

Black, Green, Gold

A collection of poems, reflections, and short stories by Lee-Ann Sims; edited Shirley Hamilton

Dedicated to my mother Beverly Sims who taught me about the resilience of Jamaica's people, showed me the beauty of Jamaica's land, and allowed me to witness the brilliance of Jamaica's golden sunshine. Above all she taught me the importance of Jamaica's motto, that out of many we are one people.

Introduction

For my finale project I wanted to talk about Jamaica, the country my mother is from and a place I spent a lot of time growing up. Throughout this semester as we talked about environmental humanities and global health my mind always drifted back to what I see as the exploitation of the island through tourism. The following works are commentaries on environmental humanities in Jamaica.

Black, Green, Gold

*Black is for the people,
Green is for the land,
Yellow is for the sun,
White are the people who come to enjoy the "destination."*

*Black is for the people,
Green is for the land,
Yellow is for the sun,
White is for the sand of beaches Jamaicans don't get to see anymore.*

*Black is for the people,
Green is for the land,
Yellow is for the sun,
White is for the sugar from the cane crop that grew on plantations.*

*Black is for the people,
Green is for the land,
Yellow is for the sun,
White is for neo-colonialism.*

*Black is for the people that endured hardships,
Will they ever overcome?*

Soon Cum

“Mi soon cum,”

A phrase I heard often growing up.

Soon cum means soon.

Soon cum means eventually.

Soon cum means next week.

Soon cum means soon enough.

Soon cum means that enough time will pass, and you might just forget what you were waiting for.

Soon cum is the reality of environmental justice in Jamaica.

If mi eat mi madda black betty peas river cum wash mi way

One story my mom often told my sisters and me was about a boy who was asked to watch a pot cooking over a fire. The boy’s mother told him to watch a pot full of “black betty peas” while she ran an errand. Before the mother left, she warned the boy that if he ate the black betty peas the river would come and wash him away. When his mother left the boy decided to take a little taste from the pot and when he did, he noticed a small pool of water from the river at his feet. Seeing that nothing serious happened to him he took another spoonful. The boy took spoonful after spoonful until the pot was empty. With each bite the river got higher and higher until the water washed him away.

When I think of this story from my childhood, I couldn’t help but associate it with Rob Nixon’s *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Slow violence is the violence that is unseen. Since the destruction is gradual, we don’t always think of this kind of violence as violence at all. The boy in the story didn’t mean any harm — he just wanted to try some of the food his mother made. Each bite he took didn’t look like it was diminishing the pot until it was empty. By the time he realized what he had done it was too late. The task we have as human beings is to take care of the environment. We live on this earth as one species out of many, yet we don’t seem to care about the actions we are taking or the harm we are causing. We have to realize if we keep taking there will be nothing left. We could simply be “washed away”.

Ackee the Poisonous Fruit

Isn’t it poetic that ackee, Jamaica’s national fruit, is poisonous?

Ackee is not always poisonous only when it is prepared the wrong way.

To prepare ackee correctly one must wait for it to be ripe before it is picked.

Ackee is ripe when the skin turns red, and the plant opens naturally.

Only when ackee becomes ripe on its own should it be consumed.

Is the same not true for the island of Jamaica?

Hotels popped up one by one along the white sand beaches of the island.

Taken over by companies until the coastline was full.

As a result of climate change, sea levels rise, and the ocean water creeps slowly inland.

Was the consumption of the island too quick before we realized Jamaica itself can be poisonous to those that cause the island harm?

Should we have let the island ripen on its own before the rising tide of colonialism crashed onto its shores?

Cyrtopholis Jamaicola

The *Cyrtopholis Jamaicola* is a species of tarantula that is native to Jamaica. The tarantula is thought to be extinct in its natural habitat due to the introduction of the mongoose in Jamaica.

The *Herpestidae* more commonly known as the mongoose was introduced to Jamaica by plantation owners in the 1800s.

The mongoose was introduced to address a decrease in sugar plantation profits thought to be caused by rat infestations.

While seemingly successful at first, the mongoose grew tired of doing pest control and started to consume fruit, fish, farm products and more.

Colonialism was successful at degrading the environment to protect its interests and tourism continues this tradition today.

Is there something we can introduce to get rid of the *Tournacense*, Latin for *The Tourist*?