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Landscaping Englishness: Respectability and Returnees in Mandeville, Jamaica¹

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Abstract

Since the early 1990s, the town of Mandeville has become a haven for returning residents² (henceforth returnees), particularly Jamaicans who migrated to England in the 1950s and 1960s and subsequently returned to Jamaica in the 1990s to retire (See Nettleford 1998). As Harry Goulbourne (1999, 164) observes, "...The hill town of Mandeville has acquired the reputation of being a desirous destination for returnees who create a prosperous ghetto characterised by some English pastimes: tea in the afternoon,

¹ A previous version of this article was published in Potter, Conway and Phillip's edited volume, *The Experience of Return: Caribbean Perspectives*. See Horst, Heather A. "Landscaping Englishness: The Postcolonial Predicaments of Returnees in Mandeville, Jamaica". In *The Experience of Return: Caribbean Perspectives*, edited by Rob Potter, Dennis Conway and Joan Phillips, 207–224. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2005

² "Returning resident" is a government category for a person who leaves Jamaica for five years and claims the title for customs purposes upon moving back to the island. In this chapter, I use "returning residents", "returned migrants" and "returnees" interchangeably to refer to individuals who migrated to the United Kingdom in the 1950s and 1960s and remained there up to the 1990s when they opted to retire in Jamaica, unless otherwise specified. Although exact numbers are difficult to determine due to the transient nature of "returning resident" status and the requirement of only *one* returnee per household to register with customs, 20,085 individuals enrolled for returning resident status between 1993 and 2003 (Planning Institute of Jamaica 2004). While only 250 individuals joined Mandeville's two Returning Resident Associations in the year 2000, estimates suggest that there are enough returning residents in Mandeville to create at least six active associations. Moreover, the 250 does not count spouses or the returning residents who did not wish to formally enlist in the association(s), but often participate in the group's organised activities (Personal Communication 2001)

the cultivation and display of well manicured lawns and gardens ordered for more aesthetic pleasure than practical use, which stand in sharp contrast to the utilitarian kitchen and fruit gardens of rural Jamaica. Some would see an irony here because the town of Mandeville in the parish of Manchester, like Simla in the Himalayan foothills, used to be the retreat for British Administrators in the colonial past during the hottest months.” Referring to returnees as “the English”, many Jamaicans and others attribute returnees’ choice to move to Mandeville as a deep internalization of English values and aesthetics as well as a sense of superiority over the “local” Jamaican population.
