor of Caribbean literature Joan Anim-Addo suggests, in relation to piecing together her grandmother's claims to Scottish heritage, that "the archive is often corporeal, signified in markers of skin tone, and

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subject to the fragility of memory."<sup>28</sup> In our grandmother's case, her black frizzy hair was a clear marker of racial difference but not one we read in relation to the Caribbean region and its history of creolization. Moreover, the relatives and friends who may have been able to help piece her life story together were living in the United Kingdom, Panama, Jamaica, or Canada or had long since passed. Anim-Addo asks: "How does a community draw on oral history the fragility of which makes it prone to being forgotten or eroded particularly as generations are dispersed across the diaspora?"<sup>29</sup> She answers, in part, that the reliance on oral stories "has greatly contributed to the loss of much Caribbean women's history."<sup>30</sup>

At the same time, oral histories are crucial for gaining insight into the details of the Caribbean past because people of the region usually committed them to memory rather than paper, a point Anim-Addo also makes. Our grandmother, unfortunately, died when we were in our teens and before we had developed an interest in our Jamaican heritage; we did not ask important questions or record her life story before she passed away. Our mother, Doris's only child, has some memories and stories about the Jamaican side of the family. But growing up in the United Kingdom, living so far from the Caribbean region, and resembling her English father, she did not connect with Caribbean culture as an adolescent, apart from the numerous Jamaican friends and family members who frequently visited her parents' home in London.

Doris migrated to the United Kingdom well before large numbers of Caribbean migrants started to arrive following the landmark voyage of the SS. *Windrush*. Doris's half-brothers lived in Panama, so they too were at a distance. Dispersal from the Caribbean region (to the United Kingdom and Panama) and migration to Australia—which, in the 1970s, did not have many Caribbean migrants (Newcastle, the small coastal city where Doris settled, had no visibly Caribbean migrants)—has greatly contributed to our loss of cultural inheritance, family networks, and details of Doris's family history. The black British writer Andrea Levy, in her reflective essay "Back to my Own Country," talks about her own light-skinned Jamaican parents who "never discussed Jamaica with anyone" after they moved to London. Levy describes their silence as a "lost history . . . a loss that caused me some problems."<sup>31</sup> There is arguably a "morality of remembrance," to use the arts writer Catherine Keenan's phrase, in attempting to remember a silent story, in bearing witness to a story that exists in fragments, and in remembering untold women's stories—particularly untold diasporic stories.<sup>32</sup> But what are the implications of following this imperative of remembrance, of investigating this lacuna of family history? Investigators may find nothing new from reading family photographs; and if they do, they may not like what they find. Other people, furthermore, may not readily accept the information

they uncover, particularly if the raced and classed status of ancestors does not match the visible appearance of the investigators. Another possibility is that the information may have an impact on the investigators' personal sense of identity. Ford-Smith, who also theorized about race, class, and gender in Jamaica by interviewing family members and analyzing family photographs, identifies the risk as "accusations of vanity or narcissism, the celebration of the cult of the individual, the risk of shame and the lack of scientific objectivity."<sup>33</sup>

In this article, we analyze the usefulness of family photographs as historical clues to the past in a context—Jamaica and the wider Caribbean—where there has been a predominantly oral rather than a written culture.<sup>34</sup> Anim-Addo also pieced together her grandmother's life story through family narrative and genealogical records, made difficult by the absence of recorded information in Grenada and the Grenadines: "It remains true . . . that in relation to most family history, there is often precious little to be found that has already been recorded on the page since the fabric of our material culture comprises crucially words that travel from the lips, reside in the memory and finally disappear when memory fades."<sup>35</sup> Piecing together Doris's life presents some of the same problems that Anim-Addo identifies above.

### Family Photography: The Silent Archive

Annette Kuhn, in her book *Family Secrets*, proffers the concept of "memory work" as a means by which we can place Doris's story and, by extension, the Caribbean family in its broader socio-political and historical context via an investigation of personal memories and artifacts. The Caribbean family is a site for investigation because colonialism and plantation slavery and their aftermath severed genealogies. Piecing the branches of families together involves careful investigation of the fragments that exist. It includes the sort of "detective work" that Kuhn advocates in her approach to memory and history: "Working backwards—searching for clues, deciphering signs and traces, making deductions, and patching together reconstructions out of fragments of evidence."<sup>36</sup> In a context where family connections were deliberately severed and children's paternity covered up or denied mainly by the plantocracy, moreover, "memory work" acts as a form of "radicalised remembering."<sup>37</sup> This method works by actively bringing to light untold stories—from that which is repressed or forgotten—while sustaining an analytical and questioning attitude toward the past.

The family photographic archive, in this case of Doris's Jamaican family, demonstrates the fragmentary nature of Caribbean family structures through the presence and absence of family members: Doris's father is

missing; her mother is captured only in one photo, a death mask, taken at her funeral; and there are no photos of Doris as a baby. The photographs that do exist depict the color and class hierarchies in Jamaican society as our reading of the photograph in figure 1 exemplifies. Doris's archive contains photographs of an eclectic mix of people: family members, friends, suitors, and acquaintances. It further demonstrates Doris's social milieu, which included people who possibly occupied different social positions on Jamaica's color and class hierarchies. We selected four photographs that depict Doris's early life in Kingston as the basis for our analysis: a wedding photo, a family photo, and two photos of Doris's family home and the neighborhood in which it was located.

In this investigation, we utilize the four steps in the process of memory work posited by Kuhn. First, we identify the human subjects in the photo and then put ourselves in the place of those subjects. Second, we look at the context of production: where, when, how, by whom, and why was the photo taken? Third, we analyze the photographic technologies used. And fourth, we ask for who or what did the photographer take the photograph.<sup>38</sup> As a feminist mode of inquiry, "memory work" challenges patriarchal histories and representations by being self-referential: it questions how memory operates (is both recorded and validated) by exploring the self and its relationship to what is shared, that is, the relationship between personal memory and broader issues about the nature and workings of cultural memory. Rather than treat memory as truth, "memory work" examines reminiscence as a form of evidence for scholars to question. "Memory work," therefore, is a tool that scholars can use to investigate what is remembered and why, what makes us remember and how.

The semiotician Roland Barthes' seminal work *Camera Lucida* focuses on the relationship between the spectator and the subject in a phenomenological discussion of "how photographs acquire meaning," arguing that the photograph contains a referent to the "real."<sup>39</sup> In writing of his experience viewing a photograph of his mother shortly after her death, which he refers to as the "Winter Garden Photograph," Barthes discusses the idea of the "flat death" whereby the photograph depicts the past while preceding the subject of the photograph's actual death.<sup>40</sup> As Marianne Hirsch explains in her book *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory*, "The referent haunts the picture like a ghost: it is a revenant, a return of the lost and dead other. Ultimately, the puncture of the *punctum*, is not the detail of the picture but time itself."<sup>41</sup> The "Winter Garden Photograph" is not a mere object of evidence, as it would be for others viewing it with no connection to the person photographed, but an image that impacts Barthes through the effect of what he terms the *punctum*. Unlike the *studium*, which Barthes describes as a cultural participation in and appreciation of what is

represented in photographs, the *punctum* is what moves him, "for *punctum* is also: sting, speck, cut, little hole—and also a cast of the dice."<sup>42</sup> Just as Barthes is moved when viewing the "Winter Garden Photograph" of his deceased mother, the *punctum* elicits a sense of both loss and mourning when viewing photographs of our relatives, particularly our grandmother who helped raise us.<sup>43</sup>

In her recent book *At the Edge of Sight: Photography and the Unseen*, the visual and critical studies scholar Shawn Michelle Smith critiques Barthes' concept of the *studium*, and consequently the *punctum*, for its "race-based paternalism."<sup>44</sup> In privileging the *punctum*, Smith argues, Barthes assumes that readers can take his close readings of photographs in *Camera Lucida* "at face value" rather they should read them in relation to prevailing cultural and historical codes.<sup>45</sup> Barthes' description of the *punctum*, however, is useful to our analysis by deciphering what Hirsch terms "familial looks."<sup>46</sup> Hirsch proposes that an exchange of looks take place when viewing family photographs, a sense of "mutual recognition," and suggests that this is evident in Barthes' description of feeling an umbilical cord connecting him to his mother when he views the "Winter Garden Photograph."<sup>47</sup> Hirsch interrogates the family photograph as a site that perpetuates familial myths and the photograph as a medium through which individuals construct personal identity and, consequently, familial ideology. Photographs, she posits, reveal to us both desire for an ideal family and what our family is not.<sup>48</sup>

By conducting close readings of family photographs, a technique we also utilize in this article, Hirsch asks the following questions in her analysis: "How does vision structure the day-to-day practices of family life? How does it produce family relations and form family memory?"<sup>49</sup> To "replace the regime of the *gaze* with the field of the *look*," we employ personal narrative, oral history, theoretical discourse, and critical analysis, situating our reading of family photographs in relation to the cultural and historical distance of our position in Australia (as we mentioned previously) to begin unraveling the familial myths and silences surrounding the images within Doris' photographic archive.<sup>50</sup> It is the event of "illegitimacy" and the absence of knowledge of Doris's paternal line that drives this inquiry. Doris's illegitimacy was "the secret," even her cousin Dorrit, ten years her junior, either did not know or would not reveal the identity of Doris's father's family. "They were Portuguese" was her short response when we asked directly for this information. But family photographs not only spark personal memories, they also point to systems of power at work within the institution of the family, as Hirsch and Kuhn examine, as well as the cultural and social mores at play at a given point in history. Both Kuhn's and Hirsch's methodologies offer political and historical dimensions, including a critical

question about the process of remembering and structure of telling and a guideline for viewing everyday personal experiences in light of cultural, historical, and social forces. In the absence of many written documents, the photographic archive is an aid to cultural memory.

### Doris's Photographic Archive

Let us closely examine the first of a series of photographs from our grandmother's archive. Some of the photographs in Doris's archive are of weddings of family members or of friends. In figure 1, Doris stands on the right, a large bow in her hair. It is not clear from looking at this photograph whether Doris was a bridesmaid. Her cousin Vivia, the bride, is seated holding a bouquet of flowers, the ribbons of which are entwined around her feet. The flower girl (Doris's cousin Dorrit) and pageboys (Doris's half-brothers Morris and Stanley and her cousin Karl, Dorrit's brother) are the children in the photo. Also captured is Doris's friend Beulah (the chief bridesmaid), who is seated next to the bride.



Figure 1. *Vivia's Wedding*, Kingston, Jamaica, Photographer Unknown, 1916.

The children's outfits look uncomfortably hot for the tropical setting—long socks and long-sleeved tops, frayed sashes around their waists. The age difference between Doris and her half-brothers is obvious in this image: Doris is sixteen years old and her half-brothers are still small boys. There are people looking on in the background, watching like specters in the distance. The essayist Susan Sontag describes the hegemonic power of the family photograph in maintaining the visual ideal of family life: "Those ghostly traces, photographs, supply the token presence of the dispersed relatives. A family's photograph album is generally about the extended family—and, often, is all that remains of it."<sup>51</sup> This notion questions the very process of remembering and the way individuals mediate familial memory.

The person who took this photograph is unknown. It could have been another family member or a professional photographer, although no photographer's insignia is present. What we can be sure of is that families treasure wedding photographs, along with photographs of other significant events, as objects to be passed on to family members down through the generations. This wedding photograph is an example of colonial mimicry—it looks exactly like other photos of the plantocracy except it portrays mixed-race Jamaicans, at least three of whom were outside children. The house in the background is a colonial style building that we could, at first glance, mistake for a plantation house. It is not obvious how the people are related to each other because the complexity of interracial families in Jamaica, which included siblings on different ends of the color continuum, complicates a family narrative based on the physical resemblance between family members. The wedding reception took place at the home of a relative of the bride who was a prominent person among the so-called "brown" middle-classes in Kingston in 1916.

The image we titled *Family Photograph* (see figure 2) depicts our extended maternal family. The woman at the front in the floral dress, Doris, sits in front of her grandmother Elvira, the woman who raised her. Doris's English husband (or soon-to-be husband), Charles, sits beside her. Next to Elvira stand Doris's cousins Dorrit and Vivia. Seated on the ground holding the small boy Billy, Vivia's son, is Dorrit's mother Marian, Doris's aunt. Three of the women wear fine white chiffon dresses with lace collars. Dorrit and Marian also wear pearl necklaces. Their clothing suggests they were members of the middle or upper classes, which, as the historian Patrick Bryan points out, individuals affirmed through "wealth and occupation" as well as "education, language and dress."<sup>52</sup> It is fairly certain that the woman on the right in the back row—the only woman who wears a felt hat and a cotton shift, is not linking arms with the other three women beside her, does not have her name written on the photograph, and does not appear in the family narrative—was a domestic worker in the home of one of the people in the photograph.

Dorrit, Marian, and Vivia, the three women wearing white chiffon dresses, were the wives and daughter of men who rose through the ranks of Jamaica's legal profession.<sup>53</sup> These women, further, were in male-headed households at the time the photo was taken, which to some extent explains their finery in contrast with the clothing worn by the other women in the photograph who had to work to ensure the female-headed family survived. Although they were not part of the plantocracy, Dorrit, Marian, and Vivia were members of the "brown" middle-classes who improved their wealth and status because of access to education. That Doris and her grandmother, Elvira, are dressed more simply suggests that color privilege did not necessarily extend to wealth. Elvira, the oldest of all the women, was the head of a family in which all the women worked as shop assistants, housekeepers, and seamstresses.



Figure 2. *Family Photograph* Kingston Jamaica, Photographer Unknown, c.1920s.

It is unknown where in Kingston, Jamaica this photograph of Doris's extended family was taken or who took it. The house appears to be located in a rural area due to the unkempt yard and the view of the hills in the background. It was certainly not taken in front of the home where Doris grew up, which, being in downtown Kingston in the commercial district, would have been surrounded by a mix of wealth and poverty (as figures 3 and 4 reveal).<sup>54</sup>

Doris lived with her grandmother in a modest house on Tower Street in downtown Kingston, very close to the waterfront (see figures 3 and 4). The city of Kingston, according to the anthropologist Diane Austin Broos, "was from its very beginnings a city which harboured the vast majority of whites and people of colour living within Jamaica. Always a city that was majority black both in the days of slavery and freedom, it remained, nevertheless, the home of Jamaica's commercial and professional wealthy."<sup>55</sup> In the first of the two photographs, both taken on the afternoon of Elvira's funeral in 1941, it is striking to notice the number of white people standing in the doorway or to the side of the house, suggesting that Elvira Lambert was connected to the middle and upper-classes in Jamaica or the English ex-patriate community. The people lined up behind the policeman were, we presume, either waiting to pay their respects to the family or were merely observing the wake. Whatever the correct scenario is, the street was dominated by the people who resided there—evidenced by the people standing between the houses and on the steps of the house next door—rather than those who are standing in the doorway of Elvira's house.

Doris's aunt Marian, cousin Dorrit, or close friend Beulah took these photographs (figures 3 and 4) as the writing on the back describes the day of the funeral to Doris, who was unable to attend. These two photographs are from a series of five photographs that capture Elvira Lambert on her deathbed, the hearse waiting to collect her body from the house, the afternoon of the funeral, and the gravestone of Elvira Lambert. While they seem macabre, it was one of the only ways for loved ones, dispersed to England and Panama, to share in the ritual of mourning. The photographs provide yet another insight into the complexity of race and class in the Jamaican context as they situate the family home in the city of Kingston as well as give clues about the identity of Elvira Lambert's exclusively black Jamaican neighbors (like Mrs. Spencer, whose children can be seen looking out of the window of one of the houses in figure 4). The diaspora and migration studies scholar Femke Stock, in "Home and Memory," suggests that the "remembered home" "is imagined, longed for, remembered in the present through the diasporic imaginary."<sup>56</sup> For us, this remembered home—both at 95 Tower Street and in Jamaica more generally—reinforce the distance of geography, time, and generational divide. The house—if it is still standing—has not been within our reach; each time we have visited Kingston, middle-class Jamaicans have deemed it too dangerous for us to drive along Tower Street to look for it. Our skin color and class positioning further prevent us from inconspicuously walking along Tower Street to view the home of our ancestors. It would be, ironically, a similar experience for our grandmother Doris if she were still alive to make the journey back to Kingston.



Figure 3. 95 Tower Street on the afternoon of Elvira Lambert's funeral, 1941.



Figure 4. The hearse parked on Tower Street, Kingston on the afternoon of Elvira Lambert's funeral, 1941.

## Doris's Story

We recently gained access to birth, death, and marriage certificates that have helped in piecing together some of Doris's family narrative. We think Doris was the daughter of a Jamaica white woman who died young, when Doris was eleven. We are using the term "Jamaica white" (a term to describe "white" people in Jamaica who have some African ancestry) to describe Doris's maternal family because it included family members who would have been seen as white outside of Jamaica and also those who were obviously mixed-race (see figure 1). The racial positioning of Doris's maternal line is ambiguous as photographic evidence from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century suggests that they could have been mixed race, but it is difficult to be sure. By quoting the St. Lucian poet Derek Walcott's poem about Jean Rhys, which points out the irony of looking at white Creoles who appear "colored" in sepia photographs, we make a further argument about the reliability of photographs (like those displayed above) when the distance of time and space tricks the eye: "In their faint photographs / mottled with chemicals / like the left hand of some spinster aunt, / they have drifted to the edge / of verandahs in Whistlerian / white, their jungle turned tea-brown— / . . . all looking coloured / from the distance of a century."<sup>57</sup> While Jean Rhys's family was white, Doris's extended family was mixed race.

We can trace Doris's paternal line to a middle-class "brown" family with the surname Benjamin, originally from Morant Bay. Doris's father was the second eldest of six children, all born outside of wedlock to Matthew Benjamin and Manuelita Del Carmen Zuniga (born in Cuba). The Catholic Church eventually married Benjamin and Zuniga in 1874 and baptized Doris's father in 1871, fourteen years after he was born; and, like his daughter, was registered with no surname.<sup>58</sup> Doris's paternal family did not have any involvement in her upbringing. Like many other men with outside children, her father already had a complete nuclear family in addition to at least three outside children.<sup>59</sup> Doris's mother bore another child to Benjamin, a boy named Norval, but the baby died when he was only a year old. It was a revelation, but at the same time not so surprising, to find that Leila Lambert, Doris's mother, is listed as a housekeeper on her son's birth certificate, undermining any notion that Doris came from a middle-class or well-to-do Jamaican family. Although Leila married, despite having an outside child, she did not take her daughter to live with her new family. Her husband, whose surname was Leon, was among the second generation of Jewish immigrants in Kingston and he also had children from a previous relationship. Leila Lambert and Leon had two sons, Morris and Stanley. Doris had regular contact with her half-brothers and they played an important role in her life but, sadly, they migrated to Panama and Doris remained in Jamaica with her grandmother, Elvira.

The Tower Street residence, which had been Elvira's parents' home, comprised, at different times, Doris's grandmother, Elvira, her Aunt Rosaline (Elvira's sister), Aunt Anita (Elvira's sister), Adeline (Doris's cousin), Vivia Dunn (Doris's cousin), Ann Smith (Doris's great grandmother), Irvin (Doris's uncle), Ellen (adopted by Elvira, but she worked as a domestic helper within the home), and Doris herself. Evident from looking at birth, death, and marriage certificates is that many of the people living at 95 Tower Street had numerous children (both within and outside of wedlock), many of whom died in infancy, and that the members of the family constantly dealt with death as part of their everyday lives.

In the late 1920s, Doris met her husband Charles through a mutual friend. Charles was stationed in Kingston as a soldier in the British army. The pair married in the Scots Church, St. Andrew and moved to London in 1930 when the army reassigned Charles. Their daughter Kathleen was born in 1931. During World War II, Doris's Aunt Marian wanted her to send Kathleen to live in Jamaica until the war ended, but Doris kept Kathleen with her in London, despite bombs dropping all around them. Doris returned to Jamaica only once after forty years away. In 1971, she emigrated for a second time to live with her daughter and Australian son-in-law in Newcastle, Australia, which is where she died in 1989.

## Conclusion

Looking at the decay of colonial style buildings in downtown Kingston, in the area where our grandmother grew up, evokes yet another silence: the silence surrounding the absence of a group of people—light-skinned or white—who no longer reside there but whose presence remains in the crumbling stone fences and derelict houses. The decay represents both the demise of colonial Jamaica and the economic impoverishment of the island under neo-colonialism. In a similar way, the stigma attached to being a light-skinned Jamaican outside child is also part of the colonial past; it is no longer so much part of social relations in contemporary Jamaican society, although the anthropologist Lisa Douglass argues illegitimacy "still carries social shame."<sup>60</sup> The position of the light-skinned outside child in Jamaican society pre-independence nonetheless disrupts any notion of a clear-cut social hierarchy in which white and light-skinned people were at an advantage. In Doris's case, the shame surrounding her outside status and the economic disenfranchisement that resulted from being abandoned by her father complicated light-skinned Jamaican subjectivity. At the same time, her light skin enabled her to marry an English soldier and move to England. Robinson-Walcott points out, "The poorest white still speaks from a position of privilege . . . a white skin entitles, privileges the wearer, allows

the wearer access to mobility, to power."<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, when Doris arrived in England her English mother-in-law would not, at first, acknowledge her because she was from Jamaica and would not accept our mother until she was born resembling the English side of the family.

It is our grandmother's life story, evidenced in family photographs, that has been the impetus for this article. Silences and acts of forgetting within our family point to a broader cultural amnesia and erasure of memories—silences about "illegitimacy," class, and race embedded in the continuous historical moment of imperialism. And our family photographs reveal the broader story of "illegitimacy" in Jamaican society during the colonial period. The vital statistics on the birth, death, and marriage certificates explain, to some extent, Doris's silence. But it is only by engaging with family photos that we were prompted to search for answers to the clues provided by the visual archive. As non-Indigenous Australians, it is important to understand the circuits of empire that enabled us and our forbearers to live in Australia. Doris's family narrative demonstrates that we are both complicit in and impacted by the violence of colonialism and the way it played out in both the Caribbean and the Pacific regions.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup>Lou Smith, "The Sound of Unknowing," *Strange: New Melbourne Writers* no. 2, ed. Marion May Campbell, et. al. (Melbourne: University of Melbourne, Department of English, Crooked Styles Press, October 2004), 137–46; and Lou Smith, "The Sound of Unknowing," *Scrapbook to Somewhere*, ed. Lou Smith and Eve Vincent (Melbourne: Breakdown Press, Autumn 2004), 38–45.

<sup>2</sup>In this article, we are using the term "outside" to refer to being outside of the "legitimate" family rather than simply "illegitimate."

<sup>3</sup>Michelle Cliff, *Claiming an Identity They Taught Me to Despise* (Watertown, MA: Persephone, 1980), 6.

<sup>4</sup>"Passing for White, Passing for Black (1991)" *Transitions* 58 (1992): 4–32, 14.

<sup>5</sup>Honor Ford-Smith, "Making White Ladies: Race, Gender, and the Production of Identities in Late Colonial Jamaica," *Resources for Feminist Research* 23, no. 4 (Winter 1994/1995): 55–67.

<sup>6</sup>Marianne Hirsch, "Introduction: Familial Looking" in *The Familial Gaze*, ed. Marianne Hirsch (Lebanon, NH: University of New England Press, 1999), xv.

<sup>7</sup>The term *squattocracy* in Australia refers to wealthy landowners who squatted on Crown land stolen from indigenous people to graze livestock eventually owning large tracts of pastoral land. The term *plantocracy* in the Caribbean refers to the owners of plantations who used an African slave labor force to grow sugar cane and other crops for export.

<sup>8</sup>Kim Robinson-Walcott, *Out of Order: Anthony Winkler and White West Indian Writing* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2006), 55.

<sup>9</sup>Honor Ford-Smith, *Peeling Back the Skin: Whiteness and Gender in late Colonial Jamaica* (master's thesis, University of Toronto, 1994), 37.

<sup>10</sup>Yin C. Paradies, "Beyond Black and White: Essentialism, Hybridity, and Indigeneity," *Journal of Sociology* 42, no. 4 (December 2006): 355–67.

<sup>11</sup>Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith, "Feminism and Cultural Memory: An Introduction," *Signs* 28, no. 1 (Autumn 2002): 1–19, 7.

<sup>12</sup>Alissa Trotz, "Behind the Banner of Culture? Gender, 'Race,' and the family in Guyana," *New West Indian Guide* 77, no. 1–2 (2003): 5–29, 7.

<sup>13</sup>Carole Boyce Davies, informal conversation with Karina Smith, Melbourne, Victoria, February 16, 2007.

<sup>14</sup>Patrick Bryan, "The White Minority in Jamaica at the end of the Nineteenth Century," in *The White Minority in the Caribbean*, ed. Howard Johnson and Karl Watson (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1998), 116–30, 122.

<sup>15</sup>Brian L. Moore and Michele A. Johnson, *Neither Led Nor Driven: Contesting British Cultural Imperialism in Jamaica, 1865–1920* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2004), 132.

<sup>16</sup>Lisa Douglass, *The Power of Sentiment: Love, Hierarchy, and the Jamaican Family Elite* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992).

<sup>17</sup>Ford-Smith, *Peeling Back the Skin*, 49.

<sup>18</sup>See Trotz, "Behind the Banner of Culture?"

<sup>19</sup>Trotz, "Behind the Banner of Culture?" 11.

<sup>20</sup>Annette Kuhn, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (London: Verso, 2002), 57.

<sup>21</sup>Persis Charles, "The Name of the Father: Women, Paternity, and British Rule in Nineteenth-Century Jamaica," *International Labor and Working-Class History* no. 41 (Spring 1992): 4–22, 17.

<sup>22</sup>Judith Blake, *Family Structure in Jamaica: The Social Context of Reproduction* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1961), 19.

<sup>23</sup>Carole Boyce Davies, *Caribbean Spaces: Escapes from Twilight Zones* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 136.

<sup>24</sup>Alfred. W. Sangster, *The Kingston Technical High School story with short histories of Dinthill, Dunoan, Holmwood, St. Andrew, St. Elizabeth and Vere Technical High Schools: partners with CAST/UTECH in developing technical education in Jamaica* (Kingston: A. W. Sangster, 2004).

<sup>25</sup>Ford-Smith, *Peeling Back the Skin*, 12.

<sup>26</sup>Michael Shanks, "Archaeography" *Michael Shanks—All Things Archaeological*, last access October 25, 2016. <http://www.mshanks.com/archaeography/>; Michael Shanks, *The Archaeological Imagination* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2012); and Michael Shanks and Connie Svabo, "Archaeology and Photography: A Pragmatology," in *Reclaiming Archaeology: Beyond the Tropes of Modernity*, ed. Alfredo González-Ruibal (New York: Routledge, 2013), 90.

<sup>27</sup>Honor Ford-Smith, *My Mother's Last Dance* (Toronto: Sister Vision, 1997); and "Grandma's Estate" is included in Sistren with Honor Ford-Smith, *Lionheart Gal: Life Stories of Jamaican Women* (London: The Women's Press, 1986). For further information on Ford-Smith's creative works and their exploration of the Jamaica White "outside" child, see Karina Smith, "The Attic of My Grandmother's Subconscious: 'Whiteness,' 'Illegitimacy,' and Migration in Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*;" and Honor Ford-Smith, "Grandma's Estate," *Women: A Cultural Review* 25, no. 3 (Autumn 2014): 287–304.

<sup>28</sup>Joan Anim-Addo, "'I, Daughter': Auto/biography, Fractured Histories and Familial Quest for 'Scotch Blood' in Grenada and the Grenadines," in *With and Without Empire: Scotland Across the (Post) Colonial Borderline*, ed. Carla Sassi and Theo Van Hoijnsbergen (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 168–84, 179.

<sup>29</sup>Anim-Addo, "A Brief History of Juliana 'Lily' Mulzac," 74.

<sup>30</sup>Anim-Addo, "A Brief History of Juliana 'Lily' Mulzac," 75.

<sup>31</sup>Andrea Levy, *Six Stories and An Essay* (London: Tinder Press, 2014).

<sup>32</sup>Catherine Keenan, "On the Relationship Between Personal Photographs and Individual Memory," *History of Photography* 22, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 60–64.

<sup>33</sup>Ford-Smith, *Peeling Back the Skin*, 9.

<sup>34</sup>Anim-Addo, "A Brief History of Juliana 'Lily' Mulzac," 48.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Kuhn, *Family Secrets*, 4.

<sup>37</sup>Kuhn, *Family Secrets*, 10.

<sup>38</sup>Annette Kuhn, "Photography and Cultural Memory: A Methodological Exploration," *Visual Studies* 22, no. 3 (December 2007): 283–92.

<sup>39</sup>Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 5.

<sup>40</sup>Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 92; and Liz Wells, ed., *Photography: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 31.

<sup>41</sup>Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 5. The *punctum* is a detail within a photograph that moves the viewer directly. As Jay Prosser states, it “is the poignant partial detail that ruptures or punctures the *studium*” (25). For Barthes, when viewing the “Winter Garden Photograph” of his late mother, “the *punctum* is the photographic incarnation of Barthes’s melancholia. It is loss that won’t be healed” (26). Jay Prosser, *Light in the Dark Room: Photography and Loss* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 25–26.

<sup>42</sup>Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 26–27.

<sup>43</sup>See also Hirsch’s discussion in the introduction to *Family Frames*, 1–15.

<sup>44</sup>Shawn Michelle Smith, *At the Edge of Sight: Photography and the Unseen* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 25.

<sup>45</sup>Smith, *At the Edge of Sight*, 24–25.

<sup>46</sup>Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 2.

<sup>47</sup>Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 2, 5–9.

<sup>48</sup>Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 8.

<sup>49</sup>Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 116.

<sup>50</sup>In *Family Frames*, Hirsch enlists the “theoretical, critical, and autobiographical” (15) in her reading of family photographs in an attempt to revise the hegemonic visual discourse. See Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 1–15.

<sup>51</sup>Sontag, *On Photography*, 9.

<sup>52</sup>Patrick Bryan, *The Jamaican People 1880–1902: Race, Class, and Social Control* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan Caribbean, 1991).

<sup>53</sup>Bryan points out that “colored” Jamaicans dominated the legal profession in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. See *The Jamaican People*, 77.

<sup>54</sup>Moore and Johnson, *Neither Led Nor Driven*, 4.

<sup>55</sup>Diane J. Austin-Broos, “Gay Nights and Kingston Town: Representations of Kingston, Jamaica,” in *Postmodern Cities and Spaces*, ed. Sophie Watson and Katherine Gibson (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995), 149–64.

<sup>56</sup>Femke Stock, “Home and Memory,” in *Diasporas: Concepts, Intersections, Identities*, ed. Kim Knott and Sean McLoughlin (London: Zed, 2010), 24.

<sup>57</sup>Derek Walcott, *Collected Poems: 1948–1984* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1986), 427.

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<sup>58</sup>Jamaican Family Search Genealogy Research Library, "Roman Catholic Marriages August 11, 1869 to December, 1878," last updated 2013, last accessed January 14, 2014, [www.jamaicanfamilysearch.com](http://www.jamaicanfamilysearch.com)

<sup>59</sup>The existence of other "outside" children was revealed by a distant cousin who made contact with us because he was researching his own Jamaican family tree. He sent us copies of the birth certificates for Doris's half-siblings.

<sup>60</sup>Douglass, *The Power of Sentiment*, 129.

<sup>61</sup>Robinson-Walcott, "Deconstructing Jamaican Whiteness: A Diasporic Voice," *Small Axe* no. 29 (2009): 107–17, 112.