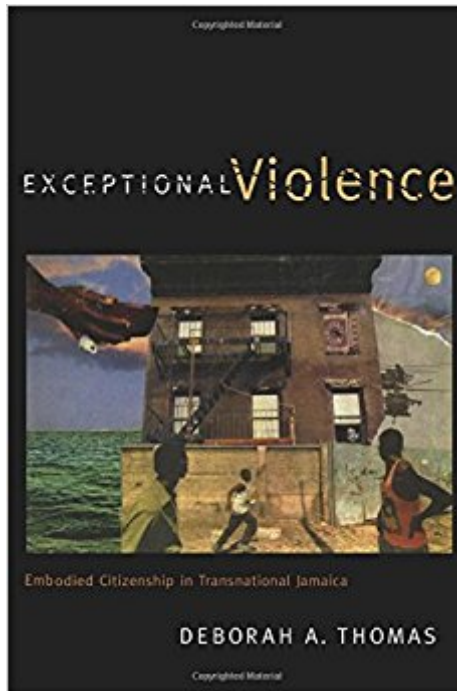




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# Exceptional Violence: Embodied Citizenship In Transnational Jamaica



## Synopsis

*Exceptional Violence* is a sophisticated examination of postcolonial state formation in the Caribbean, considered across time and space, from the period of imperial New World expansion to the contemporary neoliberal era, and from neighborhood dynamics in Kingston to transnational socioeconomic and political fields. Deborah A. Thomas takes as her immediate focus violence in Jamaica and representations of that violence as they circulate within the country and abroad. Through an analysis encompassing Kingston communities, Jamaica's national media, works of popular culture, notions of respectability, practices of punishment and discipline during slavery, the effects of intensified migration, and Jamaica's national cultural policy, Thomas develops several arguments. Violence in Jamaica is the complicated result of a structural history of colonialism and underdevelopment, not a cultural characteristic passed from one generation to the next. Citizenship is embodied; scholars must be attentive to how race, gender, and sexuality have been made to matter over time. Suggesting that anthropologists in the United States should engage more deeply with history and political economy, Thomas mobilizes a concept of reparations as a framework for thinking, a rubric useful in its emphasis on structural and historical lineages.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Deborah A. Thomas's *Exceptional Violence* is at once methodologically astute, richly researched, and critically engaged. In reframing the historical object of violence in Jamaica, she enables us to see hitherto obscured dimensions of its embodied constitution as social practice and social imaginary, its relation to citizenship and gender, the state and community, racial

subjectivities and transnational migrations. It is a fine achievement.

•David Scott, Columbia University

“In this supremely engaging book, Deborah A. Thomas puts to rest a number of procrustean, often racist, preconceptions about violence in Jamaica and, by extension, other postcolonies. Arguing persuasively against *ecoculturalist* explanations, she seeks to make sense of the incidence of and the preoccupation with violence in Jamaica by placing that violence in its proper historical context – one that turns out to be highly complex, deeply entangled, and temporally disjunctive. But Thomas does more than this. She opens up a window into the very soul of Jamaica and its diasporas, examining how Jamaicans today envisage and make their futures; how new, embodied forms of subjectivity and citizenship are being practiced and performed; and how we may understand the role of *ecoculture* and representation in these processes. *Exceptional Violence* is the kind of book from which not only every anthropologist but every intelligent reader will learn something worth knowing. And worth thinking deeply about.”

•John Comaroff, University of Chicago and the American Bar Foundation

“*Exceptional Violence* is a complicated study.... In her analysis of the way anthropology deals with violence, slavery, inequity, crime, and so on, Thomas demonstrates broad reading and a highly critical mind.”

•(Gert Oostindie *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*)

“The volume [is] an academic engagement of the imagination, possibly the last bastion for generating some creative insights into what ails Jamaica generally.”

•(Ralph Premdas *Ethnic and Racial Studies*)

“What is most impressive about this ethnography is Thomas’s ability to consistently link her work to an existing body of scholarship in the various fields on which she draws in developing her analysis. This is a well-researched book that offers a thorough engagement with relevant scholarship. It is a key part of the global conversation on violence and reparations in the African Diaspora.”

•(Keisha-Khan Y. Perry *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology*)

“*Exceptional Violence* is a theoretically sophisticated examination of contemporary Jamaica, with much to offer students of postcolonialism, anthropology, transnationalism, and the African diaspora.”

•(Mark Anderson *Bulletin of Latin American Research*)

“I recommend this book to all persons from varied and interlocking disciplines of critical theory, critical race theory, politics, economics, history, and philosophy.... Additionally, any person keen on making informed and constructive contributions to discussions about issues that shape within the United States should visit Thomas’s work and learn from her.” (Julian Ledford *Ameriquest* 2015-01-01)

Deborah A. Thomas is Professor of Anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania. She is the

author of *Modern Blackness: Nationalism, Globalization, and the Politics of Culture in Jamaica* and a co-editor of *Globalization and Race: Transformations in the Cultural Production of Blackness*, both also published by Duke University Press.

You would love this book if you were in a program for a doctors degree. To hard for the average person to understand unless they are going for a doctors degree.

Thomas' engagement with the transnational elements of citizenship is impressive. Her chapter on the Coral Gardens "crucifixion" of 1963 is particularly astute and well-researched; and her film on this event is also a good resource for students interested in this topic. However, her thesis linking embodied memory to Jamaica's problems with murder is the most dissatisfying element of this book. I question the efficacy of research on a social problem that limits data collection to cultural documents and cultural productions; resulting in simplistic and unsubstantiated statements such as "most Jamaicans would casually root the proliferation of spectacularly performed murders in the consumption of North American films." Murder is a serious social problem that requires rigorous field research in the communities most affected by this crime, and it is unfortunate that this did not take place in this study.

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