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PROSPECTS FOR GENDER EQUITY IN CARIBBEAN POLITICS: THE CASE OF JAMAICA

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ABSTRACT

Despite high levels of participation at the constituency level, Caribbean women have been under-represented in the top echelons of the hierarchy of political parties in the region. A host of cultural, social, political, and economic factors combine to exclude women from the highest levels of power within the political arena. This case study of Party Leader selection in Jamaica in 1992 shows that: (a) an unwritten cultural bias exists in the society which makes it impossible for a woman to become Party Leader and Prime Minister; (b) the gender-biased structure of the PNP excluded women from the top echelons of the party hierarchy, making it impossible for them to have the qualifications and experience necessary for party leadership; (c) the structure of the People's National Party (PNP) excludes the party rank-and-file from the process of selecting the Party Leader, giving a male-dominated group of delegates the sole responsibility of choosing the Party Leader. The case study is an example of a regional and global problem of gender inequity in politics. This problem should be seriously addressed if democracy is to become a working concept in Jamaica and the Caribbean in the twenty-first century.

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1. Introduction

The study of women in Caribbean¹ politics has been noticeably sparse. This is unfortunate as there have been in the post-independence period of electoral politics over three decades of sustained grass roots activism by women, as well as distinguished individual women in high positions in dominant parties in the region.² The Caribbean represents an interesting case of a contrast between the large numbers of female party activists at the constituency level and the negligible number nominated to serve as local government councilors, members of parliament (MPs), or Party Leader (Senior, 1991). However, there are signs of some progress. In 1980, Mary Eugenia Charles, leader of the opposition Freedom Party (FP), was elected Prime Minister of Dominica. Eugenia Charles became the first woman to serve at that level in the Caribbean. In 1992, Portia Simpson, of the People's National Party (PNP) of Jamaica, tried to become the second, but that did not materialize as she was soundly defeated by P. J. Patterson in her bid to become Party Leader. In 1997, Janet Jagan became President of Guyana after the death of her husband Cheddi Jagan, leader of the Peoples Progressive Party (PPP). Eugenia Charles of Dominica and Janet Jagan of Guyana were successful, so why was Portia Simpson of Jamaica unsuccessful? Eugenia Charles was a professional from the same educated social class from which the Caribbean political leadership of the post-World War II period emerged (Higbie, 1993; Hintzen, 1994). While gender might have been an obstacle, Eugenia Charles had been a firmly entrenched member of the educated Caribbean middle class. The latter quality gave her the right to participate in the game. Janet Jagan, an American-born Registered Nurse and political activist within the PPP since its inception, became President of Guyana by default on the death of her husband.

The theories offered thus far have not adequately explained Portia Simpson's failure to achieve the most powerful position in Jamaica's party system. Was it impossible for a woman to become Party Leader? Was it impossible for someone—male or female—who was not from the educated middle class to be given the opportunity to lead the PNP? Are there deep-seated prejudices in Jamaican society that contributed to this outcome? The most common explanations for Simpson's inability to become Party Leader of the PNP in 1992 have been that (a) Simpson

lacked the requisite formal education that would have allowed her to represent Jamaica overseas, and (b) that the PNP was not yet ready to allow a working-class woman to make a breakthrough in this area. Should these factors constitute the criteria for selecting Party Leaders in the Caribbean region? Or, is political experience in the party a relevant qualification that should weigh more than advanced education? Is the ability to garner votes for the party or organize at the grass roots level more important than advanced education? Are both men and women subjected to the same set of qualifications for party leadership?

Existing explanations for Simpson's defeat are limited, most notably in the fact that they mask the country's class and gender bias. The role that class and gender continues to play in the recruitment for party leadership is complex and ambiguous. In my view, there are two missing elements which should be analyzed, together with class and gender, in explaining Simpson's defeat. First, one must examine the structure of Jamaican parties that allows only the selected delegates of the parties—rather than the entire party membership—to choose the Party Leader. Second, one must understand the unwritten cultural bias towards male leadership in representing the country at the international level — from which resources come to maintain the domestic socio-political order. In my analysis, the limitations of the class-based party system become the focus, with gender as an intervening variable.

2. The Structure and Organization of the PNP

The PNP has historically been perceived as the more liberal and democratic of the two dominant parties in Jamaica. The Jamaica Labor Party (JLP) has often been characterized as authoritarian (Eaton, 1975; Gray, 1991), and over the decade of the 1990s has become increasingly dictatorial and autocratic under the stormy leadership of Edward Seaga. The PNP is the party whose members have often said, "this is a party where you can rise." Despite the PNP's seemingly democratic organization and commitment to egalitarianism, like many political parties of varied ideological persuasions in the Caribbean, it has been plagued by class and gender inequalities (Soares, 1991; Giacalone, 1994).

The PNP has always represented a great deal of ideological deviance — unlike the JLP — allowing conservatives, moderates, liberals, socialists, and Marxists membership in the party to all have a voice. Since universal adult suffrage was granted in 1944, both men and women have participated in electoral politics; but women have been noticeably absent from the hierarchy of both the JLP and the PNP and none has served as Party Leader. Both the JLP and the PNP emerged with and continues to maintain multiple class constituencies. They have incorporated citizens of widely differing social class origins. However, the PNP has received considerable support from urban workers of the lower middle classes as

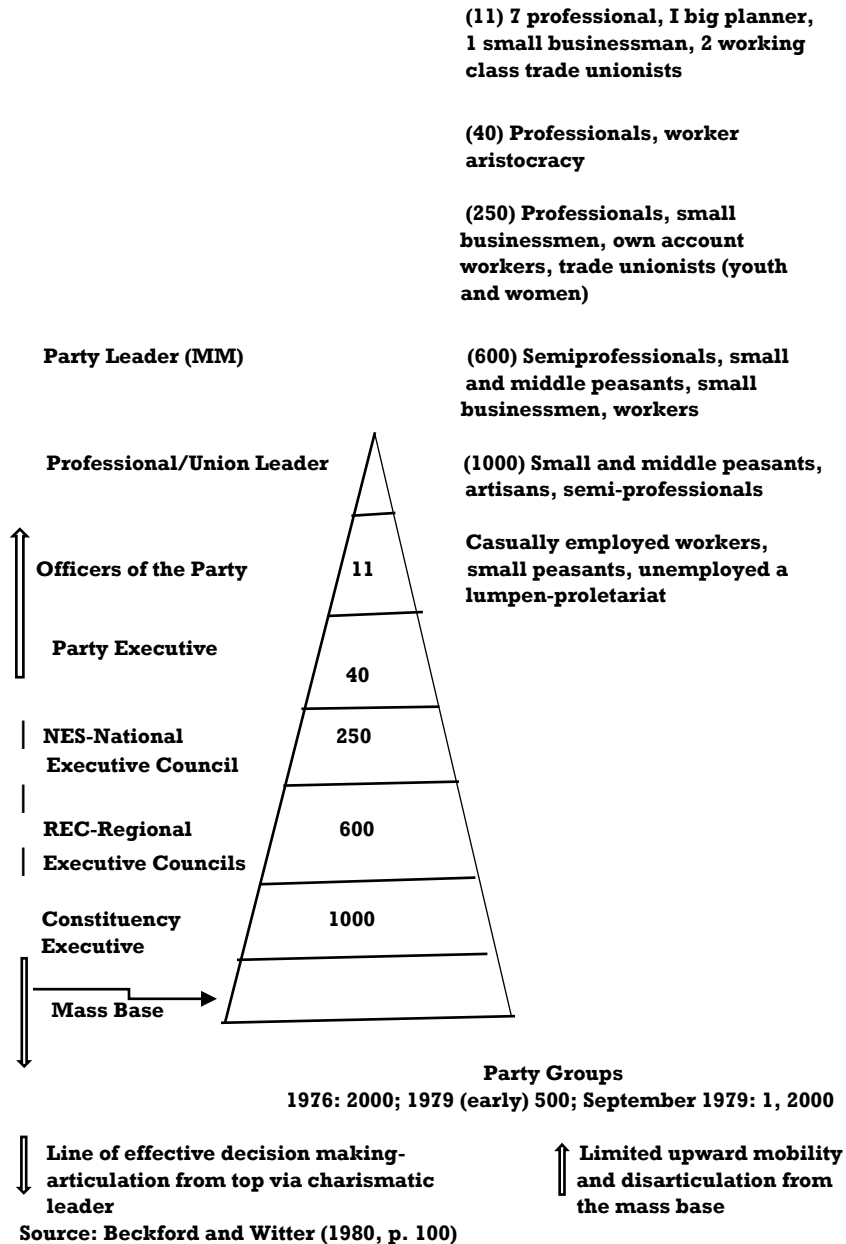
well as capitalist classes and the professionals that serve them. In contrast to the JLP, the PNP has always attracted the bulk of the educated affluent middle classes, and it is the latter that has represented the cornerstone of the party (Stone, 1976).

The educated professional classes have represented an elite at the top of the party hierarchy. Power has been concentrated within a select group of MPs and party office-holders drawn disproportionately from the middle-class professions. The selectorate remains small (excluding most party members), with the nomination for Party Leader remaining firmly in the hands of delegates selected by the MPs. Leader-selection procedures in the PNP have been influenced by a structure and organization that excludes most party members from the party's decision-making machinery. Beckford and Witter (1980, p. 100) model of PNP party organization is useful for this discussion:

Figure one indicates the power structure of the PNP, tightly organized around the Party Leader and the parliamentary elite, with the flow of authority from the top of the party downward to the local level. The National Executive Council (NEC) determines the general national policy for the party, and it consists of at least 250 members at any one time: officers of the party, members of the Executive Committee, members elected by the Regional Conferences, members of the parliamentary group, two members from each recognized constituency, one member from each provisional constituency, and eight representatives from affiliated organizations (PNP, 1979: p. 24). The Party Executive is an even more closed group within the NEC, presided over by the Party Leader and officers of the party. The Party Executive consists of the Party Leader, three representatives of the parliamentary group, eleven members elected by the NEC from their number, one member elected by the Regional Executive Council (REC) from their number, and representatives from affiliated organizations appointed by the NEC. Party officers are selected by the Annual Conference, held each September. (PNP, 1979, p. 22).

The educated middle and professional classes are represented fully within the NEC, the parliamentary group and the Party Executive. Few women are represented in these top echelons of the party. In 1974 the late Michael Manley, reflecting on the under-representation of women in the leadership of both parties, lamented that "there were only two women members in an elected Parliament of fifty-three, only one woman member of a Cabinet of nineteen, no woman ambassador and no women in top civil service posts" (1974, p. 175). Not only has the PNP hierarchy been male-dominated, but it has also been socially homogeneous, with a steady contingent of MPs and Cabinet Ministers coming from occupations such as lawyers, university professionals, physicians, accountants, and company executives. Persons in these professions tend to be educated either at the local University of the West Indies or at prestigious universities in Britain, Canada, and the United States. The structure of the

Figure 1
PNP Class and Party Organizational Structure



PNP has continued to reflect established patterns of occupational discrimination in its hierarchy. It is because of this structure that placed professionals with advanced education in the top echelons of the party that it has been given more weight than political experience and other qualities in choosing a Party Leader.

The intermediate level consists of party organization in regions and constituency zones. The membership of each of the six Regional Executive Councils (REC) consists of all NEC members, constituency secretaries, parish councilors, constituency organizers, and representatives of affiliated organizations within the region. The duties of the REC are to maintain stable constituency organizations within each region and to educate the public on party and government programs, policies and thrusts (PNP, 1979). Important party decisions have never been made at the intermediate or constituency levels, where the greatest number of members participate in the political process (Figure one).

At the constituency level, the Group represents the basic unit of the PNP, representing the party's rank-and-file. The Group level has been very important to the party because it is there that electoral support must be built. The Group is responsible for collecting dues, maintaining party members, and narrating group activities to the Constituency Committees. Among Constituency Groups, women have larger numbers than at any other level of the party. However, in most cases the Group Chairman and Constituency Secretary would be male, while all other positions would be held by females. Women and men from lower socio-economic classes have been predominant at the constituency level. Stone (1980, p. 100) showed that the unemployed, small farmers, and the lowest socio-economic groups among the working classes together comprised 81.9 percent of the rank-and-file party activists in both the PNP and the JLP.

While women have been very active at the constituency level in both the PNP and the JLP, progress has been slow in getting women accepted as serious candidates for local government or Parliament. There are a host of political, economic, and cultural factors which combine to exclude women from the political arena where they can be equally involved in making decisions that affect their lives. One of the objective factors which can be easily identified has been the gender-biased party structure that has placed women at the bottom levels of the party, excluding them from the pool of eligible members which has been centered at the top of the party hierarchy. The PNP's organizational structure has been supportive of a model candidate who is articulate, well-educated, typically employed in a professional career, and has served a lengthy political apprenticeship. This combination of qualifications has excluded many women from selection as candidates. In this very difficult context, one can understand why the number of women in Parliament has never been substantial:

As Table one shows, the number of women candidates increased from three in 1962 to twelve in 1993 and thirty-two in 1997. The number of women who won seats in general elections has shifted from two in 1962 to seven in 1993 and eight in 1997. As women have been excluded from the top echelons of the party, it has been highly improbable that they would be able to nominate other women as candidates for local government or Parliament. In the patriarchal society that has existed, rarely have male politicians pushed the party hierarchy to adopt female candidates. It has been widely believed that one of the first women MPs (Enid Bennett) winning a seat in 1967 was brought into the JLP by a powerful male politician who was able to push the Party Executive to adopt her as a candidate. Enid Bennett held her seat in North West St. Catherine from 1967 until 1993—retiring before the 1997 elections—surviving many "swing" elections. Throughout her years in the JLP, she was maintained as a "junior" MP despite her long tenure as an MP. She never held a portfolio, but many say that this was at her own request. Others suggest that it was her lack of a post-secondary education that prevented the party from giving her an important ministry. Interestingly, in November 1999, several months after her retirement from politics, JLP Leader Edward Seaga invited her to be a State Minister (without portfolio) in his Shadow Cabinet.

Table one shows that women candidates have not been very successful in general elections. For example, in 1980, of sixty members, Parliament had only six women; the number decreased to three in 1989; increased to seven in 1993 and eight in 1997. These fluctuations were reportedly related to party strength in those areas during those elections. In 1980, a year of a "swing" to the JLP, all five JLP women candidates were successful. However, in 1989, the "swing" to the PNP led to the defeat of seven of eight JLP female candidates and three of five PNP candidates. In 1993, the PNP was re-elected for another term and six of its eight female candidates were successful, while only one of four JLP female candidates was successful. In 1997 the PNP won an unprecedented third term in office. Of the sixty members elected to Parliament, seven were from the PNP and one from the JLP. Although the 1997 election produced the high-

Table 1: Number of Women Candidates and Women Elected in General Elections, 1962-1997

Election Year	Number of Women Candidates			Total Seats	Number of Women Elected		
	JLP	PNP	IND		JLP	PNP	IND
1961	1	1	1	45	0	1	0
1967	4	1	0	53	2	0	0
1972	3	2	0	53	1	1	0
1976	2	4	0	60	2	3	0
1980	5	4	2	60	5	1	0
1983*	7	0	0	60	7	0	0
1989	8	5	2	60	1	2	0
1993	4	8	0	60	1	6	0
1997	5	9	18**	60	1	7	0

Source: Compiled by the author from Electoral Office Reports, 1962- 1997, Kingston, Jamaica.

* The PNP boycotted the 1983 elections

** These include 10 candidates from the newly created third party, the National Democratic Movement (NDM)

est number of women elected to Parliament since independence in 1962, eight is still an intolerable number out of a total of sixty MPs. To put Jamaica's performance in a proper context, one should take note of the situation in the region. A 1987 survey conducted by the Inter-American Commission on Women found that women accounted for between zero and 13 percent of members in Congresses and Parliament of Latin America and the Caribbean, in comparison to the number of voters in the whole population (CEPAL, 1989; cited in Giacalone, 1994). Even in Cuba where there has been relatively much larger female participation in political leadership than in the rest of the region, women only make up 12.8 percent of the national leadership of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) (Espin, 1986; cited in Giacalone, 1994). The evidence from Caribbean parties has justified the assertion that the "higher the hierarchy, the fewer the women" (Rodriguez and Diaz, 1986; cited in Giacalone, 1994).

An important issue that must be raised is whether women candidates have been placed in constituencies where the prospects of victory are lower, or whether they encounter resistance from the electorate because of their gender. Jamaica's political system has been anchored in party politics, and party identification has been the most important factor in voting behavior (Stone, 1974, 1980, 1982, 1989). However, since women have not generally done as well as male candidates in their parties, who have consistently received more votes than they do, there does appear to be a "penalty" for being a female candidate. The exceptions have been Enid Bennett (JLP) and Portia Simpson (PNP), who, on average, have received more votes than male candidates. How "winnable" were the seats held by Enid Bennett or Portia Simpson? Were these seats previously held by party stalwarts? What was the electoral situation like in the constituencies where women candidates stood? What sort of press coverage was given to women candidates? What kinds of financial resources are available to women candidates? Are older women more acceptable than younger ones? Are party selection committees hostile to women? These questions point to some of the constraints that have prevented women from becoming elected officials in large numbers, and prevented their penetration of the leadership of both the JLP and the PNP.

The structure of the party has had different consequences for different people. For example, in examining the profile of P.J. Patterson and Portia Simpson, one can begin to understand the impact of the party structure on different candidates.

P.J. Patterson was born in Westmoreland, a western rural parish of Jamaica. He attended primary schools in Cambridge, in the neighboring parish of St. James, and then went on to Calabar High School in Kingston. He earned high passes in his Senior Cambridge exams at Calabar, and then went on to the University of the West Indies at Mona,

and the London School of Economics where he studied law. He was admitted to both the Bar in London and in Jamaica in 1963.

Under the tutelage of Norman Manley, a renowned barrister and founder of the PNP, Patterson gained access to the PNP center of power. Because he was an educated professional and had a close relationship with the Manley family, he had no difficulty joining the PNP Executive from the very beginning, bypassing the lower levels of the party. He was never a Councilor, but became an MP very early in his political career. Within the PNP Executive, he has been reputed to be a very effective fund raiser and party organizer. He had served as Vice President and Chairman of the PNP for twelve years before assuming the Presidency and becoming Prime Minister in 1992.

Patterson's professional credentials allowed him to gain critical governmental experience necessary to build a public service career. In the 1972-1976 Manley administration, he served as Minister of Tourism, Industry, Commerce and Foreign Trade; in the 1976-1980 administration, he served as Minister of Foreign Affairs and Deputy Prime Minister from 1978-1980. He also served as Minister of Finance from 1989-1991 until his resignation over the Shell Oil Waiver Scandal. In foreign relations, Patterson accumulated a wealth of experience. He was Ministerial Chairman for the Group of 77 at the United Nations from 1977-1978. Between 1974-1980, he led Jamaica's delegations to the ACP/EEC trade negotiations, and was a principal negotiator on behalf of the ACP states for two Lomé Conventions. Patterson headed the Jamaican delegation to the 1972, 1976, and 1979 U.N. Conferences on Trade and Development and special meetings on debt, the Common Fund and the U.N. Committee of the Whole, as well as the Jamaican delegations to the Tokyo Round of the GATT multilateral trade negotiations and the Paris Conference on International Economic Co-operation in 1975. He has also represented Jamaica at Non-Aligned Conferences in 1978 and 1979, and at Special U.N. Sessions, and Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings throughout the 1970s (*Carib News*, April 7, 1993, p. 3).

Patterson's contributions to the PNP have been on both the domestic and international fronts. His educational accomplishments have given him great respect in the PNP, a party that has traditionally attracted the educated middle classes. He does not have a "following" in his constituency in Westmoreland and he has not been a "grass roots" politician, but he has done consistently well in elections in his constituency. His educational background and technocratic skills have been his major contributions to the PNP.

Portia Simpson, like P. J. Patterson, came from humble origins, from a farming community in Brown's Hall, St. Catherine. She migrated to Kingston, where she attended Gaynstead, a private secondary school in Kingston. After completing her studies at Gaynstead, she had little further formal education. She worked as an office manager, and later, as a

secretary at the Trades Union Congress (TUC) under Hopeton Caven.³

Portia Simpson has been the sole People's National Party MP who came through every single rank of the party—from the Group Structure to becoming a Vice President of the party. She was reportedly "discovered" and brought into the PNP by then General Secretary D.K. Duncan, after he heard her read the minutes as Group Secretary in her constituency. She was recommended to the NEC as a potential candidate for Councilor, and later successfully served as a Kingston and St. Andrew Corporation (KSAC) Councilor for one term. After new electoral boundaries were drawn, she was subsequently offered a seat in a former JLP stronghold held by Wilton Hill. She successfully contested the elections and has held that seat (South West St. Andrew) since 1976. Her seat, along with Seymour Mullings' (South East St. Ann) have been the "safest" PNP seats in the country. They have been among the highest vote getters in the party.

What led to Simpson's rapid rise within the PNP? Supporters and detractors alike have spoken unequivocally of her commitment and responsiveness to the poor and disadvantaged members of society. Her experience as an enumerator and a party scrutineer in Kingston has given her an excellent opportunity to get the "feel" of Jamaican politics. Simpson has played a very valuable role in the PNP as the quintessential patron-politician. Over the years, she has distributed scarce resources widely in her constituency, and has developed a charismatic relationship with the people at the grass roots level. During the 1970s and 1980s, the PNP successfully checked JLP leader Edward Seaga's ascendancy in Western Kingston. It was Simpson's ability to use the clientelistic party structures to deliver crucial votes that ultimately prevented Seaga's hegemonic control of Western Kingston. In the 1970s, she captured the highest number of votes within the PNP, along with Party Leader Michael Manley and Anthony Spaulding. The Stone Polls continuously identified her as the most popular People's National Party MP after Michael Manley. After Manley's retirement in 1992, the polls showed her as the most popular MP in the PNP (*Jamaica Weekly Gleaner*, March 30, 1992). Although the PNP—like the JLP—has had a patronage function (Stone, 1980; Edie, 1991), those party members whose primary contribution has been in that area are not guaranteed power within the party. Patterson has not had a "public following" like Simpson. Both have won elections for the PNP, but since Simpson lacked formal educational skills and technocratic experience, it was her electoral successes that gave the party no choice but to allow her to join the leadership. Women like Simpson have been the bulwark of Jamaican political parties during elections.

Simpson has held several portfolios over the years, including Sports, Social Welfare, and Communications. These are ministries that would have given her administrative and organizational experience, but none in foreign affairs. She has contributed to the development of the PNP's Women's Movement, and in that capacity increased the number of

women voters in the party. She mobilized and organized women at the constituency level to carry out party work, but she has reportedly been less successful in solidifying ties with the professional women in the PNP who distanced themselves from her.⁴ Although she served as President of the PNP Women's Movement, she was not able to persuade the party to integrate more women into the party leadership.

In 1992, both Patterson and Simpson were viewed as party stalwarts, holding very different portfolios, serving the PNP in several important areas and contributing significantly to party development. However, educational qualifications seemed to have been foremost in the minds of the delegates. A total of 3,094 delegates cast their vote for a new Party Leader on March 28, 1992. The results were Patterson 2,322, Simpson 756, and sixteen were spoilt. The contest between the two had been dubbed by the local and foreign media as one between an educated lawyer with overwhelming technocratic and international experience and a working-class woman with strong grass roots connections (*Jamaica Weekly Gleaner*, March 23, 1992, p. 5; *Carib News*, March 24, 1992, p. 3). Two weeks before the election, surveys conducted by the Carl Stone Polls showed that public opinion among the PNP rank-and-file clearly favored Simpson as the preferred choice for Party Leader. Notwithstanding the rank-and-file support for Simpson, the party delegates, supported by the party hierarchy, opted for Patterson as the new Party Leader.

This was the first time in Jamaica that a woman had challenged any male politician for such a high office. The PNP party delegates ultimately decided that Simpson was not the "right" leader for the party in 1992. What were the selection criteria used by the party leadership? The PNP's selection criteria were unwritten, and it seemed as if the delegates supported an implicit qualification criteria in which the preferred type was the male, educated professional over political and grass roots experience. In this case, the preferred qualifications penalized Portia Simpson and guaranteed that a woman of her background could not be selected.

3. Explanations for Party Leader Selection

Political leadership in Jamaica, as elsewhere in the world, has been male-dominated. There has been an unwritten cultural bias towards male leadership throughout the world, and in this case Jamaica is no exception. Entrenched notions of women as subordinates, incapable of taking charge, have prevailed in the society. Given the acceptance, in Jamaica, of what appears to be a global cultural viewpoint that politics is the sphere of men, it is very difficult to know whether Portia Simpson was defeated by P.J. Patterson because of her lack of a post-secondary education and inexperience in foreign affairs, or whether she was defeated

because of her gender. In Simpson's case, we may never know the answer.

In 1992 Portia Simpson was the only candidate for PNP leadership ever, who was neither male nor an educated middle class professional. Hence, she was a new "type" of contender for Party Leader of the PNP. The PNP had previously had only two other leaders—Norman Manley, the party's founder and President until 1969, and Michael Manley, his son, whose tenure went from 1969 until his retirement from politics in 1992. In 1969 Michael Manley's challenger was Vivian Blake, a renowned barrister with close ties to the Manley family. In 1992, the potential candidates were P. J. Patterson (attorney), Hugh Small (attorney), D.K. Duncan (dentist), and Portia Simpson (social worker).

When asked which qualities were considered most important in choosing a Prime Minister in 1992, the public identified high level of education as the least valued of the five qualities put to them by the pollster. Leadership strength and defense of the poor were the most valued qualities. In contrast, in 1972 in the contest between Hugh Shearer (JLP) and Michael Manley (PNP), educational level was identified as the most valued quality (*Jamaica Weekly Gleaner*, March 30, 1992, p. 12). Over the decades of the 1980s and 1990s, Jamaica's economic crisis has been severe despite the management of the economy by educated professionals. Concern for the poor became a highly-valued attribute in the context of the existing burdensome policies of economic stabilization. Simpson was identified by the public as a "people" person and the preferred candidate.

In 1992, the dominant cultural view within the country seemed to have valued education as the most important attribute. Shock was expressed to the author—by a Jamaican woman with a university education—at the prospect of the country being led by a woman who was not well-educated. She exclaimed, "Portia CYAN represent we abroad yu know." (Portia cannot represent us abroad you know). What was being conveyed here was that Simpson, without university education, did not have the competence to represent Jamaica's interests abroad. This perspective ignored all the other valued attributes that Simpson had. The JLP leader Edward Seaga had formal education in Anthropology and later went on to become Prime Minister, holding portfolios in Finance and Foreign Affairs. Did his educational background in Anthropology qualify him to hold these portfolios? It was most certainly his business and political experience. Simpson's lack of formal advanced education raised questions about her competence and ability to conduct foreign policy, and her ability to manage a government. Contrary to many people's beliefs, foreign affairs is not the sole responsibility of the Prime Minister. It is common knowledge that both male and female political leaders all over the world have always relied on a team of competent advisers in the formulation of foreign policy. Many believed that in her alliance with the

reputedly brilliant policy analyst, Hugh Small, and the organizational strategist, D. K. Duncan, that Simpson would bring the technocratic skills that she herself lacked and Patterson had (Stone, 1992; p. 24). There was an unwillingness to give Simpson the opportunity, as all leaders, to assemble a Cabinet of competent support staff to deal with foreign affairs.

Simpson had not acquired the international experience of a P. J. Patterson, because she had never been granted the portfolios which would have allowed her to acquire that sort of experience. Sports, Social Work, and Communications ministries cannot provide international experience, whereas Finance and Foreign Affairs ministries clearly do. No woman in the history of Jamaican post-independence politics has served as Ministers of Finance or Foreign Affairs. Therefore, where would the international experience have come from? In many cases, those who have served as Minister of Finance have had a better chance of being chosen as Prime Minister, since that position brings a wealth of international experience. Why were women not given portfolios in those areas? Is it that there were no qualified women in both parties who could have held portfolios in those areas? Rose Leon was a businesswoman (manufacturer) who served under both JLP and PNP administrations, and she was never given a portfolio in either Finance or Foreign Affairs. Other businessmen, for example, Edward Seaga, were given the opportunity. There has been clearly a pattern of gender inequality in the way in which women have been assigned portfolios. Women have not been recruited by the party leadership to serve in those positions which would make them ultimately meet the preferred qualifications for the position of Party Leader.

It is clearly understood—by this author—that because of the socio-economic conditions of Jamaica, the ability to negotiate with creditors is an appropriate concern. However, the level of education of the leader of the country does not guarantee the successful outcome of any such negotiation. Post-secondary education and international experience do not immediately translate into competence. In some cases, experience can compensate for the lack of formal education. We have seen this in the past in the 1960s, in the case of Hugh Shearer who despite the lack of post-secondary education was chosen as Prime Minister. His background as a trade unionist and his External Affairs portfolio provided him with the skills to handle the affairs of the country. Should a black woman of Simpson's background in the 1990s have been given the opportunity?

Was there a concern because of Simpson's lack of post-secondary education, or was this a case of the unwritten cultural bias against women that existed in the society? Does this kind of rigidity not exclude women from becoming Party Leaders? This should be unacceptable in a country where women are at least 50 percent of the population, and where they have the right to participate in the highest levels of the political process in

a democratic political system.

4. Prospects for the Future

After nearly four decades of independence, Jamaican democracy has not facilitated the entry of all groups into politics on an equal basis. Female activity has been impressive at the grass roots level of the society, but neither the JLP nor the PNP has ever elected a woman to head the party. The rejection of Portia Simpson's bid to become PNP Party Leader in 1992 raises many questions which must be dealt with honestly by those interested in the advancement of democracy in the Caribbean region. Was it impossible for a woman to become Party Leader and Prime Minister in Jamaica in 1992? What kinds of cultural, social, political, and economic changes must be made to enable women to have the requisite qualifications to be recruited into the leadership of the political parties and chosen as Prime Minister? All the necessary changes cannot occur immediately, but there are several problems that we must all begin to reflect on immediately and move to correct them.

First, in a population of 2.5 million, of which women make up slightly more than 50 percent, to deny women an equal opportunity to represent the country is intolerable and unjust. The traditional perceived limited role of women in the society must be challenged if equity is to be achieved in all aspects of the society. Gender should not be a yardstick for measuring the ability to govern a country. Making economic and political decisions that affect the nation should not be the sole domain of the male gender. Women should be encouraged to enter the political arena and to become political leaders holding the highest office. We have seen that some women in other parts of the world function as mothers and wives as well as Prime Ministers. In many parts of the world, the most active participants in women's movements and organizations tend to be women of higher economic groups, with both the time and the resources to invest in political organizing. To participate at the highest levels, women must be encouraged to attain the highest levels of education possible. However, levels of education should not be the sole criteria for participation in the development of any country. The economic difficulties faced by Caribbean countries may make policy changes that affect women's participation very slow, but these are issues that need to be discussed constantly with a view to addressing them. Further, women themselves must take responsibility for their own empowerment, and they should seek to liberate themselves from the myth of female inferiority.

Second, the inequality in portfolio assignments in political parties is an issue that can be dealt with in the short run. Enid Bennett served as a Jamaica Labor Party MP for thirty years without a portfolio—although it has been said that this was at her request. It was only in 1999, after her

retirement from politics, that she was invited to be a State Minister (without portfolio) in the JLP's Shadow Cabinet. She did not decline this invitation. Rose Leon, Mavis Gilmour, and Portia Simpson were all given portfolios that were non-threatening to the male-dominated leadership. None of these very able and competent women was given portfolios in finance or foreign affairs. Portfolio assignment is not only based on level of education and background—as is evident from reviewing Jamaican post-independence political history—it is a political matter. Traditional roles assigned to women in the society have influenced the allocation of portfolios to women in social welfare, health, and communications. A step in the right direction would be to give women portfolios that will give them the experience to attain leadership in the party.

Third, there needs to be an open discussion about procedural changes in the selection process for Party Leader. There should be a process that includes the participation of the party's rank-and-file in selecting the leadership. The selection process should not continue to be dominated by most male delegates. This structure allowed for the continued exclusion of many women with equal talents and experience from participating in moving the country forward. Further, the political parties, private sector organizations, women's groups, and trade unions must all work harder to get more women candidates elected. More female participation must be encouraged, but these women should be in constituencies where they stand a chance to win. In 1997 thirty-two female candidates participated in the general election, but only eight won. The political parties and private sector groups supporting them must invest more financial and media resources in women candidates to enhance the possibility of more women winning seats in Parliament.

Fourth, what are the implications of Simpson's defeat? On the one hand, Simpson's defeat may give the impression to women in the PNP that no matter how well women contribute to the party's growth party leadership is out of their reach. On the other hand, with her ability to be one of the two candidates for Party Leader, the PNP might have shown progress where the JLP cannot begin to identify. Her defeat might also give a negative impression to the women of the country that despite the rhetoric that "Jamaican women can become whatever they want to become despite gender," the fact is that women cannot aspire to become Prime Minister. The perception that the position of Prime Minister is the exclusive preserve of men must be changed. In the post-independence period, under male leadership, the country's crime rate has increased, the economy has deteriorated, the gap between the rich and the poor has widened, and the future of the country remains bleak. Jamaica needs all the talent and experience of its people to solve these problems, regardless of gender or class. It is appalling that at the beginning of the year 2000, Jamaica's Parliament has eight women out of a total of sixty members and where women constitute slightly more than 50 percent of

the total population. This gender inequity should be seriously addressed and corrected. The needs of the country are great, and the best people should be given the opportunity to contribute at the highest levels. Continued emphasis on international experience and post-secondary education have ensured the exclusion of Portia Simpson and others of similar background. These criteria are class and gender-biased. They must be altered if Jamaican political leaders are to become more representative of the people who live in the society.

ENDNOTES

1. In this article, Caribbean refers mainly to the English-speaking islands in the Caribbean Sea, as well as Belize and Guyana.

2. Women such as Iris King, Enid Bennett, Mavis Gilmour, Rose Leon, Portia Simpson (Jamaica), Shirley Field-Ridley, Janet Jagan (Guyana), Mary Margaret Dyer-Howe (Montserrat), Mary Eugenia Charles and Phyllis Shand Allfrey (Dominica), Phyllis Coard and Jacqueline Creft (Grenada) are women who have gained access to power traditionally held by men. Most Caribbean women are involved in politics at the constituency level, and not at the national level. They attend meetings, raise funds, and work tirelessly for their parties and candidates. There is no substantial work that has yet been published on Caribbean women's participation in politics. For a very preliminary introduction to the subject, see Nesha Z. Haniff (1988) *Blaze a Fire: Significant Contributions of Caribbean Women*, (Toronto: Sister Vision); Beverly Andersen (1985) "Caribbean Women and the Political Process," in *Concerning Women and Development*,

2, WAND, Department of Extra-Mural Studies, UWI, St. Michael, Barbados; Olive Senior (1991) *Working Miracles: Women's Lives in the English-Speaking Caribbean*, (Cave Hill: ISER, University of the West Indies) in association with James Currey: London and Indiana University Press: Indianapolis and Bloomington.

3. The information on Portia Simpson's background and experience came from various sources. One valuable source was Carl Stone, through personal conversations in the Summer of 1982. Another was from former members of the PNP Youth Organization and the PNP Women's Movement (April 1994).

4. Author's interviews with several members of the PNP Women's Movement (April 1994). Beverley Andersen (Manley), the ex-wife of the late former Prime Minister Michael Manley, was said to have initially (along with Hugh Small and D. K. Duncan) supported Simpson, but she did not use her influence within the Women's Movement to garner support for her candidacy. Andersen's support for Simpson appeared to have been lukewarm and petered out during the campaign. Many believed that this was due to Andersen's own political ambitions and her desire to stay clear of a potential political liability.

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