

Florida International University
University Graduate School

Doctoral Dissertation Defense

Abstract

Atlantic Legacies: Free Women of Color and the Changing Notions of Womanhood in the Long Nineteenth Century

By

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This dissertation focuses on three free-born African-descended women who defied expectations and prejudices to live previously unthinkable lives in the nineteenth century. The project uses their biographies to illustrate how, as black and mixed-ancestry émigrés from the Americas living in Europe, they adopted and adapted the evolving notions of ideal womanhood. As a result they expanded who could be identified as a true, redemptive or new woman. The project shows how they used the tenets of these ideals to live life on their terms. The dissertation is set in an era dominated by white males, and defined by the enslavement and marginalization of African-descended people who were deemed to be intellectually and morally inferior. The project approaches its subjects' adoption of the social mores of the dominant society as a denial of subordination and an autoethnographic expression. By engaging with the norms of the dominant culture they practiced a type of marronage. While typically used in terms of enslavement, when looked at as a form of resistance and as a way of gaining independence and self-determination, marronage is applicable to these subjects who used established structures to break the old order. The project demonstrates how three African-descended Euro-American women live the life they wanted and left an Atlantic legacy that paved the way for subsequent generations of Atlantic women to do the same.

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Place: DM370

Department: History

Major Professor: Dr. Rebecca Friedman