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# Gnawing at the Seams: Challenges for Contemporary Jamaican Feminism and the Equality Question\*

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## Abstract

Long before the term “feminism” existed, women always sought opportunities for social and economic empowerment, whether through welfare-oriented schemes or through other forms of activism. The 1970s Caribbean experience marked significant developments in feminism where women advocated, and through those efforts, permeated state institutions to achieve legal shifts in the interest of themselves and their children. During that era, both local and global women’s activism converged to address issues of inequality and discrimination and, as a result, reaped positive results where basic reforms were concerned. In Jamaica, there was extensive legal reform as several new laws were enacted as well as amendments made to existing laws. This was especially significant in the matters related to equality of pay despite sex, legitimizing the status of all children, maintenance, maternity leave, *inter alia*. Although these were major achievements, there were still issues that continued to contribute to asymmetrical gender relations. This paper, therefore, discusses how women’s achievements within a patriarchal space were not indicative of changes in conventional gender ideologies; more importantly, it questions the extent to which the legacy of the past, by itself, within the context of women’s

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achievement and women's politics, is capable of charting new directions for contemporary feminism.

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