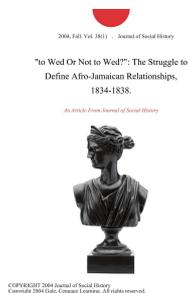


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PURCHASE WITH DISCOUNT PDF FORMAT EVROMEDIA TO WED OR NOT TO WED THE STRUGGLE TO DEFINE AFRO JAMAICAN RELATIONSHIPS 1834 1838 INSTANTLY HARDCOVER



Author: Journal of Social History

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The 1753 Marriage Act can be considered as a first step in the struggle of the rising middle classes in Britain to impose their norm of marriage on the rest of society. (1) It specified that marriage could only take place with banns or a license and parental permission for minors, before witnesses and an authorized clergyman, and that the event should be recorded in a Marriage Register. (2) One of the main aims of the Act was to change the marital lives of the propertied classes. It not only tried to combat the tendency of children of good families to marry contrary to the wishes of their parents but also to protect rich heirs and heiresses from being seduced into a clandestine or runaway marriage with their social or economic inferiors. By the end of the eighteenth century, the propertied classes had come to accept the middle classes' norm of marriage, that is a fully legal and indissoluble marriage in which the couple lived under the same roof, was faithful, and occupied separate spheres and exercised distinct roles. After the turn of the century, they joined the middle classes in their efforts to extend this norm to the lower orders of society. (3) It was largely economic self-interest that underpinned this joint effort. The industrial middle class, for example, hoped that a rise in the marriage rate of the lower orders would lead to an increase in the population. The latter was deemed essential for the future of their economic enterprises as it guaranteed them not only a large supply of labour but also an increased demand for their products. Both groups also hoped that a more stable society would result from the lower classes' adoption of the middle-class marriage ideal. They believed that if the lower classes would make their unions legal and adopt the other attributes, in particular monogamy and the exercise of distinct gender roles, that there would follow a drastic reduction in those lower class vices which upset the stability of society, such as prostitution. (4) Like so many other contemporary discourses, the discourse about marriage gradually found its way to the periphery, that is British colonial subjects were like their metropolitan counterparts encouraged to conform their relationships to the middle-class ideal. Hence efforts were made in the debate about slavery in the British Caribbean to measure the slaves' relational lives against the metropolitan ideal. (5) Contrary to slaves in the Antebellum south, slaves in the British Caribbean could legally marry, that is the slave laws recognised a marriage performed by an Anglican minister as 'valid in law.' This marriage far from resembled the reciprocal, legal and voluntary contract that couples signed in the metropolitan society. It not only lacked many of the rights and duties stipulated in the metropolitan contract but was also not performed in front of two witnesses. The most striking difference, however, was that a slave couple needed written permission from the owner or if he did not reside on the plantation, the overseer. This and the fact that they had to pay a small fee and undergo a detailed examination by the minister largely explain why so few slaves opted for what is generally referred to as a formal marriage. In Jamaica, for instance, the Anglican Church performed 3,600 marriages between 1808 and 1822 amidst a slave population of 330,000. Most slaves preferred a nonconformist marriage, which required only proof of having been baptised. The Moravians, for example, performed 189 marriages at three of their Jamaican stations between 1827 and 1834. (6)

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