

Education, Material Culture, and Coming of Age In Eighteenth-Century British Jamaica

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Although the Atlantic colonies have finally received attention in the scholarship of European colonization, a construction of the colonial family remains one of the final frontiers of imperial studies. Scholars are now applying postcolonial and transnational theoretical approaches to their studies, with many authors re-examining identity creation through trans-regional methods.¹ Although studies by historians such as Ann Laura Stoler and Kathleen Wilson have produced a wealth of imperial scholarship with works that consider gender and sexuality, few scholars have analyzed the actual experience of colonial girls.

Until quite recently, scholars have ignored colonial children, particularly young women, and their adolescence in imperial locations, such as the British Caribbean during the eighteenth century.² By overlooking young people, historians have disregarded the experience of a sizeable percentage of the colonial population.³ Individuals in their formative years participated in colonial life in various ways. They responded to their environment by either identifying with the mother country, or forming their identity in opposition to “others” present in imperial

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¹ For recent works on empire see, Ann Laura Stoler’s 2002 work, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*. Stoler presents new questions and framed colonial studies using new methodology. Stoler’s book contributed to the field of imperial studies by bringing together gender, colonialism, and race, and framing her work around the “intimate.” Stoler suggests that the regulation of sexual contact and social stratification assisted the colonizers in creating a “colonial racism.” Although Stoler is mainly interested in Dutch Indochina, her framework is far-reaching for colonial relevance. Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). See also Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995); Stoler, *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

² Scholarship on early-modern childhood has benefitted from Philippe Ariès’ seminal *Centuries of Childhood* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962). Although Ariès’ theory that “childhood” was socially constructed during the seventeenth and eighteenth century has received much response and criticism, his work opened discussion towards the subject of childhood studies. For a recent work considering globalization of childhood see: Peter N. Stearns, *Childhood in World History* (Routledge, New York, 2006). In Roland Sintos Coloma’s 2009 compilation *Postcolonial Challenges in Education*, the essay by Lisa Weems “Border Crossing with M.I.A. and Transnational Girlhood Studies” argues “for a shift in the field of girlhood studies to consider the ways in which global capitalist and imperialist dynamics operate within the material practices and representations of ‘girlhood’ or ‘the girl child.’” In other words, ‘girlhood’ becomes a site that consolidates assumptions and practices regarding difference, colonial power, and economic relations between and among gendered subjects in transnational contexts,” see Lisa Weems “Border Crossing with M.I.A. and Transnational Girlhood Studies” in *Postcolonial Challenges in Education*, ed. Rolando Sintos Coloma, (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 179.

³ According to Trevor Burnard, the total population in Jamaica in 1788 was 254,184. The white populace was only 8.1 per cent of the whole, numbering at 18, 347. See Table 1, in Trevor Burnard, “European Migration to Jamaica, 1655-1780,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 53 (1996): 772. Burnard does not give a demographic breakdown to the percentage of children in the colonial white population.

settlements.⁴ In colonial locations such as the West Indies, a large percentage of the rich young white children traveled to England for their education and had experiences as colonial youths attempting to assimilate into metropolitan culture.⁵ These colonial subjects inhabited a middle ground between metropole and empire; however, school-aged children such as Nancy and Jane Brodbelt demonstrated their British nationality by embracing the material culture of England.⁶ The Brodbelts of Jamaica represent a family who experienced the empire through education and material culture. Dr. Brodbelt, as an educated doctor living on a periphery of empire, followed current events and desired that his children gain knowledge of international affairs as well. Through studying the experiences of families such as the Brodbelts, scholars can develop their understanding of both family and cultural values in the empire. Participation in British education and material culture allowed this family to fashion their identity as members of the British Empire, inhabiting a space of both metropole and colony.

Since the British West Indies were part of the New World exoticism, they retained a certain kind of “otherness” and were not the “city on a hill” like the North American colonies.⁷ This exoticism generated many negative stereotypes of the creole whites who inhabited Jamaica, Antigua, and Barbados. Although creoles attempted to create a colonial identity, “seeking metropolitan acceptance as useful subjects of an extended British world,” by the eighteenth century they were not accepted as British subjects.⁸ The colonists were marginalized through their contact with slavery and the hot climate since “torrid, temperate, and frigid zones of the globe were formative in imagining that a sexualized woman of empire was distinct from domestic English womanhood.”⁹ Therefore their behavior was perceived to change from that of respectable British citizens into that of the sinister “other,” a creole West Indian.

Not only is the role of childhood in colonial sites a relatively uncharted field, but research on all white women in the British West Indies is scarce compared to scholarship on other imperial locations, such as Colonial North America.¹⁰ Historians such as Natalie Zacek and Lucille Mair

⁴ In Colonial Jamaica, various groups of individuals inhabited this colonial space including a small percentage of indigenous peoples, African slaves, free blacks, and various European groups. For more information see, Catherine Hall’s *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830-1867* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002).

⁵ Wylie Sypher posits that seventy-five percent of the creole whites went to Britain for their education. See “The West Indian as a ‘Character’ in the Eighteenth Century,” *Studies in Philology* 36 (1939), 504.

⁶ As Catherine Hall has noted “metropole” refers to the “Mother country.” In this case, I refer to England. See *Civilizing Subjects*, 22. For more information concerning childhood in eighteenth-century England, see Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979). See also Leslie Reinhardt, “Serious Daughters: Dolls, Dress, and Female Virtue in the Eighteenth Century” *American Art* 20 (2006): 32-55 for an interesting article concerning material culture and childhood.

⁷ Wilson, 130.

⁸ Christer Petley, “‘Home’ and ‘this Country’: Britishness and Creole Identity in the Letters of a Transatlantic Slaveholder,” *Atlantic Studies* 6 (2009): 43. During the eighteenth century, the word “creole” referred the blending of cultures and did not necessarily indicate a place of birth, or racial classification. For more information about creolization see Kamau Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770-1820* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971) and William A. Green, “The Creolization of Caribbean History: The Emancipation Era and a Critique of Dialectical Analysis,” in *Caribbean Freedom: Economy and Society from Emancipation to the Present* ed. Hilary Beckles and Verene Shepherd (Kingston: Jamaica Randle, 1993).

⁹ Felicity Nussbaum, *Torrid Zones: Maternity, Sexuality, and Empire in Eighteenth-Century English Narratives* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1995), 7.

¹⁰ Works that include women in the British West Indies include: Barbara Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society, 1650-1838* (London: Heinemann Publishers, 1990); Hilary McD. Beckles, “Sex and Gender in the Historiography of Caribbean Slavery” in *Engendering History* ed. Verene Shepherd, Bridget Brereton and Barbara Bailey (London: James Currey Publishers; Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 1995); Verene A Shepherd, ed. *Women*

provide a framework by which to study women in the eighteenth-century colonial West Indies.¹¹ Furthermore, Sarah Yeh demonstrates in her article “‘A Sink of All Filthiness’: Gender, Family and Identity in British Atlantic, 1688-1763” that the British viewed the West Indies as “a realm of loose morals, broken families, and genders turned upside down.”¹² Her analysis of British perceptions of the Caribbean colonies in the eighteenth century in relation to “gender, family and identity” proposes that identities were “multilayered and fluid,” as opposed to “bound in opposition to foreign others.”¹³ Yeh’s article posits that this broken “family” in the West Indies led to unfavorable stereotypes of life in the West Indies.

Since, according to Yeh, the institution of “family” was representative of the entire state of the British realm, the arrangements in the colonies did not fit into the metropolitan-created value system. The colonists attempted to create similar family life in the Caribbean islands to that in Britain, however, the lack of respectable women for marriage often made that an “uphill battle.” Jamaica dominated the metropolitan imagination of the Caribbean because of the sugar crops and the wealth and profits from that industry. This exotic island fascinated British minds.¹⁴ According to eighteenth-century opinions, women in Jamaica “were prone to licentiousness and

in *Caribbean History: The British-Colonised Territories* (Kingston: I. Randle, 1999); Linda L. Sturz, “The ‘Dimduke’ and the Duchess of Chandos: Gender and Power in Jamaican Plantation Management—A Case Study or, A Different Story of ‘A Man [and his wife] from a Place Called Hope.’” *Interamerican* 29 (1999); Lucille Mathurin Mair, *A Historical Study of Women in Jamaica 1655-1844* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2006).

¹¹ Natalie A. Zacek, “Searching for the Invisible Woman: The Evolution of White Women’s Experience in Britain’s West Indian Colonies,” *History Compass* 7 (2009): 329-41; Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire, and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2003). See also Wilson, *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity, and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660-1840* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004); “Rethinking the Colonial State: Family, Gender, and Governmentality in Eighteenth-Century British Frontiers” *American Historical Review* 116 (2011): 1294-1322.

¹² Sarah E. Yeh, “‘Sink of All Filthiness’: Gender, Family and Identity in British Atlantic, 1688-1763,” *The Historian* (2006), 67.

¹³ Yeh, 67.

¹⁴ For general works on Colonial West Indies see: Frank Wesley Pitman, *The Development of the British West Indies, 1700-1763* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1917); Lowell J. Ragatz, *The Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean, 1763-1833; A Study in Social and Economic History* (New York: Century Co, 1928); Richard Pares, *A West-India Fortune* (London: New York, Longmans Green, 1950); Richard Pares, *War and Trade in the West Indies, 1739-1763* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936); James Anthony Froude, *The English in the West Indies* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969); Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves; the Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture at Williamsburg, Va., by the University of North Carolina Press 1972); Cyril Hamshire, *The British in the Caribbean* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1972); Richard B. Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery; An Economic History of the British West Indies, 1623-1775* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974); Gordon K. Lewis, *Main Currents in Caribbean Thought: The Historical Evolution of Caribbean Society in Its Ideological Aspects, 1492-1900* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983); Sarah M. S. Pearsall, “‘The Late Flagrant Instance of Depravity in My Family’: The Story of an Anglo-Jamaican Cuckold,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 3, (2003): 549-582; Larry Dale Gragg, *Englishmen Transplanted: The English Colonization of Barbados, 1627-1660*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Trevor G. Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and His Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Elizabeth Mancke and Carole Shammas. *The Creation of the British Atlantic World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005); T. A. Milford, *The Gardiners of Massachusetts: Provincial Ambition and the British-American Career* (Durham, N.H.: University of New Hampshire Press, 2005); B. W. Higman, *Plantation Jamaica, 1750-1850: Capital and Control in a Colonial Economy* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2005); Susan Dwyer Amussen, *Caribbean Exchanges: Slavery and the Transformation of English Society, 1640-1700* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Natalie Zacek, *Settler Society in the English Leeward Islands, 1670-1776* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

infidelity, a well as swearing, drinking, and obscene talk.”¹⁵ They did not practice the “manners” customary in Britain. Many of the young men sent back to England for education did not fit into the social structures in Jamaica, and some were soon sent back to the West Indies.¹⁶ However, this did not deter creole white families from dispatching their children to be educated in Britain.¹⁷

Childhood in the West Indies in many ways mirrored the lifestyle of mainland Britain.¹⁸ The young sires of the Jamaican plantocracy indulged in British goods, and valued metropolitan material culture. However, the presence of a large enslaved population created an environment quite unlike that in England. The overindulgence seen in the progeny of the wealthy Caribbean elite by both their parents and others responsible for their upbringing shocked European observers.

Eighteenth-century travel authors depicted the damage to West Indian children through contact with the black enslaved population.¹⁹ At a young age, these children became accustomed to the sight of violence against black slaves, including maiming and whippings, and came to consider inflicting pain an amusing pastime. Additionally, young girls became “harsh and domineering” when dealing with their subordinates.²⁰ The presence of a staff of individuals who were expected to bend to the wills and caprices of these adolescent masters created a host of admonitory tales of life in the West Indies.

Creole children were not traditionally raised by their mothers but usually by a number of slaves that were ordered to obey the children’s every whim. According to Maria Nugent, wife of the Governor of Jamaica from 1801-1805, West Indian children were “allowed to eat every thing improper, to the injury of their health, and are made truly unamiable, by being most absurdly indulged.”²¹ At the Skinner home in Jamaica, Nugent witnessed the young daughter named Bonella. She was a “sweet child, but so spoiled that I am afraid she will be a little tyrant. Mrs. S., like all Creole ladies, has a number of servants with her, and all are obliged to attend to any

¹⁵ Yeh, 74.

¹⁶ Ibid., 75-76.

¹⁷ Although there is no direct evidence that Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s blockbuster educational tract *Emile* directly influenced the educational values of families in the West Indies, this work affected both European Continental and British considerations of childhood and education. For more information on the shift for children concerning fashion, toys, literature, and pedagogy, in the late eighteenth century following Rousseau’s writings see, Jennifer J. Popiel, *Rousseau’s Daughters: Domesticity, Education, and Autonomy in Modern France* (Durham, N.H.: University of New Hampshire Press, 2008).

¹⁸ The age of “innocence” in England lasted until about age seven. However, girls were dependent on their parents until marriage, which girls could enter beginning around age fourteen. The age of “discretion” and independence was not until twenty-one. I will use the term “girlhood” and “childhood” to represent the young girls from the Caribbean until marriage, as these girls were unlikely to attain independence from their families through attaining maturity. The girls under study in this work married before the age of “discretion,” therefore remained part of the “childhood” cycle for their education and entrance into society. For more information on “childhood” in eighteenth-century England, see Anja. Müller, *Framing Childhood in Eighteenth-Century English Periodicals and Prints, 1689-1789* (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2009).

¹⁹ Satirical prints provided visual representations for the stereotypes prevalent in travel narratives. For an example of a print satirizing creole life in the West Indies, see Appendix: Image One.

²⁰ Lucille Mathurin Mair, Hilary Beckles, and Verene Shepherd. *A Historical Study of Women in Jamaica: 1655-1844* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2006), 121.

²¹ Maria Nugent, and Frank Cundall, *Lady Nugent’s Journal: Jamaica One Hundred Years Ago: Reprinted from a Journal Kept by Maria, Lady Nugent, from 1801 to 1815, Issued for Private Circulation in 1839* (London: Published for the Institute of Jamaica by A. & C. Black, 1907), 193.

caprice of the little girl, as well as her mamma; and I grieve to see it.”²² Nugent understood the difficulties in this plantation society to keep her own son from similar vices. She shuddered at the possibility that her son would be raised to think “himself a little king at least, and then will come arrogance, I fear, and all the petty vices of little tyrants.”²³ Nugent vowed to raise her son in a different manner.

Furthermore, the lack of educational opportunities in the Caribbean contributed to the perception of indifference and neglect regarding the upbringing of children in the West Indies. Parents had the choice of education at home, private schools, or traveling abroad for schooling. Those who educated their children at home faced recrimination, as this 1812 tale from the *Jamaica Magazine* articulated:

Eliza remained at home under the protecting wing of a foolishly fond mother, who LOVED her to such excess that she never thwarted a wish of her heart, but allowed her to pursue in everything the free bent of her own inclinations. Insensible to the blessings of mental cultivation herself, this INDULGENT mother would not even force reading and writing upon this her darling, FURTHER THAN SHE HERSELF LIKES...so that by time that Eliza had arrived at womanhood she knew but little, and that little imperfectly and but by halves.²⁴

The opportunities for instruction in proper schools were minimal in the West Indies, and children either had to be shipped to England or learn at home from their parents or tutors. Remaining at home resulted in a second-rate education for these young girls and their speech and manners opened them to ridicule from “polished” visitors. Travel historian Edward Long in his *History of Jamaica* remarked, “The more gentle and esteemable fair-ones apply themselves to repair the deficiencies of an imperfect education, by giving some leisure hours to the most approved authors, by whose help they might add the delights of a rational conversation to those abundant graces which nature has bestowed upon them.”²⁵ Even though some of the more “esteemable” attempted to improve themselves through reading, these travelogues suggest that the vast majority preferred leisure time to strenuous scholarly efforts.

Fellow travel writer J.B. Moreton, like Long, commented on creole education in his *West India Customs and Manners* and came to a different conclusion regarding boarding schools. Moreton seemed unsure about the benefits from the custom of educating creole children in England. He proposed local schools for the general improvement of creole children, with “proper English masters and mistresses.”²⁶ For, if they went to England, they might return to Jamaica dissatisfied with the slower pace of plantation life. After living in England, Jamaica seems a “flat land” and “insipid.”²⁷ They would miss the entertainments available in London.²⁸ Moreton also

²² Ibid., 191.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ *Jamaica Magazine* 2 (June 1812) as qtd in Mair, 122.

²⁵ Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica, or, General Survey of the Antient and Modern State of the Island: With Reflections on Its Situation, Settlements, Inhabitants, Climate, Products, Commerce, Laws, and Government: Illustrated with Copper Plates* (London: T. Lowndes, 1774), 284.

²⁶ J. B. Moreton, *West India Customs and Manners: Containing Strictures on the Soil, Cultivation, Produce, Trade, Officers, and Inhabitants: with the Method of Establishing, and Conducting a Sugar Plantation. To Which Is Added, the Practice of Training New Slaves* (London: printed for J. Parsons, Paternoster Row; W. Richardson, Royal Exchange; H. Gardner, Strand; and J. Walter, Piccadilly, 1793), 120.

²⁷ Moreton., 112.

believed that once a young creole girl traveled to England she soon received the title of a “rich West Indian heiress” and would be married to some Englishman who sought financial gain from the match.²⁹

According to Long, in 1750, three hundred creole children were in British boarding schools, but by the late eighteenth century, more than three-quarters of the children from the West Indian plantocracy class received their education in England.³⁰ Creoles were believed to be upsetting the social order of England and were presented like nabobs, the British citizens returning from India with fortunes from sources as questionable as the West Indians themselves. Furthermore, after returning home, the children were often more educated than their parents, which created tensions that Nugent perceived as a great “misfortune” for the creole West Indians.³¹ These young creoles found boredom awaiting them in their colonial homeland, and their accomplishments such as music and foreign languages could not reach full potential in the sugar plantation islands. Nonetheless, young creole women who did not go to boarding school were portrayed as ignorant and uneducated. The lack of education in creole women and their peculiar speech created social boundaries for metropolitan observers such as Nugent.³²

These girls allegedly matured into unsuitable wives and mothers. As imperfect “British ladies,” they became notorious in both travel writings and literature.³³ However, some families had the financial means to hire a governess from England. Others turned to private schools in urban areas such as Kingston. A Mrs. Robinson established a boarding school in Kingston to compete with the fashionable English boarding schools. She offered “those elegant accomplishments which are taught in schools” as well as “Embroidery, Felagree, Flower-Making, Landscapes, [and] Maps.”³⁴ Additionally, this school employed “Proper masters in French, writing, drawing, music and dancing.”³⁵ Although this school provided the curriculum popular in England, many families still sent their children away for their education.

Janet Schaw, an elegant and well-connected Scotswoman who traveled to the West Indies on a “Grand Tour” across the Atlantic, disagreed with this practice of sending young children to Europe. Although this was the main way for young creole girls to receive a “proper” education, most of the authors agreed that this practice harmed pupils. Schaw and her young companion Fanny met with many of the latter’s former boarding school acquaintances from Britain. Although Fanny found pleasure in discussing and remembering former friends, Schaw eschewed her usual exuberance about the customs in the West Indies and expressed opposition to sending young girls to Britain for their education: “they form their sentiments in Britain, their early connections, commence there, and they leave it just when they are at the age to enjoy it most, and return to their friends and country, as banished exiles; nor can any future connection cure

²⁸ Ibid., 113.

²⁹ Ibid., 112.

³⁰ Long, 510-511. Long does not provide the exact number of children who left Jamaica for schooling at the end of the eighteenth century. He does assert that out of the three-quarters who left the West Indies, less than two-thirds returned. For more information, see Lowell Joseph Ragatz, “Absentee Landlordism in the British Caribbean, 1750-1833” *Agricultural History* 5 (1931): 7-24.

³¹ Nugent, 125.

³² Ibid., 76, 102.

³³ These travel narratives include Long, Moreton, and Bryan Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies* (Philadelphia: J. Humphreys, 1805).

³⁴ Mair, 123.

³⁵ Ibid.

them of the longing they have to return to Britain.”³⁶ Although she enjoyed her own experiences in the West Indies, Schaw did not think that the colony superior to Britain. These girls would be part of neither society, and they would return to the plantations without the comforts they were used to in Europe and always long for the society they enjoyed during their education.

Nonetheless, schooling abroad gave the creoles the education they desired, coupled with the experience of living in the motherland. According to Mair, England was parents’ top choice for overseas schooling. Additionally, parents sent girls away at younger ages than they sent away boys. According to metropolitan observers such as Long and Moreton, creole parents did not raise their children to be “proper” English inhabitants with regard to education, however, the Brodbelt family does not fit in to this stereotype. The Brodbelt parents were involved in their children’s education.³⁷ Dr. Brodbelt particularly concerned himself with the schooling of his youngest daughter during her studies abroad.

Transatlantic correspondences provide insight into the strife and trials of maturation in the late eighteenth century.³⁸ Sources such as the Brodbelt Family Correspondence reveal the lives of young women such as Jane and Nancy Brodbelt. These imperial girls traveled to England for their education, yet they retained connections with their colonial homeland. As a case study, the experiences of these young women and their cross-cultural exchanges can assist with understanding colonial society and maturation during the long eighteenth century. Although British travel writers portrayed colonial children from Jamaica as uneducated and malignant, the Brodbelt family does not fit with the stereotype.³⁹ The female Brodbelt children experienced the empire through consumption of material goods and communication with loved ones inhabiting the sugar plantation islands in the Caribbean.

The Brodbelt family provides a case study of the creation of multi-cultural identities for white creoles returning to the West Indies from Britain. The experience of colonial girlhood is illuminated through the experiences of Nancy and Jane Brodbelt. Dr. Brodbelt, a prominent doctor in Spanish Town, had the money and connections to send his children to England for their education.⁴⁰ Some of the matters written in the letters might seem trivial, but these seemingly inconsequential events were important as methods of communication for a divided family.⁴¹ The letters of Ann and Nancy Brodbelt, Jane’s mother and sister, respectively, help elucidate everyday life in Spanish Town. These reflections also reveal the significant aspects of the lives of these colonial women. Although Jane’s correspondence to Jamaica does not survive, the letters she received are an illuminating source for a wealthy creole family in the British West Indies.

³⁶ Janet Schaw, Evangeline Walker Andrews, and Charles McLean Andrews, *Journal of a Lady of Quality: Being the Narrative of a Journey from Scotland to the West Indies, North Carolina, and Portugal, in the Years 1774 to 1776* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1921), 92.

³⁷ Mair, 124.

³⁸ The Brodbelts represent a family in urban Jamaica. Although they owned land and participated in slave labor, they were not part of the plantation lifestyle. Dr. Brodbelt, as a physician, had contracts with various plantations to provide medical attention to the enslaved population. However, they did not own sugar-producing property. Both Dr. and Ann Brodbelt came from financially well-off creole white families. Ann had wealthy family connections in England who looked after the children while they were in school.

³⁹ For more information about the creation of the stereotype see Chloe Northrop, “From Stereotype to Caricature: White Women in the British West Indies,” Masters Thesis, University of North Texas, 2010.

⁴⁰ For more information about Ann Brodbelt see: Natalie Zacek, “Brodbelt, Ann (1751–1827).” In Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, online edition. (Oxford University Press, Sept 2004).

⁴¹ The painting of the Brodbelt children shows the importance of the portraits to show their connection to Britain, and to remember loved ones who were across the Atlantic.

The Brodbelts desired that their daughters receive a proper education in England. They did not display the carelessness of many West Indian parents concerning schooling of their children. An education in England could help the girls become “accomplished” British ladies and not display the attributes noted by travel historians and metropolitan visitors alike. Dr. Brodbelt seemed aware of the perception of the lack of erudition present in Jamaican ladies, and took an active role in developing Jane’s curriculum. Both Jane and Nancy Brodbelt received their education at Eliza Fenwick’s school, Fleet House. This was a popular destination for wealthy West Indian children and boasted classes in French, embroidery, music, drawing, and even horseback riding.⁴²

Jane began her education in 1788, at about eight years of age. Ann sent a letter to Jane in October 1788 about the doll Jane had recently received: “pray what is my Granddaughter’s name? I hope you make yourself all the clothes she wears, for that will teach you to make your own by and by; which is a very commendable thing in a young Lady and saves Her many disappointments from her Milliner or Mantua Maker.”⁴³ Ann displayed her focus on Jane’s material benefits from school, including the possibility of sewing and tailoring clothes. As Ann preferred to have her attire assembled in and shipped from London, she realized the benefits of the ability to mend one’s own clothes and not rely on local dressmakers, who did not have what she believed was the skill or talent of those in the metropole. Additionally, Jane’s engagement with her doll mirrored her future occupation as a mother. Jane Eva Baxter argues for material objects’ major role in “establishing and reinforcing social roles for children during childhood and later in their gendered roles as adults.”⁴⁴ Furthermore, she posits that parents’ “desires, hopes, fears, and longings for their daughters were reinforced with material culture.”⁴⁵ Jane Brodbelt, far from her Jamaican home, participated with a doll not only for play but to learn vital skills for adulthood. Ann enjoyed both discussing her amusements and receiving examples of Jane’s talent and progress in embroidery and drawing.

Material objects assisted in keep the family connected. Through touching and handling these items, Brodbelt felt attached to her children. One such item included locks of her children’s hair. She wrote to Jane: “I have been comparing the lock of Hair you sent me from Margate with the pretty curl I cut from off your head a short time before you left me, and I find that your hair is at least six shades darker than it was then. Your dear Brother and Sister’s are so exactly alike in colour that I can scarcely tell which is which.”⁴⁶ Ann’s “touch” and interaction with this tangible representation of her children assisted her in remembering her offspring and commenting on their development.⁴⁷

⁴² Other young Jamaican ladies who attended Fleet House include Sarah Goodin Barret Moulton, aunt of the more famous Elizabeth Barret Browning, British poet. Thomas Lawrence immortalized Sarah in a 1794 portrait, *Pinkie*, which now hangs at the Huntington in California. Sarah died of whooping cough in 1795. Undoubtedly, she and Jane were acquainted, as they were both from the same small island, and attended Fenwick’s school at the same period.

⁴³ Ann Brodbelt to Jane Brodbelt, October 17, 1788, *Letters to Jane*, 11. A “mantua maker” was a term for a dress-maker in the eighteenth century.

⁴⁴ Jane Eva Baxter, “Socialization and the Material Culture of Childhood,” in *The Archaeology of Childhood: Children, Gender, and Material Culture* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2005), 39.

⁴⁵ Baxter, 44.

⁴⁶ Ann Brodbelt to Jane Brodbelt, October 18, 1789, *Letters to Jane*, 21.

⁴⁷ An important aspect in the formation of an identity as a mother is “touch.” Ewa Lajer-Burcharth and Sarah Cohen have contributed much to the scholarship on “touch” in relation to art. Burcharth’s theory that “touch was established as a key category for understanding the formation of subjectivity,” is an important tool to understand the

Shortly after Jane's arrival in England, the Brodbelts commissioned a portrait of their three children.⁴⁸ Richard Cosway created the visual representation at the behest of the Brodbelt's relatives in England. Rigby is depicted standing and attired in van Dyckian costume. Nancy, the eldest daughter is sitting in a flowing white muslin gown. Next to her is Jane, the youngest, also in a light gown and looking adoringly at her two siblings. Looming above the Brodbelt children is a bust of Galen, the physician from ancient Rome. This figure ostensibly represents their physician father. In the background, classical columns and drapery complement the motif created by the bust.

Brodbelt's manipulation of and relation with material goods such as a portrait of her children demonstrate how members of a colonial family remained connected to one another and to the metropole through material culture. Decorative objects, such as the portrait, assisted Brodbelt in displaying the importance of her children and her role as a mother. These items required that she interact both through touching and handling, as well as exhibiting the items, to feel connected to her children. Although art historian Alden Cavanaugh asserts that decorative arts contribute to the account of royal motherhood, this narrative can extend to mothers with purchasing power in the growing consumer world.⁴⁹ Brodbelt, although not a queen or aristocrat, used decorative objects to reveal the importance of motherhood for a colonial woman in the eighteenth century.

Marcia Pointon denotes the importance of children's portraits in her chapter "The State of a Child."⁵⁰ She demonstrates the change of the depiction of children during the eighteenth century. This portrait can be viewed as part of the shifting delineations of young members of wealthy families through the sentimental rendering of the two Brodbelt girls. Their mother appreciated the careful treatment of her daughters' youth and innocence.

Ann wrote to Jane shortly after receiving the portrait enumerating her excitement on the visual depiction of her offspring: "I sent your Picture over to Mrs Harrison's, and they all thought it very like you; Dorothy and Kit did not want it to be carried away again, but that could not be granted by me, for I should by that means lose the pleasure of looking at you twenty times in the day."⁵¹ This portrayal became a local sensation as neighbors both visited and commented on the delineation of the young Brodbelts. Ann noticed small physical changes in her children:

Rigby's face is certainly much altered but am sure its very like Him from what I can recollect of it when He left Jamaica, and the striking resemblance there is to your Papa in

importance of small items. See Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, "Pompadour's Touch: Difference in Representation," *Representations* 73 (2001): 56.

⁴⁸ See Appendix: Image Two for the painting of the Brodbelt children by Richard Cosway. According to the Victoria and Albert Museum, Cosway the "Principal Painter to the Prince of Wales, Royal Academician, and the leading fashionable miniature painter of the day" in the late eighteenth century, "developed an intriguing and highly sophisticated new form of portraiture to offer his clients. These portraits joined the graphic qualities of pencil drawing with the fine detail of miniature painting. The figures were sketched out with great vigour while the faces were carefully delineated using the miniature painter's techniques" (<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O65854/drawing-sir-james-hamlyn-first-baronet/>). Perhaps the Brodbelt children were delineated in such a fashion. Cosway also favored the Van Dyck style, in which Rigby is depicted. Once such miniature of Cosway measured Height: 22.9 cm, Width: 14 cm, comparable to the Brodbelt's portrait.

⁴⁹ Alden Cavanaugh, "The Queen's *Necessaire*" in Alden Cavanaugh and Michael E. Yonan, eds., *The Cultural Aesthetics of Eighteenth-Century Porcelain* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010): 121.

⁵⁰ Marcia Pointon, "The State of a Child," in *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Published for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art by Yale University Press, 1993).

⁵¹ Ann Brodbelt to Jane Brodbelt, April 12, 1789, *Letters to Jane*, 18.

his forehead and eyes. Nancy's face has altered very little, I should have known it among many for hers, she is drawn with a fine skin and complexion, the first she has always had and the latter I daresay she now has. Bessy Brammer tells me that nothing can be more like her than it is, and that her Hair was exactly in those curls the day she went from Mrs Fenwick's to sit for it. She also informs me that you are grown fat, that your skin is greatly cleared and your lips red but no colour as yet in your cheeks.⁵²

Ann used this portrait to converse with acquaintances about her children, especially their growth and development in England. It provided an opportunity for conversation about her family. This painting helped Ann remain connected with her children through gazing at this visual depiction of her loved ones.

Decorative objects such as paintings also helped keep Jane attached to her homeland and parents. The colonial mother shipped "in the Box with the Shells your dear Father's Profile, and considering the disadvantages attending the taking of it here, where we are in want *both* of a machine to steady the Head, and a proper shade of light for it, it's thought very like Him."⁵³ Describing the profile, Ann exhibited the desire to display British fashions: "Your Father's hair is generally dressed as the Gentlemen now wear it in England – nearly straight at the sides – and as he has but a small quantity of hair on the top of his Head, he combs it smooth on the forehead. I have mentioned these things, and it is right to have it done as he usually dresses."⁵⁴ Dr. Brodbelt adorned himself in what was considered "British" to display his metropolitan sagacity.

Ann sent her daughter Dr. Brodbelt's profile for Jane to have it reduced and made into two miniature portraits.⁵⁵ Jane was allowed to keep one for herself and ship the other back to her family. According to Pointon, "the collecting of miniature portraits expressly for display proved one way of establishing a visual family tree." Certainly Ann desired to display her family in a matching set of miniature portraits. The family set of miniatures would enable her to view her beloved family in a matching collection. This "same kind of frame," which contained a "gilt circle within the black," exhibited those closest to her for both her own viewing and possibly the extended family and local acquaintances. Mimi Hellman describes this desire to possess matching items in her chapter "The Joy of Sets." She argues that matching sets carried "prestige" due to the "rarity or luxury" of the object.⁵⁶ The Brodbelts demonstrated their connection to the metropole through the display of rare items such as miniature paintings, and decorative objects from their daughter..

Jane's progression in her education included material endeavors that would help her become an accomplished young lady. Ann asked Jane to make her a "Fan, and I dare say I shall approve of the performance. Your dear Papa desires me to tell you that He is really at a loss to name what work you shall do for him, therefore he requests the favour of Mrs Fenwick to determine what it shall be."⁵⁷ Jane crafted the decorative object for her mother and shipped it across the Atlantic.

⁵² Ann Brodbelt to Jane Brodbelt, April 12, 1789, *Letters to Jane*, 18. For more information about "complexions" and the West Indies see: Deirdre Coleman, "Janet Schaw and the Complexions of Empire." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 36 (2003): 169-93.

⁵³ Ann Brodbelt to Jane Brodbelt, July 18, 1792, *Letters to Jane*, 32.

⁵⁴ Ann Brodbelt to Jane Brodbelt, July 18, 1792, *Letters to Jane*, 32.

⁵⁵ For a visual rendering of Ann Brodbelt, see Appendix: Image Three. For the miniature portrait of Dr. Brodbelt, see Appendix: Image Four.

⁵⁶ Mimi Hellman, "The Joy of Sets: The Uses of Seriality in the French Interior," in *Furnishing the Eighteenth Century: What Furniture Can Tell Us About the European and American Past* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 131.

⁵⁷ Ann Brodbelt to Jane Brodbelt, September 16, 1792, *Letters to Jane*, 40.

Ann later effused to her youngest child that she “must not omit saying that I am greatly pleased with my fan.”⁵⁸ These items were vital in connecting a family and producing concrete representations for the absent members.

As Jane progressed in both years and skill she produced works that were more complex. Ann remarked that “the nice Fringe you made for me has come to hand without the least injury and looks delicately white.”⁵⁹ However, they did not desire her to overexert herself with needlework because they were afraid it would hurt her eyes. Jane sent two pieces of print work she produced. Her mother displayed it in the front room so that it would be admired by all their acquaintances in Spanish Town.⁶⁰ Her adoring parents appreciated her achievements, and other family members and friends in this colonial outpost joined in praising her efforts as well.

Jane’s material accomplishments did not go unnoticed by her scholarly father. Dr. Brodbelt enjoyed it when she used these skills to display her mental capabilities. Regarding drawing and painting, he requested she learn how to paint flowers, which was considered a skill of a well-bred woman: “When Mrs Fenwick thinks you sufficiently qualified in drawing, I will be obliged to you to request of her to have you taught drawing in the Botanical way, and I wish you had it in your power to learn a sufficiency of Botany to make you a good Florist, but I do not mean by this to take you from drawing of landscapes, Faces, hands &c.”⁶¹ Although those were important accomplishments of an English education, Jane was expected to participate in both material displays and mental exercises while at Fleet House.

Dr. Brodbelt mostly focused his attention on Jane’s scholarly edification. He wrote in February 1789 of his concern about her diligence in her studies. He hoped to “have the pleasure of perceiving your improvement which I hope is very great, as well in writing and reading and all other accomplishments which Mrs Fenwick thinks proper for you to learn; and I hope that you often recollect that the faster you learn for much the sooner you will return an accomplished lady to your dear father and mother in Jamaica.”⁶² Dr. Brodbelt did not appear to be a father who lacked ambitions for his young daughter’s education. He took time to write to Jane enumerating his plans for her studies. This would ensure, he hoped, that fully benefited from the opportunities overseas. Ann also understood the importance of her educational progress and wrote, “You have abilities to acquire every accomplishment, and your dear Papa will spare no cost, so that you have nothing to do but apply with all your heart.”⁶³ Although Jane’s parents participated actively in her progress, they understood the importance of her own contribution. As Jane grew, Dr. Brodbelt’s expectations for her diligence and studiousness increased.

By 1792, Jane’s progression in her studies merited an increase in her allowance. On April 8, Dr. Brodbelt wrote that “four or six guineas a year will be sufficient” in addition to her regular sum given for her additional needs.⁶⁴ That reflected a growing reliance on her judgment throughout both her progression in school and as a young woman. To demonstrate her educational progress, Jane wrote later that year to her father from boarding school: “I learn Musick, Drawing, French, English, Dancing, Writing, Geography, Singing.”⁶⁵ Her advancement in French seemed to please both her parents, who desired that she speak French well and without

⁵⁸ Ann Brodbelt to Jane Brodbelt, December 24, 1792, *Letters to Jane*, 40.

⁵⁹ Ann Brodbelt to Jane Brodbelt, June 15, 1794, *Letters to Jane*, 89.

⁶⁰ Mozley, 105.

⁶¹ Francis Rigby Brodbelt to Jane Brodbelt, Spanish Town, Jamaica, September 8, 1793, *Letters to Jane*, 70.

⁶² Francis Rigby Brodbelt to Jane Brodbelt, Spanish Town, Jamaica, Feb. 17, 1789, *Letters to Jane*, 16.

⁶³ Ann Brodbelt to Jane Brodbelt, *Letters to Jane*, 33.

⁶⁴ Francis Brodbelt to Jane Brodbelt, April 1792, *Letters to Jane*, 33.

⁶⁵ Jane Brodbelt to Francis Brodbelt (unsent), *Letters to Jane*, 37.

a strong accent. In October 1792, Ann queried: "How does French go on? I hope you speak nothing else at School, and that you take pains to pronounce it properly, for without you do that, you had better not to speak it at all."⁶⁶ When Jane's brother visited her in 1793, he communicated to their mother and praised Jane's scholastic skills. Ann wrote to Jane: "Your Brother tells me that he thinks you improved in your playing and singing, and that you are likewise so in your French."⁶⁷ Speaking French would ensure Jane was more cosmopolitan and could converse in the language of the European elite.

Furthermore, Dr. Brodbelt aspired for his daughter to be conversant in history. Along with the traditional curriculum of arithmetic and reading, Dr. Brodbelt requested: "Let me know if you can calculate Interest and how far you are advanced in Arithmetick. I hope you read History with great attention, and study Geography constantly, both which will improve your mind, and render you a very pleasant companion."⁶⁸ Although novels became increasingly popular throughout the late eighteenth century, Dr. Brodbelt did not wish his daughter to become engrossed in these sentimental works: "As I know you are fond of reading I would advise you to read History and not Novels, for you will receive infinite benefits, by the first and none by the last."⁶⁹ One of the benefits of her education included an increased appreciation of the events of the ongoing French Revolution. The actions in France beginning in 1789 affected the inhabitants of the Caribbean, who constantly feared a French invasion of their islands. Dr. Brodbelt wrote to Jane to entreat her to read and be knowledgeable of the events in Revolutionary France. He especially mentioned John Whitaker's *Real origin of the Government* and Abbe Barruel's *History of the Clergy During the French Revolution*.⁷⁰ Even though the Revolution was still progressing, Dr. Brodbelt understood the importance of the proceedings in the traditional enemy of Britain: "I wish you and your dear Brother would make yourselves perfectly well acquainted with all the transaction of France and the other Nations from the beginning of the Revolution to the end of It, or to the end of the War, which I wish was at an end... Recollect that you are never to speak any thing but French to [Rigby]."⁷¹ The desire for his offspring to be knowledgeable about both history and current events does not fit with the rhetoric of absent and indifferent colonial parentage.

As Jane's education progressed, her parents inquired increasingly after her skill and practice of music. The possession of a talent such as playing an instrument would ensure that she would have an accomplishment to display in her homeland and a hobby to engage in during the tedium that awaited her in the sugar plantation island. Additionally, she could perform for family, neighbors, and potential suitors to display her metropolitan accomplishments. Jane also needed to be able to tune her own instrument, as that skill was not readily available in Jamaica. Jane's father reminded her to pay "with greatest attention the best books on Musick, so as to teach you

⁶⁶ Ann Brodbelt to Jane Brodbelt, September 16, 1792, *Letters to Jane*, 40.

⁶⁷ Ann Brodbelt to Jane Brodbelt, November 25, 1793, *Letters to Jane*, 77.

⁶⁸ Francis Brodbelt to Jane Brodbelt, *Letters to Jane*, 82. Jane created a decorative object for her father that contained a script including some historical quotes. Her father responded: "The motto with the embellishments gave me infinite satisfaction as it shows you venerate our most inestimable Constitution and our very excellent King. I am sorry you accuse me of not writing, but I can assure you I make a point of answering your letters as soon as I receive Them" (64).

⁶⁹ Francis Brodbelt to Jane Brodbelt, *Letters to Jane*, 42.

⁷⁰ These two works were published in 1795 and 1794, respectively. See: John Whitaker, *The Real Origin of Government* (London: Printed for John Stockdale, 1795); *The History of the Clergy During the French Revolution A Work Dedicated to the English Nation: by the Abbé Barruel* (Dublin: Printed by H. Fitzpatrick, for P. Wogan, 1794).

⁷¹ Francis Brodbelt to Jane Brodbelt, October 4, 1795, *Letters to Jane*, 118.

that Science systematically and make you a Mistress of the Technical words, and to have you taught properly to tune the Harpsichord and grand Piano Forte.”⁷² An ability to play music would separate her from other young creole women.

Although Jane’s parents demanded close attention to her studies, as she progressed, they allowed her to spend more holidays away from school to experience the culture and sociability of the metropole. During one holiday, while she was visiting acquaintances from the West Indies at Bath, the Brodbelts reminded her to display proper gratitude. Jane’s parents expected to her “treat Mrs H. and all the family to 2 or 3 plays, and to a concert or two, and when coming away to give each of them some trifle by way of a remembrance of friendship, but recollect, all this must be done with a handsome delicacy attended with great address.”⁷³ The Brodbelts expected their youngest daughter to participate in the artistic endeavors available in England. Jane’s maturation included skill in both playing music and selecting performances to delight her benefactors. While live performances were not unheard of in the West Indies, the ease and selections in the urban centers of England provided Jane with opportunities that she would not have at home.

Along with the appreciation of music, Ann desired that Jane would possess other endowments to portray herself as a well-bred woman of fashion and a desirable companion. Jane’s mother recounted the story of a “Miss Harris,” who married well even though she did not possess “a sixpence in the World: therefore you see what mental and personal attractions will accomplish, and which she possessed in a high degree.”⁷⁴ According to Ann, “personal attractions” included concern with posture to stave off crookedness of figure: “I think with the Generality of the World, that a *well-formed shape* is far preferable to the beauties of the face.”⁷⁵ Jane’s mental accomplishments would not be displayed to best advantage without careful attention to her appearance.

Jane’s maturation also included shopping and attiring herself in the latest fashions. Ann warned Jane to “[o]bserve that all the materials are of the best quality, for they are not only the most genteel, but the most lasting. Let every thing fit exactly to your Shape and put them on with *great taste*.”⁷⁶ As Jane developed, it became increasingly important to ensure that she dressed with style and to the best advantage for her figure. Ann also desired that her daughter develop the elusive “taste” while in England. According to Bernard Herman “taste” was a “coded material and performative language strategically employed in a process of self-identification along lines of both affinity and difference. In this sense, taste serves as an instrument that simultaneously privileges processes of social cohesion and social distinction. Taste in this context informs

⁷² Francis Brodbelt to Jane Brodbelt, May 20, 1794, *Letters to Jane*, 86.

⁷³ Francis Brodbelt to Jane Brodbelt, July 6, 1795, *Letters to Jane*, 112-113.

⁷⁴ Ann Brodbelt to Jane Brodbelt, *Letters to Jane*, 61.

⁷⁵ Ann Brodbelt to Jane Brodbelt, *Letters to Jane*, 62. When Jane was sixteen, a family acquaintance, “Mr. Raymond,” came to pay a visit to her at Flint House, and kissed her. Both Mrs. Fenwick and the Brodbelts found this to be a breach in propriety. Jane father wrote: “I rejoice exceedingly that you considered how very right your good Governess acted in speaking to you about Mr Raymond’s kissing you when he called at Flint House, for it certainly was very wrong and indelicate, as such a liberty should only be taken by a Parent or a very near Relation.” (54). Although the Brodbelts wished Jane to possess womanly charms to attract a husband, they felt she was much too young at sixteen to be receiving such favors. Coincidentally, this gentleman married her sister Ann Maria some years later.

⁷⁶ Ann Brodbelt to Jane Brodbelt, May 17, 1795, in *Letters to Jane*, Mozley, 109.

material and visual representations of power.”⁷⁷ The Brodbelts expected Jane to display both her “taste” and her educational accomplishments on her return to the West Indies.

As Jane’s education in England drew to a close, Dr. Brodbelt worried that she had not taken full advantage of the opportunities in the metropole. He grieved over the lack of scholastic progress perceived in the fellow creole ladies and enumerated his desire that Jane not join their ranks. Travel writers and visitors to the West Indies recorded their perceptions of the lack of motivation for educational endeavors in the Caribbean, and Dr. Brodbelt agreed with those observations: “It is really a grievous heartbreaking business to see how ignorant and supercilious most all the young Ladies return to Jamaica from school: it is more than probably that this Ignorance arises from the young Ladies’ friends keeping them too much from School, and allowing them to come Home too often.”⁷⁸ His assessment agreed with travel historian Long’s consideration of “the very great defects” in the education of the creole ladies of Jamaica.⁷⁹

Furthermore, Dr. Brodbelt’s concern for his children’s education broke with the alleged tradition of creole parents indulgence of every whim of their offspring and complete lack of concern for their scholastic edification.⁸⁰ Long posited: “The education of the youths *remitted* from this island is, in general, so mismanaged, that...not one in ten would ever arrive at the age of discretion, or return.”⁸¹ Dr. Brodbelt’s close attention to Jane’s curriculum separated him from other families in the Caribbean who allowed their offspring to engage in “mismanaged” schooling. The Brodbelt children received a strict and circumscribed instruction, and Jane’s coursework was coming to an end as she reached her sixteenth birthday.

Jane’s completion of her education and her “coming of age” process included her families’ increased confidence in her for news and her access to goods to purchase and ship from the metropole. Additionally, Dr. Brodbelt depended on Jane to purchase special medical supplies in London to send to Jamaica. Furthermore, Nancy, Jane’s elder sister, who completed her education and returned to the Caribbean, relied on Jane for reports of fashions and gossip when she returned to the sedentary life of Spanish Town. Most importantly, her transition to adulthood depended on the material goods she would purchase to take back home, and both her display and manipulation of these possessions.

The Brodbelts attempted to ameliorate the monotony of life in the West Indies for their young girls returning home from schooling through the acquisition of material goods. Long famously recorded in his work that the education creole children “usually receive in Great-Britain does not qualify them for useful employment in Jamaica.”⁸² Jane’s parents compiled a list of items she would need to retain her cultivation from her experiences in England. They understood the

⁷⁷ According to Bernard Herman, “Taste can be read as a system of social and cultural values focused in the eighteenth century on regularity, hierarchy, order, and standardization, all materially grounded in and made visible through architecture and an astonishing range of artifacts and social behaviors,” in “Tabletop Conversations: Material Culture and Everyday Life in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World,” in John Styles and Amanda Vickery, *Gender, Taste, and Material Culture in Britain and North America, 1700-1830* (New Haven, CT: Yale Center for British Art, 2006), 43.

⁷⁸ Francis Brodbelt to Jane Brodbelt, October 4, 1795, *Letters to Jane*, 117.

⁷⁹ Long, 286.

⁸⁰ Long described creole parenting: “...they have not the watchful attention of a parent, to check their intemperate fallies, to conduct them into the ways of prudence, and habituate them in the practice of self-denial! How much to be regretted, that the fond father, whilst his son thus remains unemployed in useful pursuits during the most headstrong career of his life...” (247).

⁸¹ Long, 247.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 246.

importance of these material acquisitions to assist Jane in engaging in “useful employment” of her time.

The manipulation and possession of certain goods assisted in the formation of individuality in the colonial world. Maya Jasanoff states that “possessions are critical indicators not only of personal taste, but also of social milieu, wealth, education and status. By acquiring them one can craft and advertise a particular persona.”⁸³ The “persona” that the Brodbelts assisted Jane in crafting required material goods from the metropole. As T. H. Breen has shown, colonial Americans “self-fashioned” their identity by engaging with British material culture. The Brodbelts, as Breen demonstrates, can be seen through that lens as they also “went about the business of constructing a visual imagination out of the materials and experiences of everyday life.”⁸⁴ They desired to display their cosmopolitan nature through consumption of British items.⁸⁵

On the conclusion of her education in England, Jane received a stipend from her father. Her parents enclosed a list that included jewelry, clothing, and a musical instrument. Jane was encouraged, however, to use the money as she determined. We can see Jane’s acquisitions through the lens of *Girlhood* authors Jackie Kirk, Claudia Mitchell, and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh. They propose that young girls develop “agency” through currency and decision for conspicuous consumption.⁸⁶ Jane enacted agency through her consumption and assisted in crafting her own identity through the objects she purchased to take back to her home in Jamaica. Breen reveals how colonial individuals participated in a “social process known as self-fashioning,” and through this phenomenon they enacted “human agency.” Through acquiring these goods, Jane was “self-fashioning” her identity as a member of the consumer elite in the British Empire. These items were not just souvenirs from England but necessary items to help her retain her development and accomplishments from her time at school.

Throughout Jane’s education her parents raised animals such as cows and goats, which they sold at the completion of her time in England. This gave Jane her own income to spend on necessary commodities in England.⁸⁷ Jane was allowed to exercise her own will in choosing the items. Her father remarked: “I therefore beg that you will appropriate it to any use you think proper when you are coming out.”⁸⁸ However, Dr. Brodbelt asked that Jane buy a “handsome

⁸³ Although there have been excellent works on consumption and the creation of a national identity, few works have considered the role of “colonialism” in consumption. Maya Jasanoff demonstrates the use of material culture in “self-fashioning” throughout the British empire. Jane’s coming-of-age purchases can be seen as part of her “self-fashioning” in the metropole for her imperial experience. “By accumulating material wealth, objects and property, . . . individuals had the ability to transform themselves,” in “Collectors of Empire: Objects, Conquests and Imperial Self-Fashioning,” *Past & Present* 184 (August 2004). See also Jasanoff, *Edge of Empire: Lives, Culture, and Conquest in the East, 1750-1850* (New York: Knopf, 2005). Although Jasanoff utilizes a case study involving imperial consumption in India; her trans-regional methodology remains useful for the study of material culture in other colonial regions. *Ibid.*, 111.

⁸⁴ T. H. Breen, “The Meaning of Likeness: Portrait-Painting in an Eighteenth-Century Consumer Society,” in Ellen G. Miles, ed., *The Portrait in Eighteenth-Century America* (University of Delaware Press, 1993), 39.

⁸⁵ For the Brodbelts, these items included the previously discussed goods such as miniature portraits, silhouettes, fashionable goods, and accessories such as fans, belts, and lace trimmings.

⁸⁶ Jackie Kirk, Claudia Mitchell, and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh, “Toward Political Agency for Girls: Mapping the Discourses of Girlhood Globally,” in *Girlhood: A Global History* ed. Jennifer Helgren, and Colleen A. Vasconcellos (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2010) These authors explain that in the “first world” young girls “suddenly have a currency all of their own, and there is no shortage of public data . . . to the purchasing power . . . to consume” (18).

⁸⁷ Francis Brodbelt to Jane Brodbelt, Dec. 30, 1795, *Letters to Jane*, 125.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

gold watch and chain as a remembrance of my approbation and love.”⁸⁹ He reminded Jane to make sure that the jewelry was of good quality due to the difficulty in finding a jeweler to mend items in the Caribbean. They also desired that Jane buy a pearl necklace to match the “very elegant” pins and earrings that Ann had in Jamaica.⁹⁰ These family treasures were to be bestowed on their youngest daughter on her return. They recommended a close relative to assist Jane in her purchases to ensure she was not cheated. However, they did not want Jane to acquire anything unless it was of her own choice. Dr. Brodbelt reminded Jane: “Recollect we don’t desire you to lay out your Money in Pearls, unless it perfectly pleases yourself.”⁹¹ As part of her coming of age, Jane now had purchasing power and discretion to acquire luxury goods such as jewelry.

Along with ornamentation, the acquisition of a musical instrument provided Jane an opportunity to both exercise her judgment and display her achievements. Dr. Brodbelt wrote: “I have likewise another token of my Affection to make you, which is a Musical Instrument for you to bring to Jamaica, and which I also leave to your own choice,” either a harpsichord or a pianoforte. He asked Jane to ensure that the music master of her school approved of the choice. Additionally, he reminded Jane to learn to tune the instrument she chose. Jane would be able to best display her accomplishments with this instrument she would choose herself and know how to interact with and manipulate this good.

The “performative” aspect of both playing and handling this instrument can be seen through the lens of Mimi Hellman’s work on furniture and sociability. “Through strategically designed aspects of form and function,” Hellman argues, “furniture appeared to accommodate and flatter its users as they pursued such activities as reading, writing, conversing, eating, dressing, and game playing.”⁹² Furthermore, performance on this instrument would display her developed form and posture, and her musical talents. In this aspect her interaction with her pianoforte would be “visual and kinetic; objects were not simply owned, but indeed performed.”⁹³ The Brodbelts desired that Jane present her accomplishments to the best advantage, and her “performance” would ensure approval with her education and polishing from the metropole.

Dr. Brodbelt would never see the fruits of his labors concerning Jane’s education. The report of his death reached Jane in December 1795, only a few months before her planned return to the West Indies. According to a friend of Dr. Brodbelt, “This day I have received, a most serious check, in the fall of my most favorite friend, the death of good Mr. Brodbelt of Jamaica, it is said he has died rich as provided well for his family, but above all he left a most excellent character, a very material part, and very difficult to support thro’ a life of business.”⁹⁴ Jane’s sister Nancy’s letter reached her in February lamenting that their father’s final conversations regarded their impending reunion: “His only Conversation when we were alone was of the Happiness we should experience this Year in *all* meeting.”⁹⁵ Although the entire family was grief-stricken, Ann soon wrote to Jane reminding her of the items she needed to procure to efficiently plan her journey home.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., 125-126.

⁹² Mimi Hellman, “Furniture, Sociability, and the Work of Leisure in Eighteenth-Century France,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32 (1999): 416. In this essay, Hellman suggests “that decorative objects conveyed meaning not simply through possession but also through usage, through a spatial and temporal complicity with the cultivated body that produced the appearance of leisured, sociable ease” (416).

⁹³ Hellman, 416.

⁹⁴ Mozley, 127 n.

⁹⁵ Ann Maria Brodbelt to Jane Brodbelt, February 1, 1796, *Letters to Jane*, 128.

This letter did not include sentiments for the grieving Jane or details of Dr. Brodbelt's funeral. Ann's letter contained business and paid little attention to the emotional state of the family or her daughter in England.⁹⁶ Additionally, she enclosed a list of items that the family needed that Jane was to procure. She suggested that Jane purchase new music to play: "Bring out some fashionable music, both in the Lesson as well as Sing song way, as you had better learn a few of each, as anything *new* is very taking here."⁹⁷ To avoid seasickness, Ann kindly recommended dried bruised ginger tea to drink on the ship. She also reminded Jane to purchase "3 pair Sheets," and "3 pr pillowcases" for a clean and comfortable voyage. Ann's letter displayed concern with receiving her own goods as well as Jane's comfort, though her husband had just died and Ann was still in mourning.

Furthermore, Jane's mother enclosed a list of the fashionable attire needed in the West Indies. She included both items for mourning and various other garments to construct her wardrobe. Jane was now a lady of style returning from England, and her parents wished her to be "completely fitted out before you leave England."⁹⁸ Her garments included "two riding Habits mentioned in the inclosed List, but you had better bring out *only one*, and let that be made of a Cloth which will both answer the purpose of *Second* mourning, and be of use to you when that is at an end, by changing the lining and buttons."⁹⁹ The first and second mourning periods prescribed various costuming changes, and Ann wished that Jane efficiently garb herself in dress that would suffice for both.

Ann did not limit her list to mourning garments. She remembered other "Articles of dress &c., &c. which J. G. Brodbelt will require at the time of Her quitting England," which consisted of "6 morning caps, 8 night caps, 4 genteel fashionable dresses, proper to pay Yea visits in, [and] 4 very smart white morning dresses."¹⁰⁰ The details of the fashionable ensembles helped separate Ann and her elder daughter in Jamaica from the other colonial women, since, as Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell explains, it was "trimmings and accessories that determined whether or not a person was in style."¹⁰¹ After tragedy struck the Brodbelt family, Ann's desire for efficiency and a timely return for her youngest daughter took precedence over Jane's agency in determining her "trousseau." Although Jane was given preference when it came to her musical instrument, choice of sheet music, and jewelry, her wardrobe needs were circumscribed. Jane might have had discretion in the cut and fabric of her dresses, but Ann dictated the quantity and items.

With Jane's arrival in Jamaica, the three Brodbelt women were together again. However, Ann found the West Indian home unbearable after the death of her husband and desired to return to England. Ann, although a wealthy and independent widow, retired in Bath, the "warm and

⁹⁶ Ann reminded Jane: "As you will require a Female attendant during the voyage, if you could meet with either a brown or a Black person of a Fair character, who has been already to in the Island, and is inclined to return again, you may hire one of that discription for a trifle, and who will answer your purpose much better than a White Servant, for you will not know what to do with Her after you arrive here" (Mozley, 129).

⁹⁷ Ann Brodbelt to Jane Brodbelt, February 1, 1796, *Letters to Jane*, 130.

⁹⁸ Ann Brodbelt to Jane Brodbelt, February 1, 1796, *Letters to Jane*, 131.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 131. According to Lou Taylor: "Mourning dress for the wealthy became increasingly fashionably styled, with black coats and breeches for men and mantua dresses for women, in black and half-mourning mauve" (Lou Taylor, "Mourning Dress." *The Berg Fashion Library*. 2005. <http://www.bergfashionlibrary.com/view/bazf/bazf00408.xml> (accessed 9 Apr. 2012)).

¹⁰⁰ Ann Brodbelt to Jane Brodbelt, February 1, 1796, *Letters to Jane*, 130.

¹⁰¹ Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell, "Fashioning (and Refashioning) European Fashion" in *Fashioning Fashion: European Dress in Detail, 1700-1915* (Munich: Delmonico Books, 2010), 17.

pleasant retreat for the retired West Indian plantation-owners,” to be near her British relatives.¹⁰² The schemes for Jane’s triumphant arrival to Jamaica, attired in the most fashionable dress and displaying her accomplishments to great success, gained her a wealthy creole husband, Peter Mackenzie. Jane, fresh from her education, left her mother in England, went back to Jamaica two years after the completion of her education and married in 1798. They lived in the Caribbean until her husband’s death in 1856, when she retired in England as well. Jane’s brother Rigby took his father’s seat on the Council, and practiced medicine in Spanish Town from 1797-1810.¹⁰³ Although this family participated in Caribbean life, they were interwoven with the British world and felt like British imperial subjects, occupying the space of both the West Indies and the metropole.

The Brodbelts do not conform to the rhetoric of “family” in the West Indies. The participated in British material culture, and the daughters received their education at an English boarding school. Dr. and Ann Brodbelt paid close attention to their daughters’ lessons and accomplishments and even recommended works to help with the girls’ edification. Additionally, the use of material culture marked a shift in the language and focus of their trans-Atlantic correspondence. Although the Brodbelts sent money for Jane to acquire goods to form her identity as an accomplished lady returning to the West Indies, they relied on her discretion in the choice of items. This marked Jane’s coming of age and the completion of her education. Furthermore, her “self-fashioning” using these items would distinguish her as an accomplished lady of style for a potential husband. Jane’s coming of age depending on both the completion of her education and her ability to display her accomplishments in her Caribbean home. Wearing tasteful jewelry and playing an instrument would display her cultivation to best advantage. Furthermore, fashionable attire from England would mark her as a lady of distinction in the urban Caribbean colonial world. After the death of Dr. Brodbelt, Ann and her daughters returned to England, but both daughters married men with West Indian interests. Both Nancy and Jane returned to their former homes and began families of their own.

The Brodbelt daughters did not display the characteristics of creole women as noted by travel historians. The “soft and spiritless,” creole lady with every step betraying “languor and lassitude,” does not characterize the experience of the Brodbelt women.¹⁰⁴ Although this family does not represent the entire creole population, particularly the plantation families in the rural West Indies, they do demonstrate that the entire creole population cannot be reduced to stereotypes and caricatures.¹⁰⁵ This cosmopolitan family experienced the empire through retaining close connections to family and other loved ones in Britain. Furthermore, through participation in British material culture, the Brodbelts remained linked with the metropole.

¹⁰² Averil Mackenzie-Grieve, *The Great Accomplishment: Biographies of Five Women of the 18th Century Living in the Colonies*, (London: Bles, 1953), 108.

¹⁰³ Rigby died in 1827, and Ann never recovered from the shock, and died later that year. The next year Nancy and her son died. Jane and Peter lived in Jamaica, after Peter’s death, Jane went to England with her own daughters. The Brodbelts are now gone from Jamaica.

¹⁰⁴ Edwards, 13.

¹⁰⁵ Most stereotypes of the West Indian populace regard the plantation “misses” who were either married or daughters of plantation owners, or oversaw the large properties in the Caribbean themselves. In the future I plan to compare this analysis with writings from other Caribbean urban families and women, by using the writings of Sarah Dwariss, Margaret and Mary Cowper, and Ann Appleton Storrow. For purposes of this article, I narrowed my analysis to one family and hope to expand this study for my dissertation. Although the stereotype of the depraved West Indian women prevailed in plays, visual images, and in literature, the Brodbelt family demonstrates that the caricature of the Caribbean creole cannot be extended to all members of the white populace. Whether or not this phenomenon extended to more members of the urban elite will be explored in future studies.

Additionally, the young women in this family used items from England to both come of age following their education and display their accomplishments from school.

Appendix

Image One



Abraham James, “A Grand Jamaican Ball! or the Creolian hop a la Mustee; as exhibited in Spanish Town,” London: William Holland, 1803.

Image Two



THE BRODBELT CHILDREN BY COSWAY

Richard Cosway, *Brodbelt Children*, 1788, in Geraldine Nutt Mozley, *Letters to Jane from Jamaica, 1788-1796*. (London: Published for the Institute of Jamaica by the West India Committee, 1938), Frontispice. From left to right Jane, Nancy and Rigby Brodbelt.

Image Three



Isabella Beetham, “Ann Brodbelt,” 1791, in *Letters to Jane*, 33.

Image Four



John Miers, “Francis Rigby Brodbelt,” c. 1792, *Letters to Jane*, 65.