

“This is what you will see...”

A Creative Embroidery Project on Tourism, Conquest, and the Other in the Caribbean

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Text on back of embroidery:

If you come to Jamaica as a tourist, this is what you will see...

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As a tourist, you see the sunset from the balcony, but you don't notice your sewage being pumped into the sea you swim in or the environmental destruction of the tourism industry.

What you don't see is the economic injustices present in the places you visit while sheltered in a resort.

You may not notice the ease through which you go through customs; nor the difficulty for people from Jamaica to receive a visa for the United States. You may not realize the privilege you have to escape your life, attempting to find meaning elsewhere. People experiencing poverty Jamaica lack the freedom you have while on holiday.

You may not realize that, though countries such as the U.S. view tourism as a sort of development aid, little do tourists know the cost to the islands. Jamaica spends \$17 to attract each Canadian tourist to Jamaica, funds which could be used to improve the infrastructure for residents. Staying at hotels and resorts is more likely to benefit transnational corporations than the people of Jamaica; tourism jobs account for 2 percent of the workforce and tourist service jobs are low-paid.

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Reflection

Hues of orange and yellow paint the horizon overlooking the sea. A young boy sits on a cliff. Boats gracefully approach the harbor. “If you come to Jamaica as a tourist, this is what you will see,” quotes the narrator of *Life and Debt* at the end of the film. When a tourist visits Jamaica, or another island in the Caribbean, they often encounter the natural beauty of the island and learn about its culture and history at a surface-level, or even in a way that is carefully constructed to better appeal to tourists. This obfuscation of the cultural beauty of Jamaica as well as its economic and social injustices throughout its history by the tourism industry’s images of a postcard-perfect paradise was the impetus of my embroidery project, “This is what you will see.” The needlework is intended as an homage to the sweat-shop workers at the Kingston Free Zone depicted in the film *Life and Debt*. The aim is to present (embroider) images, often ones considered mundane or viewed as not complex, and dive deeper, through writing on the back of the embroidery, to reveal the social, historical, and economic meanings of these images in relation to tourism, conquest, and the other. The medium I use establishes a contrast between the superficial image and deeper truth by juxtaposing a craft that is all surface, with a deeper history written on the underside.

Depicted here is the first piece in my project, “Sunset.” The peaceful sunset contrasts the historical and economic turmoil faced by Jamaica. The above quote, “If you come to Jamaica as a tourist...” as narrated by Belinda Becker was adapted from “A Small Place” by Jamaica Kincaid. Kincaid makes thoughtful observations about the freedom a tourist visiting Antigua has, which I base my remarks on the back of the embroidery on. “Eventually the masters left, in a kind of way. Eventually the slaves were freed, in a kind of way,” cites *Life and Debt*. Kincaid

draws a parallel between the white ‘master’ and the white tourist, and between the black Antiguans and the black slaves. This parallel is not solely drawn because of how the islanders serve tourists, sometimes in a less-than dignified way—servitude has an especially problematic connotation for people whose ancestors were actual slaves—but also because of the differential in freedom. If someone from the U.S. wants to see this sunset, to “tour the natural wonders” they simply board a plane. However, people from Jamaica and other countries do not have the freedom to travel to the United States as we have. We do not face the same scrutiny in customs: “You go through customs. Since you are a tourist, a North American or European—to be frank, white—and not an Antiguan black returning from Europe or North America with cardboard boxes of much needed cheap clothes and food for relatives, you move through customs swiftly, you move through customs with ease. Your bags are not searched” (Kincaid). Another way that they can lack freedom is because of poverty: Kincaid argues that the native despises the tourist who comes to escape the banality of boredom of their own lives to explore the banality and boredom of a new place; natives who are poor do not have this privilege. I also discuss on the back of the embroidery how tourism can take away from the people of an island in the Caribbean. I hope that this project makes people think more about the ill effects of tourism on the Caribbean and how it continues the narrative of ‘conquest’ and ‘othering.’