

# **"On the Outside Looking In?"**

**by Gabrielle Hezekiah**

**In 1908 and 1909, Sir Harry Johnston—British geographer, artist, diplomat, anthropologist, photographer and naturalist—travelled to the Caribbean seeking information on the political stability of Cuba, Haiti, Jamaica and Panama on behalf of U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt. Johnston was particularly interested in the industriousness (or not) of Blacks and their preparedness to meet the modern economic age. Johnston photographed the everyday lives of working-class Black people out of an interest in the comparative development of the "Negro" in Africa and the Caribbean. He was keen to investigate the "benefits" of colonialism, which supposedly gave Blacks in the Americas an advantage over their African counterparts, and the differences in slavery and colonialism under various European colonizers. Johnston recorded his journey in photographs, several of which were reproduced in his 1910 publication, *The Negro in the New World*. From May to October of 1998, seventy photographs from the original expedition travelled from their home at the Royal Geographical Society in London to museums and art spaces in Jamaica, Trinidad, Barbados, Cuba and Haiti. This migration was a collaborative effort involving the Society, lecturer, critic and curator Dr. Petrine Archer-Straw, and the British Council. The exhibition was called "Photos and Phantasms: Harry Johnston's Photographs of the Caribbean."**

Opposite: *Haitian Woman and Children*, Sir Harry Johnston, 1908–09. Photo courtesy of the Royal Geographical Society.