

Chapter 1



The Research Setting

Jamaica, an independent nation since 1962, is the third largest of the Greater Antilles, an arc of islands located in the western Caribbean Sea. A tropical island 4,230.5 square miles in area and with a population of almost 2.4 million people, Jamaica has flat but narrow coastal plains. Slaveholding colonizers found these attractive and established sugar plantations and cattle ranches. They also greatly depleted the once densely forested island's stock of timber, as their fellow citizens valued "exotic" hardwoods. Still verdant, Jamaica's interior has over 120 streams and rivers and countless steep valleys and mountains, which reach as high as 7,400 feet in the east. The island's original name was probably *Xaymaca*, a word used by some of its first inhabitants, Arawak Indians, perhaps to mean "land of wood and water."¹

"TOWN" AND "COUNTRY": MY ARRIVAL

Jamaica's present capital, Kingston, which I first saw in the summer of 1988, sometimes seems about to be overrun by goats and street vendors. The apparent disorganization and raucous color of this hot, dusty city, called "town" by Jamaicans, can be quite intimidating. Downtown, at a place

called "parade," a rainbow of cars and vans with monikers like The Exterminator painted across their windshields speed by, radios blaring, and stuffed to near-bursting with uncomfortable people whose heads and arms often protrude from the windows. Drivers dodging crowds impervious to traffic laws must keep a special lookout for young boys pushing handmade wooden carts heavy with goods belonging to "higglers," or market women.

Off the street, hawkers with cardboard boxes or baskets full of fruit, candy, or sundries such as toilet paper, cheap watches, or the daily tabloid push their wares. Idle men lean against crumbling colonial storefronts with cigarettes dangling from their lips and caps pulled low, harassing passing women with superficially sweet entreaties and pleas for attention. "Town" (Kingston) is known by all Jamaicans as a place in which "everybody looking something from you." While the same holds true for "country," most say that only necessity or "compulsion" makes country people journey into town: they fear its hustlers and thieves. They also find the pace too quick, dress and customs foreign, and the crowds of strangers unnerving. The stress of travel is another factor that keeps rural folk "in country."

Jamaican's sometimes liken their busses to the slave ships that brought West Africans to the island. My first minibus ride was, like each subsequent venture, a lesson in discomfort. After taking care of business in town, I found "a transport" to the area in which I would live. "Packed so til it can't take message," the old van full of sweating people sat in the heat for over one half-hour before we moved. "Driver like to kill us all," passengers mumbled to themselves. No one left for a breath of air because to do so would mean giving up a hard-won space. Commanded by a man in an unbuttoned, untucked long-sleeved shirt who sported several gold-toned chains with big medallions and a pair of dark glasses, the bus finally pulled out honking, left the city limits with speed, and careened over the narrow, potholed junction road through mountains overgrown with greenery to Port Antonio in the north.

I settled myself in a northeastern coastal "district," or village, of about eight hundred people just off the single-lane, rutted main highway. It was in this village, where I lived for a year between 1988 and 1989, that I learned about most of the beliefs and practices discussed in this book.

Except in sections of this chapter describing the national context of the study, I often use the term *Jamaicans* in reference to the people whose lives and thoughts I describe. I do so because most Jamaicans are members of the group that this book specifically concerns: poor, rural people of African descent.² I tested the representativeness of my findings for this group during the final month of research when I worked with William Wedenoja in two of his fieldsites, one a central mountain village near Mandeville and the other a southwestern fishing village near Savanna la Mar. Media accounts and data gathered during several short trips to Kingston indicate that my findings also apply to impoverished city dwellers but I have not confirmed this.

The village that I lived in, like most others, consists of a conglomeration of people brought together only by geography and ancestry: they share a postal agency, patronize the same shops, and have many relatives in common. No one has any more legitimate authority than the next person except insofar as others allow it to them. In general, respect accompanies certain occupations or riches; class is important, and those desiring of respect strive to adopt the lifestyle of the Jamaican elite, which includes certain appliances, hairstyles, vocabularies, and so on.

"In country," life's pace is slow. Unemployment and underemployment rates run high. When not working in their yards or farming, people willingly sit for hours on verandas watching others amble past on errands. Some wait time out at the shop on "the main," or the coastal road that passes below the village. The shop is a typical one-room structure with the usual scant stock of soap, tinned mackerel, biscuits, cornmeal, and matches. Generally, all stock is stored behind a counter, with chicken-wire separating customers from shopkeepers and their wares. Out front, under the corru-

gated zinc overhang, mostly men but also idle youths and a few women gather, chatting or sitting silently on wooden stools worn smooth, watching for the sagging country bus to pull by to see who gets on and who comes off, noting just what each fellow villager wears and carries. Such information can have great strategic importance.

PERSONAL APPEARANCE

In one's "yard," that is, within the bounds of the land on which one has a home, ragged "judging" (shabby, threadbare, and unpresentable) clothes get worn. But to "walk out," even if only to a local shop for salt pork, requires attention to appearance. "We are young ladies," a ten-year-old informed me as she and her sister prepared to fetch bread for their caretaker by changing clothes and replaiting their hair. On major or social outings, such as when going out of the district, to church, or "up street" to see "what a go on" at the pub, clothing—even shoes—must be fresh and clean no matter how old. Holes must be mended and clothes well pressed, even if this means the use of a charcoal-heated iron on a scorching hot day. New clothes are reduced to yard-wear in a short time because of the vigor with which Jamaicans wash.

Young men and women love to affect a stylish appearance, and to "shock out," or impress, with their dress. They are especially keen to meet Easter, Independence Day in August, and Christmas with "new brand" clothing "suits," even when money "runnings" are tight. At Christmas, the words of one carol are sung as: "Don we now our *new* apparel." No one openly admits to wearing "old broke," or the castoffs of others. Clothes relatives send as gifts from "foreign" (anywhere overseas; usually England or the U.S.A.) are frequently passed off as new when they are not.

Modesty and a concern about the effects of the skin-darkening, health-endangering rays of the sun lead most Jamaicans to cover themselves with clothing. Although "rebels" and some city women "walk street" in shorts, pants,

and miniskirts, the more conservative majority stick with skirts and dresses that cover the knees and half-sleeved blouses or T-shirts. Most women feel strange without a belt to keep things "together." They always "lap frock tail" when sitting down on low stools or logs, bringing their rear skirt hems up through their legs like a diaper, guarding their crotches from male eyes and other irritants.

Men wear long pants (rarely dungarees) and long-sleeved shirts or "ganzies" (knit T-shirts or jerseys). Like the women, they do not tuck their shirts in but smooth them down over their waists. Bare feet for males as for females are all right in the yard but not on the street, and socks are necessary for trips to town. People like to don caps, and many have nice hats for special occasions, when men wear suitcoats.

Jamaicans take pride in their appearance and all but the most deeply impoverished have one outfit for church and funerals. Each Sunday a parade of girls in lacy frocks and hats, boys with white dress shirts, a few older men in mismatched slacks and jackets, and "plenty" women in high-heeled shoes carrying umbrellas to ward off the sun makes its way down mule paths and along the roads to church. People openly carry Bibles, but nothing more; purses, totes, and opaque plastic bags conceal personal goods from the eyes of others, whom Jamaicans always cast as "too beg," "red eye," and "too bad mind and grudgeful" (too envious and too quick to cast aspersions).

"WALKING OUT"

On weekdays and Saturdays, women may leave their yards and walk with loads atop their heads, whether laundry being taken to the river to wash or stones being carried for construction or road work. Men with machetes and tall boots head to their fields and gardens or to those of others for whom they work. Now and again, they ride donkeys. Many children go off to school, dressed in tidy, mandatory uniforms. Young unemployed men saunter off to sit and smoke or chat

with others, while young women "care" children and do other domestic work in their own yards. Those cooking send children "up shop" for ingredients as needed, since storage, refrigeration, and bulk purchases are generally a problem. Unless haste is absolutely mandatory, and especially in the heat of the day, everyone walks slowly.

Children often cluster in large groups, but adults do not. With the exception of courting teens who chance their caretakers' wrath, men and women rarely socialize as couples or even walk together. Men almost always "walk out" alone. Women more often meet up and walk in twos or threesomes. This is partly because many women do not feel safe alone and also because, while it is acceptable for men to cluster at rum shops to chat, women (who are expected to keep to their yards) can only exchange news and advice when a "mission" such as taking washing to the river brings them out. Even so, they usually walk with related females, such as daughters or the girlfriends or wives of their brothers.

No one, male or female, wishes to be seen talking with others too often lest s/he be labeled a gossip, and walking with kin helps lessen this risk. Avoiding strangers also helps keep "business" more private, in theory. People know, however, that even their closest kin can turn around and harm them by sharing with other villagers even the tiniest bit of incriminating evidence about "what really a go on" in their lives.

SEEING, SMELLING, HEARING

People with "roadside" yards know "plenty" because, being adjacent to the road, they see things happen. They see people pass from here to there and draw their own conclusions. But even those who must walk over narrow tracks through "bush" or untended vegetation to reach their yards know others' "business," because "they will hear." The surest way to learn is to watch and "study a thing," and all Jamaicans know how to "pick sense out of nonsense."

Knowing who has wealth of any kind is of the utmost

importance in this world of grinding impoverishment because then strategic alliances can be sought. So also is knowing about others' antics, such as hoarding or "sleeping out" (with a lover, away from home), because this knowledge can be used to stop them from gaining command of resources. People try to cover their tracks and guard their positions while, at the same time, undermining those of others. When inept, manipulations to these ends are laughed at. When unjust and uncovered, they also bring shame. Almost every person must "try a thing" to get by, and in one context or another this can be cast to "look bad."

In addition to things seen, certain odors characterize daily life in the village I lived in. These include the stench of dirty hog pens and the smell of stale sweat. Often, the sweet scent of marijuana percolates out from under the big mango tree where idle young men sit and "reason." "Later on up in the day," one notices the floral freshness of those who have recently bathed. On weekends, the smell of chicken being "jerked" or barbecued for sale to pub-goers fills the air by the shop. Certain people, mostly women, regularly sell treats, such as sweet oranges or peanuts (which they pack in small plastic bags and then tie to a bent wire hanger), to hungry or "peckish" revelers. These small-scale vendors appear at funerals and other gatherings as well. Special occasions are always accompanied by the strong "renk" odor of simmering curried goat, a necessary dish at any large gathering.

Weekends are always noisy. The village has two pubs; they face each other from opposite sides of the road. Each of the pub owners has installed a gigantic "set" or sound system with speakers six feet tall. People come from outside as well as inside the village to dance and look for a sex partner or to gamble and drink with usually good-natured belligerence. Each pub has an ill-lit "lawn," or covered patio, for dancing; a terrace for milling about, conversing, and surveying others; a small backroom for serious gambling; and a bar. Like most pubs, these are brightly decorated but rather dilapidated establishments in which no two glasses match and customers chip their own ice.

During the week, the district is normally filled only with peaceful rural sounds. These begin in the early morning with cocks crowing and people beginning to stir, chopping wood or running water at one of the public spigots. Barking puppies, bleating goats, braying donkeys, and twittering birds also make themselves heard. Sometimes, a pig being slaughtered cries out, squealing for quite some time before it dies.

The late afternoon brings the laughter of children returning from school and the "lick" of the domino tiles men slap down onto wooden tables at the pub. Often, during the evening hours, all village radios broadcast the favorite station, and one hears it continuously and softly when passing others' yards as, for example, on the way down from one's garden in the bush "up top," at the end of the road. Now and again, a loudly played tape or a quarrel bespeaking the tensions that lie beneath the seeming calm of rural life disrupts this peace. On Wednesday nights and Sundays, gospel and redemption hymns float out through open church windows.

THE NATION'S ECONOMY

Poverty exacerbates the tensions of daily life. The present economy has its historical roots in the slave-based plantation system of the British colonial regime. Large landholdings were controlled by colonizers and sugar was produced for export. Slave labor was used until the practice was abolished in 1834; then, the "discipline of hunger" replaced the "discipline of slavery" (Mintz 1986, 70). Only a portion of freed slaves remained on the plantations; indentured East Indians provided much of the postemancipation tenant labor. Ex-slaves preferred to work for wages, however small (Kaplan et al. 1976, 63).

Many freed men and women cultivated their own plots, sometimes selling from what they produced. A marketing system was already intact, because slaves (especially women) often had to raise much of their own food and were allowed off of the plantation to sell surpluses at Sunday markets

(Mintz 1974; Patterson 1969, 224). Plantation owners monopolized the fertile coastal plains, so ex-slaves were driven inland to the highlands, where they established small subsistence gardens among the rocky slopes. A number of churches founded "free villages" by buying up ruined estates and selling small parcels to church-going ex-slaves (Mintz 1987; Black 1983). Still, many ex-slaves remained landless. The land settlement programs of the early 1940s have not helped: the eventual subdivision of parcels by kin groups led to plots too small to profitably till. Many lie fallow today (Brodber 1989, 68). Only about half of all rural Jamaicans own the land they live on (Barrett 1988, 11).

In the late 1800s, after sugar profits had declined, a few entrepreneurs established a trade in bananas, and the economy turned upward again. Much of the capital involved was American; the Jamaican economy remained (and remains) dependent on foreign investors. The attention paid to foreign markets underlies Jamaica's weak internal intersectoral and interindustry links. A reliance on foreign goods (and a concomitant disinterest in consuming local products) complicates the nation's economic woes (Davies and Witter 1989).

A well-educated professional administrative class emerged to manage foreign interests. The ruling class that replaced the colonial regime came out of this service sector. Partly owing to this and also because good land has been hard for peasants to secure, education (despite its elitist nature and the system's financial woes) has slowly replaced agricultural pursuits as the preferred route to social advancement (Austin 1984; Brodber 1989).

After World War II, large numbers of Jamaicans moved to cities seeking work. The nation is becoming increasingly urban: while in 1970, 41 percent of Jamaicans were classified as urban dwellers, by 1982, 48 percent were (STATIN 1988a, 10). Agricultural enterprise has dwindled in importance. In 1950, agriculture contributed over 36 percent to Jamaica's gross domestic product (Kaplan et al. 1976, 232). By the 1980s, agriculture's contribution to the GDP hovered at only about 6 percent (STATIN 1989, 314).

Nonetheless, a peasant class does persist. Jamaican communities form a continuum that runs from subsistence and cash-crop farming to pure wage labor (and unemployment). Generally speaking, reliance on wage labor increases with population density and proximity to a town, plantation, or mining operation. Pure farming is rare, and most rural communities, including the one in which I lived, are made up of people who rely on a fluctuating mixture of strategies for economic survival. But "occupational multiplicity" can have deleterious effects in the long run. People who do not specialize do not build guilds or other bases for power (Brodber 1989; Comitas 1973).

As a nation, Jamaica now looks toward free-market tourism, manufacturing, and bauxite mining for its income. Mining, which contributed almost nothing to the GDP during the 1950s (Kaplan et al. 1976, 232) now accounts for 7.5 percent of GDP (STATIN 1988a, 314). Manufacturing, too, has shown great increase, from 6.5 percent of the GDP in 1950 (Kaplan et al. 1976, 232) to 22.2 percent in 1988 (STATIN 1988a, 314). As for tourism, in 1988 Jamaica had over one million visitors and received over \$500 million U.S. in foreign travel (STATIN 1989, 318–19).

But much of the profit from these sectors gets returned to foreign investors. Bauxite mining (which may decrease in importance because of recycling) is not labor-intensive and uses only 0.7 percent of the nation's employed labor force (STATIN 1989, 218). Tourism relies on imported foods and amenities. Manufacturing often involves sweatshop-like export-processing operations carried out in free production zones for foreign corporations. The majority of Jamaica's citizens gain little from these industries. Jamaica has one of the greatest disparities in income levels in the world (Pariser 1985, 24), and if anything, tourism, mining, and manufacturing exacerbate the gap between rich and poor.

According to M. G. Smith, 85 percent of all Jamaicans belong to the impoverished lower class—the group that this book is about. They remain unemployed or find menial and often seasonal jobs as hotel maids, banana packers, sugar-

cane cutters, and sweatshop seamstresses. Only 12 percent of Jamaicans hold skilled positions and only 3 percent are classified as professionals (M. G. Smith, 1989).

In 1987 the per capita yearly income was about \$1,000 U.S. (STATIN 1988b, 126) and 20.8 percent of the labor force was unemployed, with a rate of 13.6 percent for males and 29.5 percent for females (64). Underemployment is not represented in these figures. Where I lived fully one-third of the population was unemployed. Two-thirds of these were between the ages of fourteen and thirty-four (STATIN 1982). For comparison, the unemployment rate in the U.S. now hovers between 7 and 8 percent.

The majority of Jamaicans rely on a "gray-market" or informal economy, one rich with "entrepreneurship, technological creativity and innovativeness, and highly motivated work effort, all of which are in short supply in the formal economy" (Davies and Witter 1989, 99). Trade for the masses is handled by higglers, mostly women, who form the infrastructure of the distribution system on which people have come to rely over the past centuries. The existence of an internal market system is an outgrowth of the market system developed by slaves (Bush 1990; Mintz 1974).

Higglers are middle merchants who buy wholesale and sell retail, whether their stock is tomatoes, cabbage, and scallions or cheap clothing and hair oil brought in from Miami or Panama. Some work from their verandas, selling eggs, ice, bread, or any other commodity. A true higgler is a feisty traveling woman who carts produce from the countryside into town every weekend on an overloaded bus or a cooperatively hired and similarly packed truck. The cost of transportation is high, and profits are low, but by wisely investing pennies some higglers have been able to "uplift" themselves.³

A few other ways to make a living exist. Goats and garden vegetables may be raised. Women—whose occupational and survival strategies are discussed in Barrow (1988), Massiah (1988), and Senior (1991)—may take in washing when it is available and some do "day work," helping in others' homes or yards when needed, usually for about \$4 or \$5 U.S. plus

lunch. Small farmers sometimes employ helpers, especially when planting or harvesting. Men may find construction work, building houses from cement blocks for people wealthier than themselves. Like the women, they usually work for those who receive "foreign" money, whether pensions from jobs held abroad or gifts from relatives who have managed to emigrate despite recent tightening of policies. Only those with aid from overseas can hire help or build large houses.

The foreign exchange that pays wages is not limited to capitalist investments or pensions and relatives' remittances: much of it comes through the black market from *ganja*⁴ (marijuana) sales. This brings in an estimated \$200 million U.S. each year (Pariser 1985, 29), which equals the Jamaican food import bill (28). In 1988, Jamaica was the United States' third biggest marijuana supplier. If money that ends up outside the island is taken into account, the *ganja* trade could be worth as much as \$1 billion U.S. (De Cordoba 1988). For comparison, tourism, one of the island's most important industries, brought in \$525 million U.S. in 1988 (STATIN 1989, 319).

GEOGRAPHY

Most of the plants Jamaica has gained fame for, such as *ganja*, bananas, and sugarcane, as well as breadfruit, mangoes, passion fruit, and other tropical produce, are not indigenous. My Jamaican friends often boasted that even a dropped seed—any kind of seed—will sprout and develop into a thriving plant. In general, this is true, and each group of settlers that reached the island added something to Jamaica's stock of flora. Ackee, a fruit brought from west Africa by slave ships, and breadfruit, probably introduced by Captain Bligh, are both "country" staples when in season. The Spaniards brought bananas, coconut, sugarcane, and citrus. The Arawak Indians brought sweet potatoes and maize, and the East Indians brought *ganja*.

Much Jamaican soil is receptive and productive. But rocky ground, steep grades, and constant erosion pose prob-

lems in the mountainous interior, where so many ex-slaves were forced to settle. Additionally, some small farmers have trouble because many commercially available seeds are designed to grow in conjunction with specific types of expensive fertilizer.

Much of the earth in Jamaica is reddish in color because of the large amount of bauxite and other minerals in the soil. However, except where bauxite mining is underway and along the roadside or rural paths, most of the earth is covered with foliage and dotted with clearings on which stand one- and two-room homes made of boards, little sheds that house cooking hearths or pit toilets, or large residences of cement blocks. The red earth is hidden on the plains of the south and northwest with rows of sugarcane and other crops and, especially in the south, with meadows and low scrub brush. The interior and the east coast are jungly. In general, Jamaica presents itself in green against a blue, blue sky. Jamaicans have capitalized on the variety of plants grown here: many are believed to have pharmacological applications and are used frequently.

While Jamaica's mountains are steeper and higher in the east where the Blue Mountains rise into damp fog, the smaller western chains are more rugged owing to the karst topography, particularly in the "cockpit country." This section of the western highlands appears from a plane as if it had been hit by a shower of giant meteors. It is full of pits and peaks, valleys and cones because, over time, many of the underground caves that lace this countryside have collapsed, dropping the earth on top of them down to form the cockpits. The topography looks like the inside of an egg carton. The whole area is covered in greenery and resembles a pool table on which the pocket-maker has gone mad. Although largely unoccupied the area used to provide sanctuary for Maroons, or runaway slaves, who banded together as rebels.

A variety of animals inhabit Jamaica. There are many kinds of hummingbirds and butterflies. Toads and frogs, which whistle at night, abound. Huge "John Crow" turkey buzzards often circle low in the afternoon sky. It is said that

they signal an impending funeral. Many types of lizards also thrive. Jamaicans fear these almost as much as they fear the nonpoisonous snakes found in the island. Ghosts, it is said, often take the form of these reptiles. Pests such as mosquitoes, rats, and giant winged cockroaches are plentiful.

Domestic animals include the pig and goat; dogs and cats are kept to guard yards and catch rats. Large landholders may raise cattle or have horses, but only a few peasants can afford even a donkey or a mule. Wild hogs roam the interior, and mongeese often steal and devour chickens. The sea is rich with (but quickly being depleted of) fish.

WEATHER

Jamaica is always warm, with an average temperature of about 80 degrees. Working in the sun or riding on packed buses can make it seem much hotter. People always carry a "rag" (a kerchief or washcloth) with which to wipe away the sweat that rolls from their brows, and they often wear hats because "sun will junk you" (make you sick). Hats also offer protection from dampness and breezes (and allow wearers to express their sense of style). Rainfall is heavy in the east and happens at least once a day in autumn. The national average yearly rainfall is 195 cm. or 77 inches.

The weather cycle joins with other cycles and the year can be seen in terms of what crops are in, what trees are bearing, or what activities children are pursuing. For example, someone thinking of September might refer to the time pimento trees bear. December is, in the east, kite-making season because of the constant breeze. People know May as the time when children hunt land crabs, July as the season of "plenty mango," and August as the month in which Independence holidays are held and as "[avocado] pear time." October and November are generally rainy, followed by "Christmas breeze," then a dry spell from January until March when the rain resumes. Breezes characterize Easter, summer comes, and then hurricane season arrives. As Pariser says, "hurri-

canes represent the one outstanding negative in an otherwise impeccably hospitable climate" (1985, 10).

The last hurricane to devastate the island hit on 12 September 1988, barely three weeks after I arrived, foisting upon me a painfully close view of crisis behavior. "Mister Gilbert," as the Jamaicans respectfully called this menace, was the fiercest hurricane to hit the western Caribbean this century. The clichés about trees felled like so many toothpicks and zinc sheet roofs lifted like lids from tin cans aptly describe the scenes Gilbert's force wrought. Many homes were completely "dashed away," some left "all mash up" and others wholly carried off, with only bare red-painted cement foundations proving that they once existed (ruined homes with dirt floors often left no evidence). Driving rains and giant waves soaked everything, and livestock not killed was set free by the hurricane. Crops and roads were damaged, water supplies tainted, and power lines downed. To top things off, a grain elevator in the island's only flour mill exploded one week later.

POPULATION

Despite Hurricane Gilbert, I got to know Jamaica, an island in which appearances and managed presentations of self—and of one's racial and cultural backgrounds—are of prime importance. The prevalence of dark skin notwithstanding, whiteness is a valued characteristic here and most Jamaicans consider it insulting to be called black by fellow islanders. African heritage is often denied or submerged. Although attitudes are changing and black pride movements have met with some success, Brodber (1989) shows that color prejudice, which she identifies as a variant of racism, is still prevalent. This is especially true in rural areas (Kaplan et al. 1976, 96). The effects this color prejudice has on self-esteem and opportunities cannot be underestimated.

Power in Jamaica is concentrated in the hands of the light-skinned European and Middle Eastern minority. At the

time of the 1982 census, only 0.3 percent of all Jamaicans were identified as white: two-thirds of these individuals were of European descent and the rest were Syrian or Lebanese (STATIN 1989, 102). Less conservative figures indicate that about 2 percent of all Jamaicans are European or Middle Eastern in origin. Nearly 3 percent are of unmixed Chinese or East Indian descent. But 95 percent of Jamaica's 2.4 million people have African ancestors (Hudson and Seyler 1989, 45).

The Jamaican social system has been characterized as a color and class system in which people rank each other, both conceptually and practically (as in hiring practices and marriage preferences), according to skin color. This system grew out of slavery and colonialism. The social structure can be visualized as a pyramid in which a small white elite at the top is supported by a large base of blacks. Brown-skinned individuals of mixed European and African ancestry are generally in the middle. Although a few light-skinned and more than a few brown-skinned people are members of the lower class, darkness of color, "African" traditions, and low status are positively correlated and assigned a place at society's base (Brodber 1989; Henriques 1958; Hoetink 1985; M. G. Smith 1984).

A number of blacks have moved into top positions, but the elite are still largely light-skinned, which perpetuates the link people make between color and status. People scrutinize their complexions in photos and destroy those in which they "show" too dark. Faces that come out light, or "bright," are favored. For example, one woman congratulating a bride remarked that she could not have chosen finer bridesmaids, for they were not black but "nice brown ladies." I was often complimented by young girls for having "good" hair, a "straight" nose, and a "clear" (i.e., light) complexion. But people also pointed out that my olive skin and wavy dark hair marked me as not being fully white.

Jamaicans of whatever color are deeply religious. Even political meetings begin with prayers. Although Jamaican spirituality is not confined to institutional settings, churches abound. For example, there were four (and later five)

churches in the village where I (and 800 others) lived: one Methodist, two Pentecostal, and one (and then two) Revivalist churches. In total, only about 100 villagers attended church regularly (although some did belong to churches in different districts). Membership was heavily female, and individuals with higher status preferred Methodist gatherings.

The majority of Jamaicans identify themselves as Christians. This is, in part, due to the influence of the color and class system in which European traditions are venerated. For example, despite its growing national and international popularity (Barrett 1988), Rastafarianism (an indigenous messianic movement that, using mostly the Old Testament, celebrates blackness and reveres deceased Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie as God) is not accorded enough respect to be included as a census category. Rastafarians are often targets for abuse, being cast as thieves and scoundrels. Many who profess to be Rasta men are, indeed, outlaws; however, true Rastafarians are peaceful and hardworking folk, usually living isolated lives as far away from "Babylon" ("the system") as they can.

Christians are part of "the system," and certain churches (especially Anglican and Methodist) are said to be more Christian and, consequently, more "civilized" than others. Just as they often discount their blackness, most Jamaicans would cringe to think that their Christianity involves African religious holdovers, and people belonging to the less European-style churches are often defensive. Nonetheless, especially for the lower-status rural poor, church does involve many African-based traditions (Barrett 1988; Hogg 1964; Simpson 1970). Even in more European-style church services, hymn lyrics of English origin are often sung and accompanied by instruments in an African fashion (Brodber 1989, 73).

Actually, many who consider themselves Christian for census purposes live what "true" Christians call "worldian" lives, being unable to resist the pull toward recreations like gambling and dance. But those who wish to maintain the respect of other villagers must belong to a church and must stay away from the pubs and street life.

MEALS

While most Jamaicans stay in their yards each Sunday, reserving that day for the family and a big dinner of "rice and peas" (rice made with coconut milk and red beans) and chicken, all other days are workdays. People generally rise with the sun, boil a little tea from "bush" (herbs), and fill their mornings with work. Tea simply means any hot drink, always sweetened and whitened with condensed milk, if possible. Without sugar, drinks of any kind taste "too fresh" for the Jamaican palate.

Breakfast, generally eaten at about nine o'clock, usually consists of belly-filling deep-fried flour dumplings or porridge made from rice or cornmeal and sweetened and "whitened" with condensed milk. When in season, people have ackee and saltfish. Ackee is a yellow fruit, poisonous if not properly prepared, which comes in a red pod with black seeds. It is similar to an avocado in nutritional content and looks like greasy scrambled eggs when cooked. Another typical breakfast, for those who can get it, is calaloo (a type of spinach) "steamed" in coconut oil and served with thick slices of dense white bread. Generally, anything can be eaten at breakfast, but flesh foods, with the exception of fish, are more often dinner fare.

Those who "work out," or away from the yard, often miss cooked breakfast and usually have to eat dinner later than normal. Because cooking with one-pot coal stoves or wood fires takes time, they eat things like tinned, corned "bully" beef or sardines on white bread before setting out. Often they have lunch, which may mean a small packet of sugarcream-filled cookies and a soda pop or perhaps "bun and cheese," a spice bun with a cut of processed, canned orange cheese. Many Jamaicans are reluctant to eat away from their yards but most will resort to these sorts of packaged foods when "hunger bites" (if they have money to do so). Lunch is seen as a snack which "holds" people until they can get dinner. With the exception of those who "work out," snacking is uncommon among adults.

Jamaicans generally eat dinner in the "evening," between

three and five o'clock. The fuller the plate, the better; people like to eat and to see others eat large portions. Typical meals consist of boiled rice or "food," a class that consists of starchy things like yams, boiled dumplings, sweet potatoes, or roasted breadfruit. Meals must also contain "salting" or some sort of "meat kind" (animal flesh) if at all possible. For some, the "salting" or "salt thing" consists of a teaspoon of canned mackerel placed in the center of however much rice they can buy to cook that day. Those who can afford it serve chicken, pork, beef, or fish, and portions increase with income. Mutton or goat is a treat. Some people cook soup once a week.

Black pepper, salt, scallions, and thyme are typical seasonings, and coconut oil and "plenty" salt is used. Sometimes, people cook with curry powder; curried chicken backs are a typical dish. Gravy or drippings are necessary to "moisten" the "food" or rice, and "drinks" (such as sugar-laced water or fruit punch from powder) must be served to wash things down. Jamaicans rarely eat vegetables other than starchy "foods," boiled pumpkin (which sometimes serves as "food"), and a little calaloo. Many people carefully pick out and discard the bits of scallion and tomato they see in their gravy.

Most people complain of a perceived lack of variety in their diets. Many suffer anemia and other deficiency diseases—one-third of all households surveyed in a 1979 Tropical Metabolism Research Unit project could not satisfy even 80 percent of their energy needs (McLeod 1982). Some simply do not get enough food to eat, while others do not eat enough nutritious food. The Jamaican diet is not unhealthy in general but the increasing tendency to rely on white flour and processed sugar has caused problems by detracting from the nutritional value of the traditional diet, which included more tubers and legumes and less processed sweeteners and bleached flours.

TABLOID TALES

Those who do not "work out" often rest during the late morning hours after tending to their home chores. A person

might sleep or read a borrowed, tattered copy of one of the two Jamaican tabloids. While U.S. tabloids dwell on space aliens and magical slimming regimens, Jamaican ones are packed with stories about homosexuality, incest, bestial acts, and strife between women and men. Rape, adultery, jealousy, and irresponsible fathers are all common topics. People meeting on the street often offer opinions on stories carried in the tabloids, share similar tales, and pass judgment on those involved. People make claims about their own morals in the process, just as they do when gossiping about real and immediate affairs.

Often, the ultimate reason for disapproving of a deed concerns the harm it can bring the body. Through talk of the body, whether in the context of tabloid scandals or of day-to-day living, and through gossip about the health and sickness of fellow villagers, ideas about the social and moral order and accompanying fears gain expression. Notions held about the body's workings affect health-related behaviors. They promote moral and sociable behavior because the things that most adversely affect health are immoral and antisocial. Sickness discourse rhetorically supports and/or subverts the social and moral order.

AVOIDING SICKNESS

The traditional precautions against sickness, whether it is willfully caused by another or taken up asocially in the course of daily life, are based on traditional notions concerning how the body works. Most of these notions come from common-sense observations and are metaphorical transformations or extensions of easily seen workings of the physical, social, and cultural environment. This is explained in the next chapter.

RESEARCH METHODS

Before going on, let me briefly explain how data were collected. I obtained much of my data through the traditional

anthropological technique of participant-observation. Family-style living arrangements provided me with a way to quickly gain exposure to all aspects of rural Jamaican life, both public and private. At first, I had a room in the yard of a very low-status and quarrelsome group of ten people representing four generations. I joined a more "respectable," two-generation household after four months. My move, a response to hurricane-related housing problems, allowed me easier access to a representative selection of villagers because the second household was better integrated into the village social system.

Much material emerged during the conversations and interactions of the people I was surrounded by; in this sense, the study was naturalistic. Most of the data collection was done in villagers' yards as people saw to chores or we rested at day's end; some was done in community settings as, for example, on the front porch of the main shop. I also collected data in two clinics and at two religious healing centers. I supplemented my observations and the lessons friends and protectors gave me with intensive interviews, group discussions, the collection of informants' drawings of the body and its inner workings, and the use of questionnaires and census-taking.

I talked with children and adults, strangers, and casual friends, as well as to those with whom deep trust had been established; I gained data from people from all over the island as well as from the villagers. As noted, this book concerns poor rural Jamaicans, but I did talk with health service providers and members of the elite and middle classes to broaden my understanding of lower-class life. Over 120 villagers, half men and half women, acted as friends and instructors. Their stories and my interactions with them provided a context for (and gave me a way to check) the in-depth information that I obtained from forty key informants, two-thirds of whom were women. Most of these women were either between twenty and thirty-five or over fifty years old; most of the men were between the ages of twenty and fifty. While three of these men and two of these women lived well by Jamaican standards, the other thirty-five key informants were as impoverished as most of their fellow citizens.

The nature of the study did not deter many from formally participating: matters pertaining to sexuality are topics of everyday discussion in Jamaica. While some declined to do body drawings (many Jamaicans, particularly older ones, feel shy about drawing as they have had little experience with it), I encountered significant degrees of resistance and fabrication only in the clinics, when certain clients—and certain practitioners—sought to impress me as sharing what they imagined to be my values. But under most conditions, honesty and openness prevailed. The connection Jamaicans draw between sex and health makes the topic amenable to conversation, as is shown in the chapters that follow.