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Presentation on Marlon James's The Book of Night Women Day 1

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Marlon James, *The Book of Night Women*
Day 1

Today

- History slavery Jamaica
- World & voice of novel re: first passage
- Depiction violence Paris/Lilith
- Lilith as character

Jamaican slavery

- Major producer sugar 1792–1814—after Napoleonic wars, sugar prices fall
- Most major slavery novels have been about American slavery (*Beloved*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*)
- Slaves--33 percent of the American South's population.
- Caribbean—slaves 90-92% of population.

Jamaican slavery

- Series of slave rebellions in Jamaica—major one in 1760 (1500 slaves)
- Another in 1831 led by Samuel Sharp leads to abolishment slavery
- James: interested in “how easily everything could fall apart at any point”
- Escaped slaves--Jamaican Maroons establish independent communities in mountains
- British unable to suppress, despite major attempts in the 1730s and 1790s.

St. Domingue (Haiti) rebellion

- Lead by Toussaint L'Ouverture
- 1791—slaves attack plantation buildings w/ machetes and torches.
- Rebellion shocked Europe—Europeans killed in their hundreds.
- France abolish slavery 1793
- British—attempt to retake island, but driven away by L'Ouverture troops

Look at

- The first two pages of chapter 4
 - Where, here or elsewhere, do we get the sense that the environment here is unstable?

What kind of world does this depict? What kind of narrator do we have?

- People think blood red, but 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. Not when the baby wash in crimson and squealing like it just depart heaven to come to hell, another place of red. Not when the midwife know that the mother shed too much blood, and she who don't reach fourteen birthday yet speak curse 'pon the chile and the papa, and then she drop down dead like old horse. Not when 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. It soon come to pass when red no different from white or blue or black or nothing. Two black legs spread wide and mother mouth screaming. A black baby wiggling in blood on the floor with skin darker than midnight but the greenest eyes anybody ever done seen. I goin' call her Lilith. You an call her what they call her (3)

Depiction of violence Lilith-Paris

- What seems notable about the scene of violence depicted on 16-17?
- How does this scene of violence differ from others that we've read this semester?

Lilith as character

- Thinking back on your reading, what do we know about Lilith?