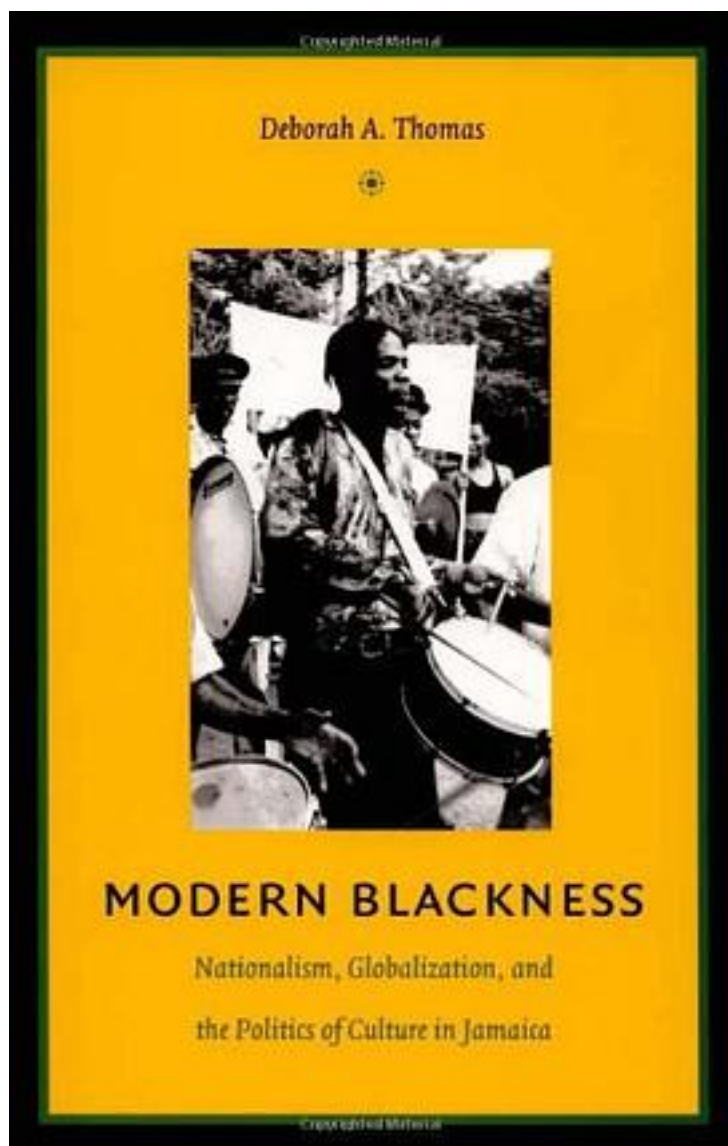


Modern Blackness



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"Modern Blackness" is a rich ethnographic exploration of Jamaican identity in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Analyzing nationalism, popular culture, and political economy in relation to one another, Deborah A. Thomas illuminates an ongoing struggle in Jamaica between the values associated with the postcolonial state and those generated in and through popular culture. Following independence in 1962, cultural and political policy in Jamaica was geared toward the development of a universal creole nationalism reflected in the country's motto: "Out of many, one people." As Thomas shows, by the late 1990s, creole nationalism was superseded by "modern blackness" - an urban blackness rooted in youth culture and influenced by African American popular culture. Expressions of blackness that had been marginalized in national cultural policy became paramount in contemporary understandings of what it is to be Jamaican. Thomas combines historical research with fieldwork she conducted in Jamaica between 1993 and 2003. She situates contemporary struggles over Jamaican identity in relation to late-nineteenth and early- to mid-twentieth century nationalists, scholars, and cultural activists; their visions of progress and development; and their efforts to formulate and institutionalize cultural policy. Drawing on her research in a rural hillside community just outside Kingston, she looks at how nationalist policies and popular ideologies about progress have been interpreted and reproduced or transformed on the local level. She chronicles the strategies poorer community members have used to advance their interests and discusses how these strategies are represented in popular culture. With detailed descriptions of daily life in Jamaica set against a backdrop of postcolonial nation-building and neo-liberal globalization, "Modern Blackness" is an important examination of the competing identities that mobilize Jamaicans locally and represent them internationally. Deborah A. Thomas is Assistant Professor of Cultural Anthropology at Duke University.

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