



Welcome to Paradise Island: The Rise of Jamaica's Cine-Tourist Image, 1891-1951

E.S. Martens

English Summary

In recent years considerable scholarly attention has been devoted to examining the interconnections between film and tourism in general and the phenomenon of film-induced tourism or film tourism, more specifically. The focus of most studies in the field of film tourism has been on the recent booming of tourists visiting places where movies have been filmed and the potential and experience of film-induced tourism in predominantly Western, (newly) industrialized countries. The historical context of film (and) tourism and its interactions with (the places and peoples on the fringes of) empire have often remained unexposed. At the same time, current studies of visual representation have demonstrated that outsiders have long imagined the Caribbean as a region of paradoxical islands of both tropical beauty and danger. In particular, several studies have examined the endless – and often ruthless – pursuit of the myth of tropical paradise for the sake of colonial (agricultural) modernization and postcolonial (tourism) development. So far, these studies have almost exclusively focused on print media – written, painted or photographed – and tended to overlook the *moving* images of the region produced by film. This thesis tries to fill at least some of these research gaps by chronicling the history of popular cinema in Jamaica from the 1890s until 1951 and by showing how practices of film and filming were instantly, constantly and intimately entangled with the island's tourism interests and colonial agendas during this period of sixty years. In doing so, this project seeks to provide the first in-depth exploration of Jamaica's commercial film history, from early cinema (1891-1914), via late silent cinema (1915-1927), to classical sound cinema (1928-1951), and to demonstrate its close associations and affiliations with the island's tourism history from the end of the nineteenth century through the first half of the twentieth century, which I have jointly dubbed the history of Jamaica's "cine-tourist" image.

Throughout my research into Jamaica's early film history, I have been guided by three principal questions: (1) how have practices of film and filming in Jamaica evolved from cinema's beginnings in the 1890s up to the 1950s?; (2) how have practices of film and filming contributed to the island's tourism industry – practices and discourses – during this period?; and (3) how have practices of film and filming from cinema's beginnings in the 1890s up to the 1950s helped lay the foundation of Jamaica's modern tourist image of tropical paradise that continues to shape the island – its environment and its people – until the present day? Aligning my work with the spatial turn in media studies and the media turn in geography, I have drawn upon a wide body of literature related to both of these fields. While the first two

questions are mainly addressed through the historical analysis of the political economy of popular cinema and the politics of film location practices (“new film history” / “postcolonial film historiography”), the answer to the third question is largely in the historical analysis of visual images and the politics of geographical representation (“postcolonial popular geopolitics” / “touristic tropicalization studies”). Besides the study of academic literature, this thesis is heavily based on primary sources, particularly articles from the *Jamaica Gleaner*, Jamaica’s leading newspaper during the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century colonial period. Through the method of archival research, collecting and examining thousands of newspaper articles, I have been able to survey the island’s film history and to reveal the many early links and linkages between film location productions (“location films”) and the island’s imperial tourism industry.

The thesis is divided into four chapters, which generally follow a chronological progression. In the first chapter, “Tourism Beginnings, 1891-1914,” I begin by discussing the emergence of Jamaica’s imperial-tourist industry and the pre-cinema culture in which the medium of film would emerge. While charting the close nexus between the island’s tourism industry and the broader imperial project (“leisure imperialism”), I argue that the creation of Jamaica as a new travel destination for wealthy Europeans and North Americans was built upon longstanding colonial practices. Jamaica’s tourism industry came into existence at the turn of the previous century, when the island’s Crown government began to emphasize tourism as a development strategy and encourage foreign investment in the industry by providing several incentives for hotel projects. The hosting of the Great Exhibition of Jamaica in 1891 marked the official launch of the “New Jamaica,” i.e. the government-supported vision of national development and modernization through (foreign investments in) tourism and trade. While spawning the birth of a largely foreign-owned and foreign-controlled tourism industry, the New Jamaica was largely based on images of colonial prosperity and exotic difference that were mediated through the literary lens of travel writing and, increasingly, the visual lens of photography.

In the second chapter, I continue to explore the nexus between leisure and the imperial enterprise, and the visual lens at work in early touristic depictions of Jamaica, but here I specifically focus on the, at the time, novel medium of film. I first show how early cinema was configured as part and parcel of imperial-tourist modernity, and how travel films became one of the most popular genres in the period of the cinema of attractions (1894-1908), a period that coincided with the height of colonialism. I then trace the beginnings of motion picture projection and production in Jamaica to the same period and chronicle the establishment of empire cinema – as practice and discourse – on the island in the first

decade of the twentieth century. After exploring at the ways early travelogues “captured” – i.e. imagined and produced – tropical landscapes and exotic natives for British-American tourist consumption, I discuss the arrival of the first fictional filmmakers on Jamaica from the 1910s and their immediate interaction with local tourism stakeholders. I specifically focus on the series of short fiction films shot on the island by the British and Colonial Kinematograph Company in 1913, which sparked a controversy among the readers of the *Gleaner*. What triggered this heated debate in the local newspaper concerning these story films? And how were these films, offering fictional accounts, related to tourism and empire?

After considering the early years of tourism and cinema in Jamaica (1891-1914) in the two previous chapters, and concluding that both industries emerged on the island as forms of leisure imperialism, in the third chapter I turn to the period of late silent cinema (1915-1928). This period saw the American takeover of the world’s film markets and the move to the Hollywood studio system and classical cinema, which would form the basis for commercial filmmaking for decades. During this era of the silent feature picture, the first slate of feature-length fiction films was shot in Jamaica, confirming and solidifying the image of the island as a colonial possession and tourist attraction. In the third chapter, I look closely at the production of these popular movies during the late silent cinema period and demonstrate that these location shootings were not only recognized as tourist attractions *after* their release (providing indirect economic benefits as tourist advertisement) but also, for the first time, *during* their production (providing direct economic benefits as business tourism). I first discuss the feature-length fiction films shot in Jamaica during the 1910s, *Pearl of the Antilles* (1915), *Flames of Passion* (1916) and, most extensively, *A Daughter of the Gods* (1916), and show how they were thought to serve as valuable advertisements for the island as both international tourism resort and film location. Also, while documenting their production stories, I explore the imperial politics of location filming of the three films and propose to consider Jamaica’s early film location industry as another (highly ephemeral and volatile) colonial economy dependent on outside capital and enterprise, much like the island’s tourism industry that from the start relied so much on foreign operators and costumers. Then, I examine the small number of moving pictures shot on the island in the 1920s. Despite the much-trumpeted desire to become a regular film studio for American and British runaway productions, throughout this decade only two feature films were made in Jamaica: *Love’s Redemption* (1921) and *Satan Sister* (1925). Why were not more movies shot on the island during this period? And how were these two films discussed by local tourism promoters? Apart from discussing the production of these two films in the context of tourism promotion, I explore their tropical(izing) narratives in the context of empire cinema. How did these stories

participate in the imperialist popular culture (including tourism imagery) of the time? What kind of images of empire and race did they produce?

In the fourth and final chapter, I turn to the so-called “golden age” of empire cinema of the 1930s and 1940s and discuss the role of the romance adventure genre in negotiating the imperial frontier at a time when the British Empire started to wane and the American Empire was still on the rise. First, I address the proliferation of the genre in both Britain and Hollywood in general terms, arguing that the majority of the imperial adventure films made during this period overtly celebrated colonial conquest and imperial power. Then I specifically discuss the pirate adventure film, the sub-type of the imperial adventure genre that became most popularly associated with Jamaica (and the wider Caribbean). Although most Hollywood pirate films were shot in studio sets, such as *Captain Blood* (1935), the island (and the region) existed in the Euro-American imagination as a setting for the “romantic” tales of swashbuckling buccaneering on the high seas (standing in high contrast with the actual, brutal history of piracy and slavery as remembered by most African-Caribbean people). As such, these films chiefly confirmed and perpetuated colonial fantasies about white men’s privileged access to land and other resources in the Caribbean. Finally, I examine the (often independently produced) slate of horror adventure films that were laid in the Caribbean during the 1930s and 1940s. Three of them three, *Ouanga* (1935), *Obeah* (1935) and *The Devil’s Daughter* (1939), were shot in Jamaica, once more breeding the hope that Jamaica could become a thriving film location. Furthermore, while connecting these films to the historical demonization of Afro-creole religions by colonial elites and the continuing suppression of voodoo and obeah practices during the early twentieth century, I suggest that they not only manifested colonial desires and anxieties but also presented a moralizing view of the British Empire. In a period when the island experienced a boom in tourism arrivals and raised its profile as a destination of choice, popular cinema solidified the image of Jamaica as a place of romantic adventure and dangerous mystery – an image that has continued to this day. While the focus of this project is on the past, it also aims to trace and make connections to the vexed postcolonial predicament of visual representation and tourism development in contemporary Jamaica. As such, this thesis is meant as a contribution to the field of tropicalization studies on the Caribbean, one that calls for a historical and critical understanding of film (and) tourism and aims to engage in the timely debate on how Caribbean small island developing states (SIDS) could develop effective sustainable development strategies beyond the prevailing images of tropical paradise.