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Reader's Guide for Marlon James *The Book of Night Women*

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Reader's Guide for Marlon James, *The Book of Night Women* (2010 Dayton Literary Peace Prize Winner)

Blair Bailey, Hyatt Hammad, Chelcie Hinders, Katharine Schlegel

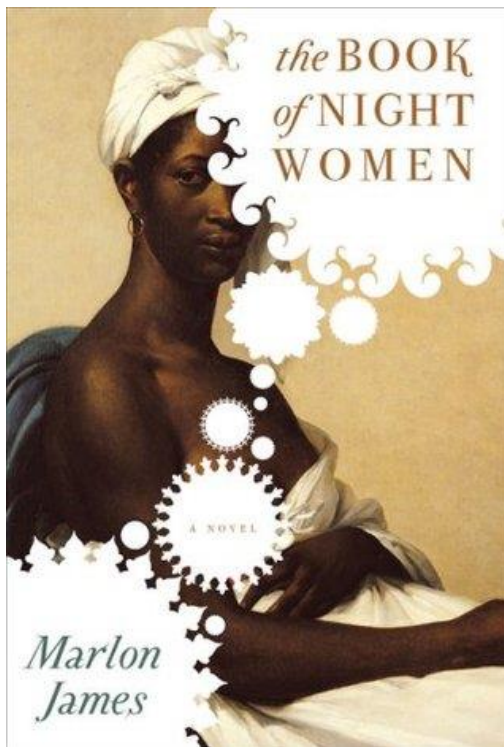


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Historical Context

Slavery in Jamaica

The British colonized Jamaica in 1655, and they quickly began using African slave labor to grow a variety of crops; sugar cane became the most common and profitable crop over time. Though other countries have deep history with slavery, including the United States, Jamaica featured notoriously violent and inhumane forms of slavery. Due to the combination of backbreaking work of growing sugar cane (a crop that is even more demanding than, for example, cotton or tobacco), malnutrition, poor diet, and cruel treatment, there were a large number of miscarriages, and the slave mortality rate was often twice as high as the birth rate. The average life span for a Jamaican slave working on a sugar cane plantation was seven years; in fact, slaves were dying so rapidly that “the Caribbean slaves experienced continuous decrease [in population], and the North American slaves experienced continuous increase” (Dunn 43). While many slave populations in the U.S. grew by a higher number of births than deaths, many Jamaican plantation owners simply purchased new slaves when their previous ones “expired”: “Prior to 1807, abolitionists contrasted Africa’s burgeoning slave population with the failure of slaves to reproduce in the West Indies, citing the latter as evidence of a cruel regime, perpetuated by the ready availability of fresh African imports. In response, planters argued that the Caribbean’s harsh climate and the sexual immorality of Africans raised mortality while depressing fertility” (Forster and Smith 2).

The cruel treatment and daily violence often inspired slave revolts over the centuries, with the Haitian Revolution being one of the most notable: “The most successful slave rebellion in history, the Haitian Revolution began as a slave revolt and ended with the founding of an independent state...News of the first successful rebellion—the only slave uprising in history to end with the foundation of a new country—went on to inspire countless other revolts throughout the United States and the Caribbean” (Andrews). In fact, it is this very revolt that will serve as inspiration for the slave revolt at Montpelier at the end of the novel.

In the U.S. South, slaves were generally 33 percent of population. In contrast, in the Caribbean, slaves were 90-92% of population. Such a ratio made the fear of violent revolt ever-present in places like Jamaica, particularly after the Haitian Revolution of 1791-1804, where slaves successfully overthrew the French and established an independent state. Jamaica itself witnessed a series of slave rebellions in Jamaica, including one in 1760 that involved 1500 slaves. Ultimately, fear of revolt was at least a partial cause of the British abolishing slavery in 1833 (this followed Samuel Sharp's 1831 revolt by just two years).

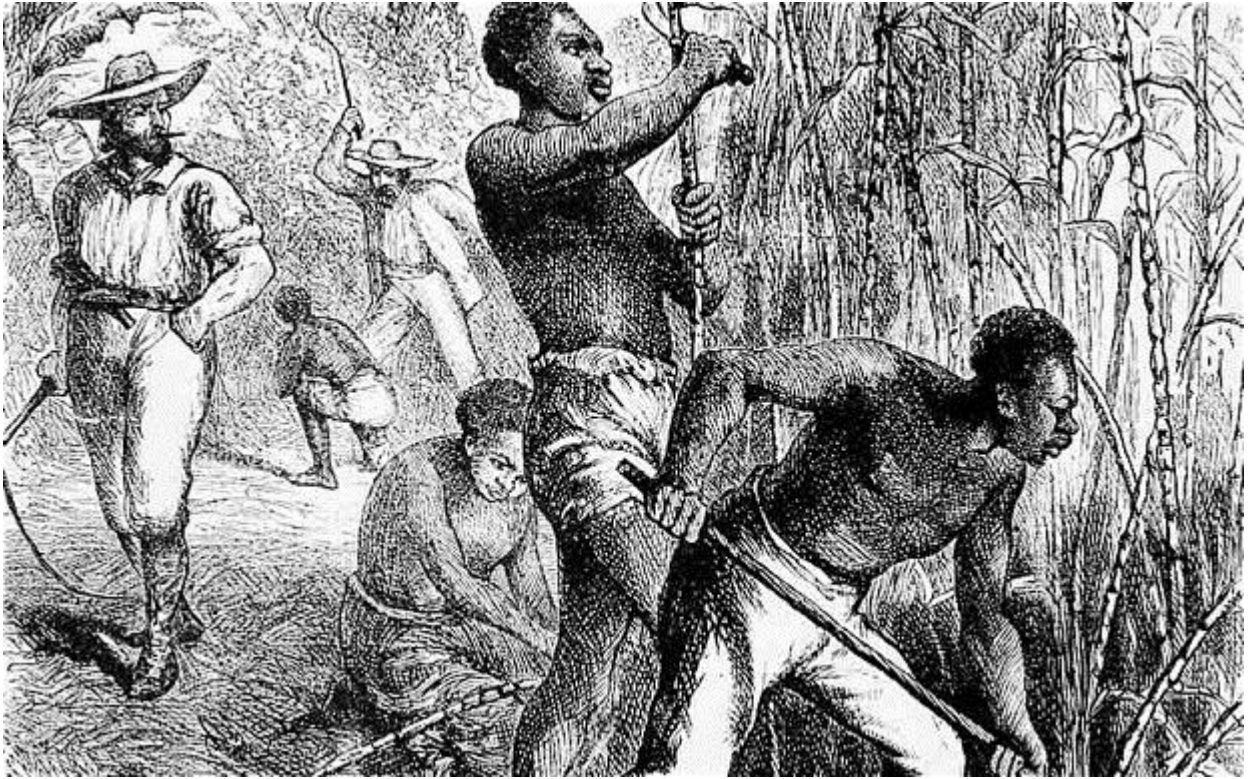
Obeah

Obeah refers to a cluster of folk magic and religious practices in the West Indies that migrated with West African slaves of Igbo origin. It is similar in structure to Vodou and Santería. Historically, because the leaders of slave revolts often practiced Obeah, the practice was perceived by the British to be dangerous. Leaders of their community, Obeah men were involved in all slave revolts in Jamaica. James puts a twist on this by making the Obeah practitioners women

Jamaican Maroons

In part because of its terrain, Jamaica had communities of escaped slaves—called Maroons—living in the mountains. The British were unable to suppress the Maroons, despite major attempts in the 1730s and 1790s. Maroons served as figures of resistance and potential volatility in Jamaica and throughout the Atlantic slave world. James mentions the Maroons on 78-79. While the Maroons provide inspiration for later revolts, they also earned money by

catching escaped slaves, making their legacy mixed at best. Maroons surface several times in the novel.



“Really, Master Wilson, Jamaica is about as stable as gunpowder in a kitchen.

—Quinn, I’ll not have you scare the ladies needlessly. Surely it’s not as bad as all that, Massa Humphrey say.

—Not as bad as all that? Are ye blind or stupid?

—Mr. Quinn! I’d thank you to remember your place, Miss Isobel say.

—Oh I’m well aware of it, ma’am. It has been made quite plain to me” (139-140).

Throughout the novel, James highlights the fact that each of the three most important white characters in the novel has a different nationality and a different class from one another. Humphrey is British and owns a slave estate that produces sugar cane for sale and distribution; he is the wealthiest and most powerful (elite) of the three. Isobel is French and lives on a wealthy slave-owning estate, but her estate does not produce any crops or product for sale like Humphrey, and she is not the owner of her estate. Robert Quinn is Irish and works for Humphrey as his overseer; Quinn is not a landowner or private slave owner. Christopher Petley writes that in Jamaican colonies, “shared fear therefore helped to bind white society and ensured that the elite did not allow divisions of class to supercede lines of racial division” (99). Lilith even remarks, “there be nothing like black flesh to make all white man realize they have the same standing” (260). In Jamaica, the threat posed by black slaves revolting was so imminent that the white slave owners had to look past their differences in class structures and their different nationalities in order to band together to remain in control over their slaves.

“I’m quite the Creole myself. I know some of the darker aspects of colonial life” (198).

“Watch out for that one Miss Isobel, you hear me. She know more ‘bout negro ways than you think. Every now and then she even have to catch herself chatting like nigger” (217).

“No better than negro I am, no breeding nor bearing, no education on how one becomes a proper lady. Have you heard what Edward Long has said about us? Even we backward Creole women have heard of it. Seems he thinks we are ignorant blackie lovers who are to be pitied.”(243).

Petley writes that it was “slavery that lent Jamaican white society its distinctively local, or creole, character and made it distinct from society in Europe” (98). Lilith writes, “Good money wagering that this not be how things go back in London, or Liverpool, or Birmingham, or whatever ham or hell white man come from” (260). The institution of slavery and the overall differences in everyday life between the colonies and the rest of Europe made the Creole life completely different from typical European lifestyles and upbringing, often isolating or belittling creole people.

“Blood don’t got no colour. Not when blood wash the floor she lying on as she scream for that son of a bitch to come, the lone baby of 1785” (3).

Lilith was the only child born on the Montpelier estate in 1785. Greg Grandin describes that “As the ratio of deaths to births remained high, slaves themselves were held to blame. ‘The Negro race [...] is so averse to labor that without force we have hardly anywhere been able to obtain it’ [...] But the sentiment covered white opinions regarding the labor of slave reproduction. Women were punished for miscarrying, sent to the workhouse or to solitary confinement.” Grandin also describes how it is the nature of the work slaves were forced to do, impossible hours, insufficient food, hard labor, and constant beatings, whippings, and abuse that prevented slaves from having children.

“A negro man and a negro woman on the platform. The two naked, save for chain round they neck and another binding they wrist. Both shiny from palm oil that carry scent right up the street. The auctioneer grab the woman little titty and squeeze. The woman yelp and try to run but the man grab her by the hair” (322).

One of the most chilling scenes in the novel occurs when Lilith accompanies Isobel into town and they drive past a slave auction. Because “Montpelier be an estate for three or four generations now and there be so many slave that Lilith can’t remember the last time she see one that come straight from Africa”, seeing men and women from Africa is horrifying for Lilith because she is used to more “seasoned” slaves looking so dejected, but not people straight from Africa. “Just off the ship and the Africa man sinking into nigger pose already. He already buckling under backra weight” (322). Grandin writes of the estate his research reports on, “despite the death rate, the plantation’s population increased, replenished by new captives purchased from slave ships or other Jamaican estates”. While Montpelier does not frequently purchase slaves from ships, other Jamaican estates worked their slaves to death and bought new ones as the old, overworked ones died.

“The negroes get preaching ten times a year. The last time was All Saints’ Day. Although they preach the same thing every Christmas and New Year’s, niggers don’t understand what a baby in the bush can do. [...] But white people think this be the greatest thing. The baby grow up

and they kill him, and white people think that be even greater. It make plenty sense that white people would get so much mirth and joy out of this 'cause nobody kill for fun like backra. [...] White man God perplexing like the white man" (148).

Lilith and the other slaves are confused by the concept of Christianity. Christopher Hudson writes that the white men thought of African religions and beliefs as savage and dangerous, and therefore made efforts to convert slaves to Christianity. He further describes how white men used religion to defend the institution of slavery. "The consensus of governments and businessmen was that slaves in the Americas lived better than they would have done as free men in Africa. Apart from anything else, it did their souls good to be converted from paganism". White men strongly believed that "[a]bolishing slavery would not only injure the livelihoods of many Englishmen 'it would be extreme cruelty to the African savages' whom the slave trade saved 'from massacre or intolerable bondage in their own country', and introduced to a much happier life".

"There be thirty three negro for every white man in Jamaica. And when most of them negroes be Ashanti, there goin' be more hataclaps in the colony than in hell itself. [...] White man know there never be a safe day in the colony. So they whip we" (261).

Despite how hard the whites are struggling to hold onto their power, Lilith and the other night women can see that things in Jamaica are shifting, and the white people are becoming more and more afraid of their slaves. "Against this backdrop of cruelty and lawlessness, slave numbers grew and grew, until in most places they massively outnumbered the whites. A 'fog of fear' descended [...] forcing the planters 'to turn to increasingly inhumane means to maintain control." Because they don't have superiority of numbers, whites are trying to maintain their superiority in force, by becoming more and more brutal and ruthless toward their slaves, which in turn creates more anger and resentment and furthers the preexisting tensions.

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Themes

The Reworking of the Slave Narrative

Most major slavery novels have been about American slavery (*Beloved*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*). *The Book of Night Women* intervenes within this literary history by changing the setting to Jamaica, where conditions made slave-owner relations radically different. In interviews,

James says he was interested in how "things could fall apart at any minute" in Jamaica, and *The Book of Night Women* is suffused with an almost constant sense of violence. This also means that slave owners were more brutal, a fact that James makes visible with events at Montpelier and Coulibre. Finally, this also meant that slaveowners, in a minority, ended up having a more intimate relationship with their slaves, a historical reality that James represents by the many relationships between slave and European characters.

Even a book as violent and bleak as Toni Morrison's *Beloved* ends with a somewhat optimistic ending. If Sethe cannot escape her past, her daughter can. *The Book of Night Women* offers no such comforts; one review notes that the novel "is not a redemption narrative," and the promised revolt at the novel's end changes nothing. This is a novel where "blood spurt from the skin, on spring from the axe, the cat-o'-nine, the whip, the cane and the blackjack and every day in slave life is a day that colour red" (3) but where all the blood in the world does not redeem.

James also reworks the slave narrative's relationship to literacy. In a range of slave narratives, literacy and freedom are bound together as in *The Autobiography of Frederick Douglass*: "I now understood what had been to me a most perplexing difficulty—to wit, the white man's power to enslave the black man. It was a grand achievement, and I prized it highly. From that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom...I set out with high hope, and a fixed purpose, at whatever cost of trouble, to learn how to read." Lilith reads Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews*, which itself warns against the danger of plays. Lilith says of the novel "Joseph want her to be a woman of the sort she don't want to be" (223). *Joseph Andrews* is simultaneously alienating, inspiring, and comforting for Lilith. In part, here, James extends the complicated relationships in Jamaica to Lilith's relationship to the novel, but he also calls into question the efficacy of any literature to create change (including, perhaps, his own novel).

Circularity

James repeats the phrase "every Negro walk in a circle" at several points during the text, with slight variations. This repeated phrase also describes the plot, which circles but does not move forward. Lilith begins life as the daughter of a slavemaster, stays more or less trapped in a cabin for the early years of her life, and moves, first to the plantation mansion and later to another estate, only to return to the cabin to live with a white man. The Europeans also seem to move in circles, never improving their lives. The novel's recurring violence adds to this sense of circularity.

Mixing

The critic Kathleen Wilson describes Eighteenth-century Jamaica as "an island of transculture [...] a place where the syncretic creation of culture was forged from the destruction of indigenous plants, inhabitants, and ways of life and the imposition of extractive forced labor regimes, and where no one could claim to 'belong.' English, Scottish, Irish, and Jewish; black, white, and colored; slave, servant, and free; Creole and 'new' were just a few of the categories through which residents attempted to sort out their status and identity." James depicts this world by making all the Night Women half-white and by choosing to have Lilith be attracted to both Humphrey and live with the Irishman Quinn.

Discussion Questions

How does Marlon James avoid misrepresenting the slaves of 1800 Jamaica?

While being interviewed, Marlon James quotes an African proverb, “until lions learn to write the story of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.” He continues to state he is interested in the lion’s story, “in the history that’s not really told.” Because slaves were treated as cattle, detailed documentation was not commonly kept on them. Historians often focus on the journals kept to dictate the history of Jamaica. These journals, as James puts it, “glorifies the hunter.”

A: James’ emphasizes his authority as a writer of this time period through his use of colloquial dialect, including the use of derogatory terms used by slave owners and slaves. He enforces his accurate representations of slave life through his relentless violence that oozes off the pages. If James had omitted the slang or horrific treatment of the human body he would be doing discredit to history.

Review the scenes on page 16 and 156/57 where Lilith is under attack by the Johnny-jumpers. In what ways are they similar? How does the structure of the scenes reflect the story?

A: Both of these scenes use a mixture of long detailed sentences followed by one or two repeated words. By pairing these styles, James disorients his reader and gives them an insight to Lilith’s thought process in her adrenalin filled moments. Her sharp focus and quick thinking keep her alive. On a broader spectrum, James omits names while illustrating these scenes. By doing so, he expands the number of lives this particular story can represent. The use of pronouns makes the violence impersonal, because of this, it can be applied to multiple slave experiences.

Review the paragraphs quoting “Every negro walk in a circle. Take that and make of it what you will” (chapters 3, 11, 18, 25, 31), What cycles would the narrator be referring to? How does this set the stage for the trauma within the novel?

A: Chapter 3: This paragraph compares a negro’s life to the continual rise of the moon and sun. It also illustrates how a slave’s life is dictated by nature, specifically crop season and the cycle that defines a girl’s status as a woman. This implies that a slave’s life is out of her control; these cycles continue regardless of the slave in question.

Chapter 11: This section refers to the cycle faced by escaped slaves. Regardless of being brought into slavery by ship or by birth, slaves are stuck in slavery because they lack sympathy from their oppressors. This foreshadows the lack of sympathy shown to the slaves by the white colonials.

Chapter 18: This cycle illuminates the slave revolts in Jamaica. Any creature will snap under extreme torcher day after day. As the revolts continue to fail, the cycle is reborn. This sets up the stage for Lilith’s mass murder at Coulibre. When Lilith is removed from the structure of Montpelier, she is introduced to a life where she cannot escape the atrocities by retreating to a basement. Lilith’s tolerance is tested and she falls into the slave revolt cycle, successfully burning the plantation. The cycle begins to repeat itself as Lilith settles in back at Montpelier, still enslaved.

Chapter 25: This passage explores the cycle experienced by the white colonials of Jamaica and how they control slave life. It describes how white men set a path for slaves, and while some white men may oppose slavery, they usually cave to the pressures of society; "others never leave" (313).

Chapter 31: The final cycle depicts how the individual slave goes unnoticed when viewing slavery in its entirety. It conveys the disposability of slaves, and by doing so, illuminating the tremendous number of individuals that were enslaved. It also sums up the other cycles referenced in the novel; as the rebellions continued "white man sleep with one eye open, but black man..." who are unable to escape the cycle of violence "...can never sleep" (421).

There are few, if any, male characters portrayed in a positive light in The Book of Night Woman; what challenges did Marlon James face while writing this female dominated novel?

A: The main challenge faced by James was portraying a woman's experience accurately. There are few documents dictating the violence against slaves in general, there are less dictating the violence against women, specifically. James also had to look past the assumed passivity of women in order to convincingly have his female characters pull off a two year in the making slave revolt.

Homer is introduced as a protective figure to the reader at the beginning of the novel when she covers up Paris's death and hides Lilith from vengeful Johnny-jumpers. From then on, Homer watches out for Lilith's wellbeing. Discuss the progression of Lilith and Homer's relationship. How does each woman affect the other's life?

A: Homer is like an unwanted mother figure to Lilith. By the time of this rescue, the teenaged Lilith has relied on herself for survival. Lilith does not feel like she needs protecting, but her ignorance of life outside of Montpelier's walls would be her downfall. Homer protects Lilith while in the Montpelier house, and tries to keep the rebellious teen out of trouble. Their relationship is elevated when Lilith journeys to Coulibre. As her first experience off of her born plantation, Lilith is forced to change her attitude and understands slave life for what it is, miserable and violent. Coulibre teaches Lilith to empathize with Homer's life experiences. Their distance from each other transformed their mother/daughter relationship to one of friends (which one could argue is another step in the patriarchy.) Finally, Lilith's knowledge of the world surpasses Homer's as she (Lilith) realizes Homer is driven solely by revenge. Homer protected Lilith so she had time to become older and wiser, while Lilith reveals Homer as the intelligent, strong, and vengeful woman she is.

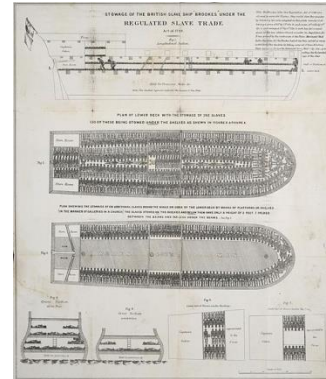


Diagram illustrating the stowage of African slaves on a British [slave ship](#).

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Book Review Summaries:

Though Marlon James's *The Book of Night Women* has received critical acclaim and the Dayton Literary Peace Prize, literary critics praise and criticize different aspects of James's work. Critic Valerie Piechocki analyzed the audible book version of James's novel, saying that fans of historical fiction would enjoy the plot but perhaps be turned off by the repeated instances of rape, torture, and slave dialect. She compares James's writing to that of Tony Morrison and Edwidge Danticat and says that the story over all is a good read.

Critic Edward St. John focuses more on summary than evaluating *The Book of Night Women*. He says that James does an excellent job with describing female reactions to violent male transgressions. St. John also comments on how Jamaican conflict is never just an issue of black and white and how there's rivalry among African tribes amongst the slaves. Black Johnny Jumpers whip other blacks, and no one can be trusted during the time of growing rebellion. He also believes that the slave dialect makes the novel difficult to read.

Literary critic Jim Hannan finds the novel to be "steeped in violence, animosity, and mistrust." Hannan is one of the more negative critics of James's novel. He finds Lilith's feelings to be ambiguous throughout the novel, especially her feelings towards whites. He believes that James's treatment of the characters is superficial and that his fixation on genitals and sexual aggression is "predictable and reductive." He also believes that James doesn't capitalize on the literary texts that Lilith and Homer read and that the slaves' Greek names were not thematically developed enough. He finds James's patois/use of regional dialect of the characters to be unimaginative. Hannan says that James too often substitutes silence, long looks and hisses for

“meaningful dialogue or narration,” which again suggest a “lack of imagination.” He believes that the amount of ambivalence in the writing proves to be a major deficit in the end.

Literary critic Kaiama L. Glover states that James’s novel is beautifully written and that “every page...reminds us that we don’t know nearly enough [about slavery].” She believes that the dialect helps transport readers into that time period and states that James avoids many clichés by never drawing rigid lines between good and evil and by never taking sides. She says that both blacks and whites are transformed into animals in this story. She says James also challenges the notion that slaves were always passive and content with their lives by making Lilith wish for a better life as well as showing how she and the other slaves were constantly resisting their oppression. She believes that James writes in the spirit of Alice Walker and Toni Morrison but with a style all his own. He has taken a subject that is rather unspeakable—the author argues it’s unthinkable at times—and successfully turned it into an eloquently-written, devastating and deeply disturbing novel about a mulatto girl named Lilith and her quest for freedom, self, and peace.

Annotated Bibliography:

Altink, Henrice. "Deviant And Dangerous: Pro-Slavery Representations Of Jamaican Slave Women's Sexuality, C. 1780–1834." *Slavery & Abolition* 26.2 (2005): 271-288. *Academic Search Complete*. Web.

Literary critic Henric Altink analyzes how the stereotypes and portrayals of enslaved women were used to justify white men’s sexual assaults against them. These stereotypes have also changed over time. There are two main stereotypes that have been used by Jamaican writers to defend the practice of slavery in response to abolitionists at the time: the black scheming Jezebel/eager prostitute and the potentially virtuous enslaved woman/housekeeper. The Jezebels were described as so promiscuous and whorish that it was only natural for a white man to surrender to their advances, while the potentially virtuous slave stereotype emerged to discourage men from “ruining” their female slaves, since it was adding to the instability of society with the increasing amount of mixed children. This essay illustrates how commonplace interracial relationships were in Jamaica throughout the slave trade and how Lilith and Quinn’s relationship was definitely within the realm of possibility during that time.

By, David B. "Jamaica: From Piracy, Slavery and Rebellion to New Era of Independence." *New York Times (1923-Current file)*: 6. Aug 06 1962. *ProQuest*. Web. In this article, David Binder describes the climate and colonization of Jamaica. He begins with the Islands history in the hands of the Spanish and the Arawak slaves they used to cultivate Jamaica’s rich land. Though when the Arawak population began to die off and the British began to colonize, slaves were brought over from Africa. Binder also discusses the mountain dwelling Maroons and their relationship with the British. The African slaves outnumbered the Europeans by a large amount though the threat of the Maroons kept them on the plantation. Binder suggests that due to the numbers, the threat of rebellion was persistent in Jamaica which made conditions harsh. The information this article contains provides a framework for better understanding the structure of society during the seventeenth century and serves as a history for the novel on how the colonization occurred.

Cole, Sarah. "Enchantment, Disenchantment, War, Literature." *PMLA* 124.5 (2015): 1632-647. Modern Language Association. Web. 1 Mar. 2015.

Cole presents violence as either enchanted or disenchanting and examines literature's role in trying to express the difference. She claims that people want to understand war and death but the way they want to understand it is unclear. In this essay, Cole explains the difference between the two theories and compares the way the body and blood are portrayed. She compares these theories from the points of view of other authors in terms of photography, religion, and descriptions of violence. Cole concludes that literature and art cannot properly represent violence. This essay is a source for understanding the role of violence in a novel and identifying where literature falls short in expressing the reality of the violence.

Dunn, Richard S. "The Demographic Contrast between Slave Life in Jamaica and Virginia, 1760-1865." *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 151.1 (Mar. 2007): 43-60. *JSTOR*. Web.

Dunn explains the difference between slavery in Jamaica and the United States, analyzing the specific plantations of the Mesopotamia estate in western Jamaica and Mount Airy plantation in Virginia. The Jamaican estate had a death rate twice as high as the birth rate, which was the exact opposite of the Virginian plantation. The Virginian plantation put a much higher emphasis on increasing slave numbers through natural reproduction as opposed to the Jamaican estate which believed it would be cheaper to just perpetually buy new slaves to replace the dead ones as opposed to caring for the slaves' health. The article also illustrates how white men pursued slave girls who were more often mixed, Jamaican born as opposed to from Africa with darker skin, showing how skin color had a very profound effect on the status of slaves and Jamaicans as a whole. Though white men made up only 5% of the population, they sired more than 10% of the children in 1762 and 1883. These statistics help illustrate just how particularly heinous and horrific Jamaican slavery was in comparison to slavery in different parts of the world, making the slave revolt at the end of *The Book of Night Women* seem even more imminent.

"Effect of Emancipation in Jamaica." *New York Times (1857-1922)*: 4. Jul 21 1860. *ProQuest*. Web.

This article shows the mindsets some people had about the abolition of slavery in Jamaica. The author praises slavery and blames the emancipation of the slaves for the fall of sugar and coffee export. This author offers a version of what those who view slavery as immoral think though he/she shuts down the claim and insists that the condition of Jamaica would be better off if the slaves were working the fields rather than trying to support their own families. This article gives insight to the attitudes some people had about the slaves and just how deeply the system of slavery affected individual's ideas of right and wrong.

Giraldo, Alexander. "Obeah: The Ultimate Resistance." *Slave Resistance: A Caribbean Study*. n.p, n.d. Web.

This article explores how the Obeah religion was often closely linked to slave revolts in the Americas. Obeah is the entity that lives within witches that allows them to harness supernatural forces and spirits for personal use. Other variations of Obeah include: Shango, Santeria, Voodoo, and Ju-Ju. Historians believe Obeah came to the Americas from

the Ashanti and Koromantin tribes in Africa during the slave trade. Obeah men and women acted as spiritual and community leaders and received the utmost respect, for many feared they would be cursed if they angered these powerful leaders. They were rumored to be able to resurrect the dead, render people invincible, cure disease, and cause great harm to others. Their knowledge of poisons was so vast that people had a much higher chance of being cured of their illness by visiting an Obeah man than a European doctor, since doctors would often bleed their patients and make the situation worse. Obeah practices were eventually banned in the late 17th century, since more and more slave masters were getting poisoned and because it was often the Obeah leaders who incited slave revolts. Learning about this religion makes the slaves' fear of Obeah in *The Book of Night Women* even more understandable.

Grandin, Greg. "Born, Bought, Sold." *The New York Times* 4 Jan. 2015. *The New York Times*. Web. Greg Grandin, writer for *The New York Times*, analyses Richard S. Dunn's "A Tale of Two Plantations." This overview shows the contrast between a slave plantation in Jamaica and one in Virginia. Grandin references Dunn's "big picture" of slavery and highlights how he sticks to the facts when following the last three generations of slavery. On the Jamaican plantation, absentee masters were very involved though they supervised from their home in England. There were more deaths than births on these plantations and the slaves themselves were blamed. In Virginia, there was a greater focus on breeding the slaves which resulted in more births than deaths and the slave population increased. Grandin concludes with the importance of Dunn showing the brutality in both plantations and does not favor one system to the other. This article can be useful in understanding the differences between the ways many Jamaican plantations were run versus those in the southern United States. Both Grandin and Dunn seem to favor sticking to the facts and avoiding bias to help readers understand these master-slave relationships.

"Jamaican History." *Jamaica Information Service*. Jamaica Information Service, 2015. Web. This webpage explores the history of Jamaica from its early origins. The original inhabitants, the Tainos, came from South America about 2500 years ago. The Spanish arrived in 1494 and eventually wiped out the native population. The British seized control of Jamaica in 1655 and started cultivating tobacco, indigo, and cocoa; however, sugar production would eventually become the dominant export (which was one of the most strenuous crops to harvest). The Americas soon became one of the three hubs of the triangular slave trade. Though Jamaica was notorious for the treatment of its slaves to try and control them, there were several slave revolts—some more successful than others. This article also describes the Maroons, an establishment of former slaves that lived in mountainous regions and successfully fought off the British army. The African slave trade was abolished in Jamaica in 1808, with full emancipation occurring in 1838. This is not too long after *The Book of Night Women* takes place, showing how the fear of constant revolt ultimately led to the freedom slaves had been seeking for centuries.

Johnson, Amy M. "Slavery on the Gold Coast and African Resistance to Slavery in Jamaica During the Early Colonial Period." *Limina* 18.(2012): 1-15. *Historical Abstracts*. Johnson describes the connection between slavery on the African Gold Coast and slavery in Jamaica. She focuses on the when and how the slaves become acclimated to slavery and explores some of the reasons behind slave rebellions in Jamaica. On the Gold Coast,

the slaves had the opportunity to marry, gain wealth, and even own their own slaves. This is a very different structure than that of the slavery in Jamaica where one inherited their position as a slave and had little to no hope of improving their situation. Many of the slaves in Jamaica were from the Gold Coast, so when they were captured and brought to the Caribbean, they expected opportunities to improve their situation. Johnson identifies this contrast as a reason for many of the slave rebellions. This study can serve as a background for the lives some of the slaves had in Africa compared to their lives on the Jamaican plantation as well as give insight to some of the motive behind the revolts.

“On the Plantations.” *The Abolition Project*. East of England Broadband Network, 2009. Web. This article describes the everyday life of a slave working on a plantation. The slaves who survived the voyage (that lasted several months) from Africa to the Americas and being crammed like sardines on top of each other were sold like animals upon arrival. They were stripped of their identities and given new names, losing their families, culture, language, and past over time. Jobs were divided according to the gender, age, color, birthplace, and strength of each slave. Men were more often assigned skilled trades while women worked more often in the fields. Slaves worked 18-hour shifts (sometimes longer during harvest season) and didn’t get days off to rest. Jamaican slaves working on sugar plantations lived an average of 7-9 years before they died from the horrific conditions and were quickly replaced by newly imported slaves. In *The Book of Night Women*, Lilith works around the house and never in the fields, so it’s important to know what the majority of the slaves had to live through to better understand why they were more motivated to revolt towards the end of the novel as opposed to Lilith, whose life was the safest living with Robert Quinn.

Paton, Diana. “Gender, Language, Violence, and Slavery: Insult in Jamaica, 1800-1838.” *Gender & History*. 18.2 (2006): 246-265. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. Paton provides an overview of the judicial system in Jamaica in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. She emphasized the differences between the ways the enslaved and the free were treated in the courts. Many accounts of slave trials were summarized and lacked the details that Diana draws attention to in her research. Her research shows the ways slaves were treated unfairly in the courts and how their lives were viewed as less important. Many punishments for slaves at the time involved violence against the body and was not against the law if he/she died during punishment. This source highlight the way the slaves were viewed as bodies and not as human beings with rights. This gives historical background to the punishment of the slaves and how being beaten to death would be considered just. When physical violence against slaves became illegal, verbal abuse became more common. Women were the main targets of this abuse and were often sexualized or animalized by their master’s speech. Paton uses the account of slave girl Sarah Williams’s verbal abuse to show just how harsh this language was and also to point out how the women did not accept their insults and often fought back. This article shows the way harsh language was used as a means to maintain dominance and was an attempt to hold control over the black population even after they were freed from slavery. Sarah Williams account serves as an example of one way women were dehumanized by speech and gives a real-life background to the harsh language used against Lilith and others in *The Book of Night Women*.

Petley, Christopher. "Slavery, Emancipation, And the Creole World View of Jamaican Colonists, 1800-1834" *Slavery & Abolition*. 26.1 (2005): 93-114. *Caribbean Search*. Web.

This article discusses nineteenth century Jamaica and the impression Jamaican culture had on the European men. In Jamaica, the white men were the minority and as a result, they began to adopt Creole ways. Many of the colonists were independent men determined to make a profit using the African slaves though they viewed themselves as loyal to Britain. Though being consumed by the speech and cultures of the Africans, they remained Creole even after Britain demanded to abolish slavery. This source can provide insight to the complicated relationships between the Europeans and the slaves in the novel. The European ways of the colonists is what gave them their perceived power over the slaves though they were influenced by the Africans in many ways even picking up some of their speech patterns.

Vásquez, Sam. "Violent Liaisons: Historical Crossings and the Negotiation of Sex, Sexuality, and Race in *The Book of Night Women*" And "*The True History of Paradise*." *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 16.2 (2012): 43-59. Academic Search Premier.

Sam Vásquez addresses three stereotypes of modern Jamaica: sexual permissiveness, homophobia, and violence. He then examines how these stereotypes are rooted in Jamaica's history. Vásquez uses instances from *The Book of Night Women* and *The True History of Paradise* as examples of this history by examining their accounts of sexual violence, the roles of men and women, and the idea of the privileged mulatto. He attributes the hypersexualization of the Caribbean people to the sexual abuse of slave women and promiscuity of white women in Jamaica and points to religion as a reason for homophobia. This source can be useful in understanding the novels place in history and how many scenes and relationships portrayed in *The Book of Night Women* shape the way Jamaica is seen today.

GLOVER, KATAMA L. "Womanchild in the Oppressive Land." *New York Times (1923-Current file)*: . Mar 01 2009. *ProQuest*. Web.

This is a *New York Times* review of the novel. It begins by describing the cast as a whole then narrows in on Lilith's character. Glover discusses her physical characteristics like her green eyes mixed race skin and highlights the way her life experiences shape her unique personality. This review draws attention to details of the novel. Though this source is a review, Glover points to the way James never takes sides between good and evil in the novel.

Robertson, James. "An Essay Concerning Slavery; A Mid-Eighteenth Century Analysis From Jamaica." *Slavery & Abolition* 33.1 (2012): 65-85. *Academic Search Complete*. Web.

Robertson discusses the origin of slave revolts in Jamaica and how the conversation starts with the slaves. He analyzes an essay that discusses the debate of slavery as it grew at a time where there was no sound policy. The essay critiques slavery in a way that Robertson suggests could have inspired change though the conversations about slavery had become limited. He concludes with the idea that arguments against slavery happened sooner than people thought. This source opens up the conversation about slavery and mirrors the way the slaves spoke about freedom and revolt in the novel.

By, LINDSAY H. "Obeah is a Fact of Life, and Afterlife, in the Caribbean." *New York Times (1923-Current file)*: 2. Sep 10 1972. *ProQuest*. Web. 5 Apr. 2015 .

This article begins with short stories about instances when obeah had an effect on individuals and their families. Haines talks about obeah as something serious that is powerful and should be feared. Forms of obeah originated in The West Indies and its practice followed the African slaves to the Jamaican plantations. Haines suggests that the modern stigma that the Virgin Islands are full of evil spirits comes from the practice of obeah. In *The Book of Night Women*, obeah is shown as a form a power that the slaves possessed. The accounts and information in this article can be compared to the events in the novel where victims of obeah experienced painful symptoms and it was something to be feared. About obeah how it is used in silent pursuit. Some short stories about obeah and how it affects individuals and families.