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Studies of white women in colonial societies have unlocked many areas of analysis hitherto closed. Gender is yet another variable in the complex hierarchies of social and economic power that constitute the prime characteristics of multi-ethnic imperial territories. Gendered relationships produce further fields of force in the inflection of authority and influence within both white and black, imperial and indigenous, fractions of such migrant, transplanted and invariably artificial social units. Moreover, despite the obvious and often outrageous privileges of white individuals within such societies, aspects of class divisions were replicated in varying ways across different colonies and continents. Hence, society in each colony needs to be understood in terms of class as well as gender and race, and within this complex mix we also have to observe the operations of elements of miscegenation. There have been a number of highly suggestive analyses of these phenomena in British colonies, including the major unit, the so-called 'Indian Empire'. And, as with so many other aspects of the imperial condition, the patterns and the dynamic of these relationships of gender often reflected back upon the metropolis. Some such studies have already appeared in this series.

But it has been much less common to examine these characteristics in slave-owning societies. In these, the unfree condition of the slaves places white women in further states of tension as the wives of owners, as owners themselves, as nascent entrepreneurs in their own right, and as people to be socially and sexually protected within societies where fear was a notable conditioner of social relations. Moreover, since white women were permitted to slip down the social scale into the condition of 'poor whites', and often did, the position of such disadvantaged females in respect of other whites and of slaves became even more problematical and complex. These nuances of social standing and behaviour are examined with considerable acuteness in this book.

This book's other highly innovative characteristic is to create a comparative study between a colony, North Carolina, which left the British Empire in the 1770s, and Barbados which remained within it throughout the period. Thus additional historical elements are fed into the mix. We have the new legislative arrangements of a state within an emergent and independent federal system and the controversies about the continuation of slavery which were to lead to civil war. On the other hand, we have the enactments of the British Empire in seeking to end the slave trade and, in the 1830s, the institution of slavery itself, albeit through a system of apprenticeship. In each case, efforts to protect the privileges and socio-economic conditions of the whites were even more striking after emancipation almost than before. In each, the position of white women was subjected to much propaganda, legal and political provision, comment in newspapers and in contemporary travel and other

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accounts. Indeed, Cecily Jones has produced a notably fresh and enlightening account of these phenomena by isolating case studies and by using a striking range of documents and other sources. Her study offers many pointers to the way in which such research can develop further in the future.

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