

Chant Down Babylon: the Rastafarian Movement and Its Theodicy for the Suffering

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The Rastafarian movement was born out of the Jamaican ghettos, where the descendents of slaves have continued to suffer from concentrated poverty, high unemployment, violent crime, and scarce opportunities for upward mobility. From its conception, the Rastafarian faith has provided hope to the disenfranchised, strengthening displaced Africans with the promise that Jah Rastafari is watching over them and that they will someday find relief in the promised land of Africa. In *The Sacred Canopy*, Peter Berger offers a sociological perspective on religion. Berger defines theodicy as an explanation for evil through religious legitimations and a way to maintain society by providing explanations for prevailing social inequalities. Berger explains that there exist both theodicies of happiness and theodicies of suffering. Certainly, the Rastafarian faith has provided a theodicy of suffering, providing followers with religious meaning in social inequality.

Yet the Rastafarian faith challenges Berger's notion of theodicy. Berger argues that theodicy is a form of society maintenance because it allows people to justify the existence of social evils rather than working to end them. The Rastafarian theodicy of suffering is unique in that it defies mainstream society; indeed, sociologist Charles Reavis Price labels the movement antisystemic, meaning that it confronts certain aspects of mainstream society and that it poses an alternative vision for society (9). The Rastas believe that the white man has constructed and legitimated a society that is oppressive to the black man. They call this society Babylon, and Rastas make every attempt to defy Babylon by refusing to live by the oppressors' rules; hence, they wear their hair in dreads, smoke marijuana, and adhere to Marcus Garvey's Ethiopianism.

For the Rastafarians, their theodicy of suffering not only provides meaning for the social inequalities they face, but it also socializes followers to oppose the status quo.

This paper will examine the history and current situation of the Rastafarian movement using Berger's theory of theodicy as a paradigm to do so. This paper will review Jamaica's violent history as African slaves fought fiercely for their independence, the birth of the Rastafarian movement in the 1930s, and the customs and beliefs of the religion as well as how the Rastafarian theodicy copes with Jamaica's devastated economy and the resulting poverty, unemployment, drug trafficking, and violent crime that plague many black Jamaicans today. Because reggae music is regarded as the voice of the Jamaican Rastas and has been responsible for the spreading of the Rastafari message not just across Jamaica but across the world, this paper will use reggae lyrics to further illuminate the complexities of the Rastafarian movement.

The Shackles of Slavery and Religion as an Agent of Rebellion

The early history of Jamaica is a violent one, as a small number of white plantation owners held complete power over thousands of African slaves. To justify slavery, whites tried to strip blacks of all humanity by destroying families, denying blacks of their rich heritage, and erasing black contributions to society. Yet the slaves in Jamaica were notorious for their fierce resistance to slavery and for their brave fighting to achieve independence, and this rebellious mentality still persists among present-day Rastafarians.

While enslaved, many displaced Africans continued to practice their native religions. Just as the Rastas do today, the slaves used their religions to resist their white oppressors. In his article "The Roots of Rebellion and Rasta Theology in Jamaica," Noel Leo Erskine explains how religion and social change are intertwined for black Jamaicans:

The Rastas were not the first to make the connection between religion and social and political change in Jamaica. Afro-Jamaicans have always made that connection. This is so because, according to the eminent east African theologian John Mbiti, Africans are never without their religion. They take their religions to the fields. They take it with them to funerals, to the market, and it shapes their beliefs, rituals and is present at their festivals. (104)

One such African religion practiced by Jamaican slaves was *obeah*. Black slaves believed that the person who had the power of *obeah* “had the ability to leave his or her body, fly at night and to cause great harm to befall the enemy” (104). By bestowing harm upon the white master, *obeah* was a form of resistance to white oppression. In a society where the slave master had the right to whip, mutilate or sell any slave at will, *obeah* was a way for slaves to exert control over the slave master. Indeed, there are many stories in Caribbean folklore telling of house slaves who used poison made by an *obeah* as an effective weapon in the struggle for freedom (105).

Another religion that persisted in Jamaican plantations was Myalism, which was a successor of the West African worship of gods by cult groups through drums, dancing, dreams, and spirit-seizure. The lines between *obeah* and Myal are often blurred, but the Myal practitioner was a leader of a group dedicated to an organized religious life, while the *obeah* man was usually a private practitioner. Myalists participated in the Myal dance to honor ancestors or minor deities who were feared (107).

Many slaves used the Myal dance to protect them as they escaped slavery and fled into the Jamaican hills. In 1655, the English defeated the Spanish for control of the island, and the Spanish left their slaves when they left the island (Barrett 30). These Spanish slaves, called Maroons, used the opportunity to flee to the hills of Jamaica, where they became fierce freedom

fighters and practiced Myalism to protect them in battle. As the British imported more slaves from the Gold Coast, many of these slaves escaped and joined the Maroons in the hills. Under the initial leadership of Juan de Bolas, the Maroons carried out a terrifying war against white slave owners. They would attack suddenly and swiftly, leaving the English completely disoriented as they retreated back to the hills. The British realized they had to confront the problem of the Maroons, and in 1663 they presented a peace treaty to Juan de Bolas. Upon agreeing to the treaty, Juan de Bolas was made a colonel by the British and was sent to pacify his followers. However, the Maroons refused to accept the treaty as a measure of British colonialism, and they murdered Juan de Bolas for his betrayal (Burt 34).

The Maroons continued their war against slavery, and in 1738 the British once again appealed to the Maroons for peace. On March 1 of that year, the Maroons signed a peace treaty with the British government. Historians disagree over the effects of the treaty of 1738. Barrett argues that “the treaty reduced the fighting Maroons from gallant freedom fighters to an unpaid army of English Planters and a permanent police force” (36). Yet Arthur Burt believes the treaty gave new freedom to the Maroons who now “lived in a state within a state, with their independence and freedom to preserve their African culture patterns and practices unchallenged” (35). Nevertheless, peace never lasted as long as slavery shackled the island. Between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, black slaves carried out rebellions every single year (Barrett 38). Religion was always at the heart of the rebellions. Erskine attributes the Myalists for inspiring every single rebellion from the late 1700s to the 1860s (107). *Obeah* practices were used to aid the black warriors during such rebellions. Erskine explains that, before the Maroon rebellion of 1760, the warriors prepared for battle by drinking an *obeah* mixture of rum, gunpowder, grave dirt, and blood from the arm of each warrior (106). After the bloody rebellion,

the *obeah* man was so feared that he was outlawed by the Jamaican legislature (106). “Even when no overt rebellion took place, the covert or passive rebellion was equally disruptive and always present” (Barrett 39). Inspired by their religious beliefs, Jamaican slaves engaged in a full-out war against oppression.

As slavery continued on the island, slaves eventually merged the beliefs of Myal and Christian Baptists to create the Native Baptist faith. George Liele, a slave preacher from Savannah, Georgia who migrated to Jamaica with his master, founded the first Native Baptist church on the island in 1784, calling it the Ethiopian Baptists Church (Barrett 76). By interpreting Christianity from an African perspective, Erskine claims that the Native Baptists “were the first church to reach out to the enslaved” (108). Services included the practices of Myal such as drumming, dancing, and handclapping. Liele established a class-leader system that divided the church members into classes for teaching. Class-leaders became spiritual guides similar to Myal leaders. Like the *obeah* man and the Myalists, the Native Baptists used their religion as a way to resist the oppression of slavery. Indeed, just participating in church activities was an assertion of black dignity. Erskine comments, “During slavery, prayer and class meetings under [church] leaders provided an experience of humanity, dignity, and brotherhood which no other institution could provide” (111). Furthermore, the Native Baptist class-leader system “served as a more-or-less legitimate means of organization and communication in a society that depended for its continued existence on the disunity of Blacks and their absolute subordination to White Rule” (111). Thus, not only did the Native Baptist Church reach out to the enslaved, but it also inspired the enslaved to become leaders in their communities.

The Native Baptists are also notable in that they were the first to embrace Ethiopianism on the island. In their attempt to justify slavery, whites tried to deny the fact that blacks were responsible for highly developed civilizations and tried to use science to claim that all civilizations were created by whites. If impossible to prove white origin, white scientists tried to “de-nigrify the blacks in these civilizations by calling the inhabitants white, even if such a description denied objectivity” (Barrett 70). The Native Baptists class leaders, though for the most part uneducated, discovered in the Bible—the only book they had access to—that Egypt and Ethiopia were in Africa and that these countries were crucial to the history of civilization. Out of this discovery was born Ethiopianism, or the dynamic mythology of the fabled biblical Ethiopia, which would later become a central tenant in both the preachings of Marcus Garvey and in the Rastafarian theology. The reggae band Steel Pulse describes Ethiopianism’s reinterpretation of the Bible in “Not the King James Version,” singing, “Hidden from me I was never told/ Ancient prophets black and gold /Like Daniel, King David and Abraham/Israel were all black men.” The chorus concludes, “African heritage/ I don’t wanna lose you.” (See Appendix A). By reminding blacks of their past glories in Africa, the Native Baptists gave black slaves a source of pride in their race, thus contesting the very foundation of slavery which tried to strip blacks of all humanity. Thus, by introducing Jamaicans to Ethiopianism, the Native Baptists laid the groundwork for the Rastafarian faith to emerge nearly one hundred and forty years later.

The early 1800s saw the crumbling of the institution of slavery beyond Jamaica with the French Revolution, the liberation of Haitian slaves, and the creation of the Anti-Slavery Society in London (39). Jamaican slaves became aware of the growing tide against slavery, and Native Baptist meetings became heated with the topic of revolution. In 1831, Samuel (Daddy) Sharp, a

deacon of the Native Baptists known for his powerful oratory, started the Baptist War of 1831, also called the Montego Bay Rebellion. The Baptist War was a continuation of the Maroons' struggle against slavery, except instead of an armed rebellion, 20,000 slaves organized to withdraw their labor. Daddy Sharp had essentially created a non-violent labor strike. Daddy Sharp was eventually executed for his role in the rebellion, and other slaves were also executed, imprisoned, or beaten for their participation in the rebellion. However, the Baptist War was historically significant in that it worried the King of England, who then hastened the emancipation of slavery. In 1834, after four hundred years of oppression, brutality, dehumanization and constant struggle, Jamaican blacks finally won their freedom. In songs like "Slavery Days" by Burning Spear or "Slave Master" by Gregory Isaacs, the Rastafarians reflect on the pain and degradation of slavery so as to honor the struggle of their ancestors and to remember their heritage. (See Appendix A).

Clearly, religion has been used as an agent of social change for black Jamaicans. Stripped of all humanity, black slaves surely found solace in their religious beliefs that helped them to survive such an evil institution. During the four hundred years of the brutalization of the black race in Jamaica, *obeah*, Myalism, and the Native Baptist faith all provided a theodicy for black slaves. Yet although the slaves' theodicy helped them to find meaning in their suffering, this theodicy should not be regarded as a passive justification of suffering. Rather, for the slaves of Jamaica, religion was used to actively resist the white man's oppression. From the *obeah* man poisoning slave masters to the Myalist-inspired armed rebellions, religion and rebellion go hand in hand for Afro-Jamaicans. These religious roots of rebellion would later manifest themselves in the Rastafarian movement's active resistance to the oppression of today's Babylon system.

Marcus Garvey: Prophet of the Rastafarians

Marcus Garvey was born in Jamaica on August 17, 1887. He founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in 1914 before migrating to the United States two years later. The UNIA differed from other civil rights organizations in that it argued that blacks had been so degraded in western countries that they could only achieve true equality by returning to their homeland of Africa. Because the consciousness of Afro-Jamaicans was rooted in religious consciousness, Garvey rooted his preachings for black equality in biblical and theological language:

“When God breathed into the nostrils of man the breath of life, made him a living soul, and bestowed on him the authority of ‘Lord of Creation,’ He never intended that an individual should descent to the level of a peon, a serf, or a slave, but that he should be always man in the fullest possession of his senses and with the truest knowledge of himself. But how has man become since creation? We find him today divided into different classes—the helpless imbecile, the dependent slave, the servant and master.

These different classes God never created. He created man.” (Garvey quoted by Erskine 118)

UNIA became one of the largest pan-Africanist movements and the largest international movement of black people. At its peak, the UNIA consisted of an estimated 1,700 groups in forty countries with four million members (117-118). Proclaiming “Africa for the Africans,” Garvey purchased two cruise ships to take Africans in the Diaspora back to Africa. However, Garvey’s organization went bankrupt before he was able to do so, and he spent five years in jail before he was deported back to Jamaica.

Though Garvey's teachings have largely been forgotten, he remains essential to the creation of the Rastafarian faith, and he is still considered a prophet by Rastas today. Garvey remains essential because he revived the idea of Ethiopianism and pan-Africanism. Though embraced by the Native Baptists of Jamaica in late 1700s, Ethiopianism moved from just an ideology to a movement during the 1920s and 1930s thanks largely to Garvey. Garvey again bases his call for black dignity in biblical imagery:

“But when we come to consider the history of man, was not the Negro a power, was he not great once? Yet, honest students of history can recall the day when Egypt, Ethiopia, and Timbuctoo towered in their civilization, towered above Europe, towered above Asia. When Europe was inhabited by a race of Cannibals, a race of savages, naked men, heathens and pagans, Africa was peopled with a race of cultured black men, who were cultured and refined; men who, it is said, were like the gods.” (Garvey quoted by Barrett 77)

Garvey emphasized black pride and black contributions to civilization. Black Jamaicans were ready to hear Garvey's revolutionary ideas about equality as Jamaican society at the time was “seething with discontent...as Negroes observed the unequal distribution of wealth and the virtual monopoly of the institutions of government by the white population” (Burt 35-36). Jamaica's white government tried to use various sedition laws to outlaw the Garvey's inflammatory writings, but his ideas quickly spread across the island, inspiring both poor and middle-class blacks alike.

Furthermore, Garvey's cry of “Africa for the Africans” sparked a self-awareness of a common identity among the black Diaspora. Garvey and the UNIA lead the Pan-African movement, which Carmen White defines as “a consciousness among many people of African

descent that they compose a collectivity that transcends national boundaries and that they share a kinship based on a common experience of globally expressed racial oppression” (691). This Pan-African ideology is expressed in the song “African,” in which Peter Tosh sings that all black people are African no matter their nationality, religion, or complexion. He explains that such insignificant differences have been exploited by whites to separate the black race (See Appendix A). Because of Garvey, black Jamaicans suddenly felt a common kinship with displaced Africans all across the globe. Indeed, Erskine believes that Garvey’s central contribution to Jamaica “was not only to keep Africa alive in our consciousness but to press us to clarify where we stand in relation to Africa” (117).

Just as the black slave rebellions were inspired by religious beliefs, Garvey rooted his revolutionary ideas in the biblical and theological terms. By doing so, he appealed directly to the black Jamaicans’ religious conscious. He instilled a sense of black pride and self-worth in blacks during colonialism, when black Jamaicans’ sense of self, culture, history, and beauty had been degraded in favor of white ideals. Carmen M. White explains, “Garvey’s active embracement of, and positive identification with, Blackness represented a particularly radical and liberating form of self-affirmation in a system where color consciousness intersected with class to create a caste system that extolled everything white and British and disparaged all things linked with the Black Jamaican underclass” (882-83). Garvey’s revolutionary ideas of black pride, Ethiopianism, Pan-Africanism, and repatriation to Africa set the stage of the emergence of the Rastafarian faith in the 1930s, as all would become the central tenants of the movement.¹ Today, he is regarded as a

¹ The followers of Garvey and Rastafari in many ways opposed each other. In the 1930s, Garvey’s UNIA consisted mostly of the middle class, who looked to the new emperor of Ethiopia with hope but did not regard him as the returned Messiah. Indeed, the middle-class black Jamaicans looked down on the black underclass, of which the Rastas were a large component, and judged them as incapable of succeeding in Jamaican society. Furthermore, Garvey was very critical of Haile Selassie, harshly criticizing him for keeping “his country unprepared for modern civilization” (quoted by Erskine 122). Nevertheless, the Rastafarians were able to sift through Garvey’s ideas, doing away with what was unhelpful and embracing the ideas that were crucial for their faith. The Rastafarians

prophet by the Rastafarians, and he is celebrated in many reggae songs including Burning Spear's "Marcus Garvey" (See Appendix A). Garvey laid the framework for the Rastafarian theodicy by identifying white oppression as the cause of black suffering and naming black unity and pride as a way to oppose such oppression.

The Coronation of Ras Tafari: the Fulfillment of Garvey's Prophecy and the Birth of the Rastafarian Movement

On the eve of his departure to the U.S. in 1916, Garvey is supposed to have said, "'Look to Africa for the crowning of a Black King; he shall be the Redeemer" (Barrett 81). Thus, when the black Ras Tafari was coronated King of Ethiopia in 1930, Leonard Howell, the founder of the Rastafarian movement, proclaimed that Garvey's prophesy had been fulfilled. Ras Tafari took the name Haile Selassie, which means the Might of The Trinity, to which was added "King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah." Selassie claimed to be the great grandson of King Saheka Selassie of Shoa, which meant that he was a descendent of King Solomon, the wisest man on Earth (81).

Leonard Howell, an original Garveyite, began his ministry in a dilapidated ghetto in West Kingston. He recruited members from the various organizations of Garveyites. By 1934, a solid nucleus of Rastafarians existed in Kingston who worshipped Haile Selassie as Jah, the divine God of Ethiopia of whom Garvey had prophesized. The movement is grounded in some key verses in the Old and New Testament. In Revelation 5:2-5, the Rastafarians found, "And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice: Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof? And no man in heaven, nor in earth...was able to open the book, neither to look thereon...And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold the Lion of the tribe of Juda,

regarded Garvey as a prophet similar to John the Baptist, and this did not make him incapable of error. "[Garvey] had fulfilled his mission and ministry. His mission like John the Baptist was to point to the one who was to come" (123).

the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.”

Howell and his followers interpreted this passage to mean that the newly coronated King of Ethiopia, from the House of David, was the Redeemer who fulfilled Garvey’s prophecy.

Many scholars claim that the new religion gained popularity because it offered hope to blacks during a tumultuous time in Jamaican history. The Rastafarian filled an emotional need for depressed Afro-Jamaicans facing “an exhausted economy, an insensitive colonial political system, massive unemployment, out-migration of black men, and a monumental exodus of dislocated peasants and laborers from rural areas to West Kingston” (Price 15; cf. Barrett 84; Burt 36). Thus, black Jamaicans were ready to listen to any doctrine that promised a better life.

Yet the budding Rastafarian faith did more than offer hope; Howell placed his new religion in opposition to the colonial, capitalistic system that was marginalizing blacks into the lowest economic status in Jamaican society. Howell created a Rastafarian identity that revolved around the following beliefs: that the Messiah had returned and Jah Rastafari was the living, black god; the blacks’ experience in the West had been one of oppression and degradation and that a repatriation to Africa was imperative; their allegiance was to Jah Rastafari, not the British Crown, and therefore the Crown had no right to tax them. As previously mentioned, Price calls the Rastafarian movement antisystemic in that it opposes mainstream society and poses an alternative vision for society. He explains that the Rastas created an antisystemic orientation of themselves versus Babylon:² the anti-colonial Rastafarian versus the white colonials and their

² The term “Babylon” has come to signify the oppressive, capitalistic status quo. It includes Western society, capitalism, and the protectors of the status quo (like soldiers, racism, or an unjust government). “The biblical Babylon was once a thriving commercial and cultural center near modern-day Baghdad, under the rule of King Hammarabi (ruled 1728 to 1686 B.C.) Babylon was soon colonized by the Assyrians, who imposed their own King. Other succeeding ‘foreign’ kings took the throne, including the son of a Chaldean, Nebuchadnezzar, who exiled Jews and razed Jerusalem. The Babylonians were polytheistic, and the King was also a priest and leader of a despotic priestly caste, but a moral code of behavior and ethics was not required by the Babylonian gods, unlike the single God of the Hebrews. The Hebrews at that time were worried about their people who were coming under the sway of Babylonian culture” (Price 17).

black supporters; their positive view of Blackness versus the deprecating views of most Jamaicans; the Rastafarians as agents of change versus the police, the establishment, and law and order” (10). Martin E. Marty explains that “fighting a common enemy has a group binding effect” (43). Marty quotes Georg Simmel, “‘Opposition makes us feel that we are not completely victims of circumstances and this gives us inner satisfaction’” (30). Thus, as the Rastafarians emerged in the early 1930s, they created a theodicy that made sense of their suffering by attributing the marginalization of blacks to the Babylonian system. This theodicy was not a form of social maintenance like the other theodicies discussed by Berger. Rather, the Rastafarian theodicy was created in direct opposition to the social order.

In January of 1934, Howell was charged with sedition and given a two-year sentence after a speech in which he proclaimed that no allegiance should be given to the British or any colonial, imperialist, and racist government. Because Howell was a threat to the Jamaican colonial government, he was portrayed as a mad man to the black and white status quo in Jamaica (Price 14). This pattern of harassment, arrest, and labeling Rastas as mad would continue through the 1970s. Police infiltrated early Rastafarian meetings and harassed or physically abused Rastarians: “They were so despised that they could not walk the streets in some places in Kingston during daylight hours, but had to walk through the gullies (drainage systems)” (16, 18). However, this heavy-handed abuse just added to the Rastafarian antisystemic identity of us versus Babylon and created solidarity among the Rastafarians.

When Howell was released from jail, he created the first Rastafarian commune in 1940 called the Pinnacle. Like their ancestors the Maroons, who had fought so savagely against white oppression, the Rastafarians returned to the hills overlooking Kingston. There, as little as 500 to as many as 1,600 hundred followers lived in their own community outside of Jamaican society to

which they refused to pay taxes. Howell patterned his commune after the Maroon communities of Jamaica, and he presided as chief. For a living, the early Rastafarians grew native cash crops, including marijuana, which has remained at the center of the religion's ritual practices. It was at the Pinnacle that several facets of the movement were established: communal living, the use of marijuana, and wearing their hair in dreadlocks (Barrett 86-88; cf. Price 17).

In 1954, the Pinnacle was raided by police and shut down. Yet this act of repression had the opposite effect of what the Jamaican authorities had intended: "The experience of degradation, rejection, and ostracization solidified group identity under a religious ideology and a shared experience of marginalization" (Price 19). More resolute in their beliefs, the now homeless Rastafarians returned to Shanty-Town in Kingston. They preached their ideology to anyone who would listen and started to more openly confront the police. By this time, the Rastafarians had defined a distinctive cultural identity with its own unique lexicon, dietary codes, a sense of a shared history, and adherence to specific beliefs, rituals and symbols. They were regarded as a threat by the Jamaican government because they openly defied the social order.

The Rastafarian Faith: Customs and Beliefs

In following with Garvey's teachings, the early Rastafarians founded their faith in the reclamation of black culture, which had been devalued in colonialist Jamaica. Though 93 percent of the Jamaican population was of African origin, white culture remained dominant in areas such as religion, education, and language (Miller 112). As Erskine comments, "To be successful in the Jamaican society of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, one had to abandon Blackness" (123). White Christianity remained the dominant religion on the island. In schools, black Jamaican children learned British history and were taught the British version of English.

To advance socially, black Jamaicans had to abandon their Jamaican dialect for the language of the colonizers. Most of the secondary schools were reserved for the children of the colored class, and many jobs in the civil service and banking sectors were reserved for the colored class as well (123). Thus, the black Jamaican underclass was systematically locked out of educational and economic opportunities because of the darkness of their skin.

The Rastafarians responded to colonialism's overt attack on black heritage by embracing Ethiopianism and pan-Africanism which provided a positive evaluation of blackness. For example, Congo and Bongo were demeaning racial epithets used to describe black Jamaicans. The Rastafarians turned these phrases into positive names, "making Bongo and Congo titles of honor, defining them as prideful expressions of black identity, including the racial characteristics that so many blacks themselves disparaged, such as having knotty hair or a broad nose" (Price 16). Furthermore, Rastafarians adopted the title "Ras" which means head or prince in the Ethiopian language. They referred to Rastafarian men as kings and princes and Rastafarian women as queens, empresses, and princesses (16). Such titles symbolize the Rastafarians' refusal to ingest Babylonian thought, which tells blacks that they are inferior. The Rastas asserted pride in their skin color, pointing to Jeremiah 13:23, which proclaims, "Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God." By instilling blacks with a sense of pride in their skin color, the Rastafarian theodicy combated the humiliating dehumanization of colonialism.

Rastafarians believe that Haile Selassie is the living God and a black God and the fulfillment of Garvey's prophecy. The book of Revelation is the central text for the Rastas, as it contains the holy prophecy about the Emperor. Indeed, it is in Revelation that the title for Selassie is found: "King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Conquering Lion of the tribe of Judah."

Selassie's Ethiopian birth and his lineage as a descendent of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba are important in that the Bible says that the Redeemer would be born in Ethiopia and be a member of the House of David. The Rastafarians also believe that the biblical Jesus is Haile Selassie, but the white slave masters and colonizers have depicted him as white as a way to further strip blacks of their true dignity (Barrett 106).³

To the Rastafarians, praising a black God is of the greatest importance because blackness is synonymous with holiness. Garvey can be attributed for the Rastafarians' image of God; for, while Garvey never explicitly stated that God is black, he insisted that each race view God in its own image:

“We, as Negroes, have found a new ideal. Whilst our God has no color, yet it is human to see everything through one's own spectacles, and since the white people have seen their God through white spectacles, we have only now started out (late though it be) to see our God through our own spectacles....We Negroes believe in the God of Ethiopia....We shall worship him through the spectacles of Ethiopia.” (Garvey quoted by Erskine 118)

Thus, Garvey opened the door for the Rastafarian God to be black. Indeed, this is of great importance to the movement for it is a renunciation of the Babylonian system and an assertion of black pride and dignity. In the song “No White God,” Sizzla sings of the importance of praising a black god: “Your system is designed to distract me from the truth.../You give me white god to praise in slavery/The doctrine follow on in the black community/The black Messiah you try to shield with fantasy.” The chorus concludes, “I have no white god/Don't teach me anything wrong/Could the white god save me from white man oppression?” (See Appendix A). This song

³ The Rastas were not deterred when Selassie declared that he was not God. They believed, like Jesus, he was keeping the messianic secret (Erskine 124). Selassie's death on August 28, 1975 also had little impact on the Rastafarians who believe he is immortal as expressed in Bob Marley's song “Jah Live” (See Appendix A).

reveals great agency in the Rastafarian faith as it rejects the disempowering notion of praising a white God. Indeed, praising a God in their own image is a source of empowerment for the Rastafarians and another way the Rastafarian theodicy defies the social status quo.

The Rastafarians, in line with Garvey, also believe that blacks have been so dehumanized in the West that they can only hope to find fulfillment in returning to Africa. Jamaican reggae artist Johnny Clarke sings, “Move out a Babylon, Rastaman/ And leave all the wicked men/ Only righteous men shall prosper/ In the kingdom of Jah the Almighty” (See Appendix A).

The original Rastas believed that a physical repatriation to Africa was absolutely necessary, although this belief has changed for many modern-day Rastafarians⁴. Rastas refer to Ethiopia to signify the entire African continent because of Ethiopia’s significance in the Bible and because it is the only African country that has never been under colonial domination (except for a brief incursion by Italy). The Rastafarians believe that Jamaica is Babylon or Hell and that Ethiopia is Zion, the Promised Land for members of the black Diaspora.

Thus, the Rastafarian customs and beliefs create a theodicy that reaches out to blacks who have suffered degradation, marginalization, and impoverishment even after the end of slavery. The Rastafarian theodicy explains such social evils by attributing them to the oppression of Babylon and seeks to oppose Babylon by preaching black dignity, by praising a black God, and by returning to Africa. Thus, at a microscopic level, the Rastafarian faith is combating the macroscopic reality of colonialism.

Rastafarian Symbols and Rituals

⁴ About half of present-day Rastas view repatriation as fulfillment of prophecy and must entail no less than a physical journey back to Africa. The other half have adopted the phrase “liberation before repatriation” and believe blacks must liberate themselves in Jamaica before committing themselves to returning to Ethiopia (White 679). There are several Rastafarian communes throughout Africa, including Shashamane in Ethiopia, which was granted to Jamaican Rastas by Selassie in the early 1960s.

The theologian Paul Tillich explains that symbols and rituals are essential to any religion. Symbols allow believers to communicate that which is unseen; they point to something larger than themselves, and they actively participate in the glorification of that which they represent. Tillich explains, “the language of faith is the language of symbols” (51). Rituals reinforce the individual’s relationship to the divine. The repetitive nature of rituals serves as a constant reminder for followers to praise the divine. For the Rastas, their rituals’ symbols are essential to their antisystemic identity, for they emphasize black pride and a refusal to follow Babylon’s status quo.

The most obvious symbol of the Rastafarian faith is that followers wear their hair in dreadlocks, a trend that originated at the Pinnacle. The Rastas point to the Book of Numbers to explain their dreadlocks, as the Nazarites were forbidden from cutting their hair (Miller 114). Dreadlocks are part of the Rastas’ defiant exterior. Dreadlocks got their name because they were originally intended to instill dread in the rest of Jamaican colonial society at a time when many blacks straightened their hair because they had come to believe that kinky hair is bad hair (114). Dreadlocks, therefore, are a celebration of African heritage. They are featured predominantly in Rastafarian art and in reggae music.

The Rastafarians’ diet is another important symbol of the movement. Rastas are vegetarians and base their diet on a wide range of locally grown food. If possible, they prefer to grow their own food. The Rastafarian diet is a symbolic act of resistance to the consumption habits of the Babylon system as Jamaica relies heavily on imported food (Miller 114).

The Rastafarians have also developed their own language symbolism. It has been called “soul language,” “ghetto language,” or even “hallucinogenic language” by outsiders (Barrett 143). Rastafarian speech is yet another symbolic refusal to abide by the rules of white society,

which requires black Jamaicans to speak the language of their colonizers if they are to advance socially. Rastafarian speech follows the so-called word, sound, and power theory, redefining words so that their sound aligns with its meaning (Price 18). For example, the word “oppression” was changed to “downpression,” as the first syllable of oppression sounds like “up” and to the Rastafarians, oppression has nothing to do with upliftment. Another example is the replacement of “I and I” for the words “me” and “you.” “I and I” is used to symbolize the unity of humanity under Jah.

Marijuana—commonly called ganja by the Rastas—is a symbol of the Rastafarian movement and is also used in religious rituals of worship and meditation. Ganja was first used in the early days of the movement at the Pinnacle, where it was likely a form of protest against the laws of Babylon (Barrett 129). The Rastas also point to many passages in the Bible to explain the importance of the so-called holy herb, including Genesis 1:12, which reads, “And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good.” In the song “Bush Doctor,” Peter Tosh calls for the legalization of marijuana as a human right (See Appendix A). Rastafarians believe that Babylonian thought has been so dominant that blacks have unconsciously started to ingest it; smoking marijuana is a way to liberate one’s mind of Babylon’s influence. Thus, marijuana is smoked in rituals to assist in meditation and bring them closer to Jah. Rastas say a prayer or read the Bible before smoking. Smoking is required at all Rastafarian meetings and at religious services (131).⁵

⁵ Sadly, the ritual use of marijuana has caused many non-Rastafarians to stigmatize or dismiss the Rastafarian faith. In reality, marijuana has long been an innocuous part of Jamaican peasant-class (Haber 18). Furthermore, the use of ganja is “intricately connected with the values and ethical systems of the Jamaican people, and the effects of ganja smoking in Jamaica would not necessarily apply to cannabis usage in other cultural contexts” (20).

The most prominent visual symbols of the Rastafarian faith are the lion and the colors red, gold, black, and green. The lion represents Haile Selassie, the Conquering Lion of Judah. The lion also represents the dominant maleness of the movement, and Rastafarians “simulate the spirit of the lion” by wearing dreadlocks which look similar to a lion’s mane (142). The colors red, gold black, and green are the original colors of the Garvey movement. In “Rally Round the Flag,” Steel Pulse explains the significance of the colors using the words of Marcus Garvey: “Marcus say/Red for the blood/That flowed like the river/Marcus say sir Marcus say/Green for the land Africa/Marcus say/Yellow for the gold/That they stole/Marcus say /Black for the people/ It was looted from.” (See Appendix A). The song also invokes images of the lion. Thus, the Rastafarian lion and trademark colors participate in the fabled mythology of Africa, reminding Rastafarians of their Promised Land.

The Rastafarians wear their hair in dreadlocks, speak a distinct language and smoke marijuana as a way to symbolize their separation from the rest of society. By refusing to follow social norms, Rastafarians reinforce their opposition to Babylon. The distinctive color imagery and the lion remind them of their relationship to Africa, their Promised Land where Rastafarians believe they will eventually return.

The Rise of Rastafari during the Tumultuous 1970s and the 1980 Election

By the time Jamaica achieved its independence in 1962, the Rastafarians had established themselves as “a fixture in the Jamaican national consciousness” (Price 21). The process of decolonization was difficult and the legacies of colonialism were still evident on the island. Miller summarizes the struggle:

Like other postcolonial societies, Jamaica faces the challenge of forging and fashioning its own political culture from the remnants of its precolonial heritage and the foundation

of its colonial experience. In the process, it has to deal with the legacies of colonialism, which created a society divided on the bases of race and color. (1)

For the vast majority of black Jamaicans locked in ghettos and suffering from abject poverty, high unemployment, and rising violence, Jamaican independence had done nothing to improve their lives. The Rastafarian faith grew exponentially during the post-independence years when social situations were getting worse. The Rastafarian theodicy provided meaning in suffering and thus appealed to many black Jamaicans who joined the call for social change and found strength in Jah Rastafari.

Reggae was largely responsible for the dissemination of the Rastafarian faith. Toward the end of the 1960s, reggae musicians began to sing songs of the Rastafarian theodicy, offering a harsh critique of Jamaican society and calling for the end of oppression of blacks. Because of the high illiteracy rates, reggae has been called the newspaper of Jamaica, alerting the poor to injustice and inequality. The protest songs reflected people's growing awareness that social improvements and decolonization were not happening (Price 21; cf. Miller 114). Bob Marley was the leading reggae artist of his day, and many say he was responsible for spreading the Rastafarian faith across the world. His songs appealed to the oppressed youth of the Caribbean, Jamaica, England, and even in white America and Europe (Barrett 213). In "War," Marley quotes a speech made by Haile Selassie calling for an end to racial discrimination. He sings that there will be war "until the basic human rights/are equally guaranteed to all/Without regard to race" (See Appendix A). People across the world regarded his message as a way of life and joined the Rastafarian movement. By 1988, an estimated 75,000 native Jamaicans were followers of Rastafari; by 1988, Barrett conservatively estimates the worldwide movement to number 300,000 (18).

Leading up to the election of 1980, Jamaica was on the brink of civil war. Edward Seaga of the Jamaican Labor Party (JLP) was opposing Michael Manley of the People's National Party (PNP) for the third time in the race for prime minister. The United States was disturbed by Manley's communist sympathies and close ties with Fidel Castro, and the CIA reportedly backed Seaga (called "CIAga" by his Jamaican opponents): "The orchestration of an unprecedented scale of political violence was an important element in the U.S.-backed JLP's successful campaign to destabilize and oust the democratic socialist People's National Party in late 1970 and in 1980" (Harrison 5). To avoid having their property seized, "much of the middle and upper classes of Jamaica instantly split to Miami, taking their money with them" (Goldman 86). The impoverished blacks remained trapped in the ghettos and the politicians "manipulated underfed, ill-educated youth as cannon fodder" (92). In exchange for support, politicians gave guns to dons, who then distributed them to the ghetto youth (Harrison 6). Some believe Seaga with his connections to the CIA and organized crime brought high-powered guns and cocaine to Jamaica. There were numerous shoot-outs between gang members who had large amounts of cocaine in their possession (5). Reggae and the Rastafarian movement continued to lament the violence and call for significant changes in society. In songs like Junior Mavin's "Police and Thieves," "How Do You Feel?" by Anthony B, and "Congress Man" by Groundation, the musicians directly address politicians and accuse them of causing violence and suffering in the streets (See Appendix A).

However, Marley was the most influential reggae artist of the day, and he devoted himself to promoting peace and spreading Jah love in his homeland of Jamaica. During the height of political tension, Marley organized musicians, disputing Rasta theological groups as well as downtown dons who were tired of the futile political violence that the Rastas referred to

as “politricks.” The group organized the One Love Peace Concert, held on April 78, 1978, where Marley united Seaga and Manley on stage. Jamaicans still remember how thunder rolled and lightning struck as Marley had the two warring politicians clasp hands above his head (Goldman 92).⁶ Today, many Rastas believe Marley to be a prophet.

Admittedly, the One Love Peace Concert did not stop the violence surrounding the 1980 election campaign. Nevertheless, Marley and other reggae artists articulated a vision of peace and equality for Jamaica, demanding human rights and an end to the oppression of Babylon. Rastafarian-inspired reggae gave a voice to oppressed blacks living in impoverished ghettos. Reggae, by articulating the Rastafarian theodicy, provided moral support and encouragement to the people of Jamaica during a tumultuous period in Jamaican history.

The Rastafarian Theodicy in Jamaica’s Current Devastated Economy

Starting in 1980, when Seaga was sworn in as Jamaica’s next prime minister, the world economy faced the most severe and prolonged recession since the 1930s. In her article “Jamaica and the International Drug Economy,” Faye V. Harrison describes how underdeveloped countries, including Jamaica, have been hit the hardest. She explains that the U.S.-backed Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) “imposed structural adjustment policies to correct the balance of payment disequilibrium through massive currency devaluations, cutbacks in government expenditures, and increased levels of taxations” (2). These policies have only exacerbated living conditions for Jamaica’s poor, who, on average, spend 75 percent of their wages on food alone. For those lucky enough to have gainful employment, minimum wages afford them only half of that 75 percent (2).

⁶ During the previous election of 1976, also between Manley and Seaga, Marley had performed a similar concert in an attempt to ease mounting political tensions. He survived an assassination attempt on December 3 to play the Smile Jamaica concert to a packed crowd the very next night (Miller 115).

With high rates of unemployment, the drug trade has proved more lucrative and stable than legitimate exports of sugar, bananas and bauxite alumina (“Trouble in Paradise” par. 7). Harrison explains that the drug trade provides a marginal subsistence for those who would otherwise go unemployed. Jamaica has played a prominent role in the marijuana trade since the 1960s. When Prime Minister Seaga agreed to the CBI, he acquiesced to U.S. pressure to reduce marijuana as a major crop; however, the initiative failed to offer other legal economic alternatives (Harrison 5). As a result of the declining marijuana trade, Jamaica turned to trafficking cocaine (which was allegedly introduced to the island by Seaga during the 1980 election campaign). Because it is highly addictive, the trade in cocaine is notoriously more dangerous than the trade in marijuana.

Today, the guns given to the street gangs by politicians in the 1980 campaign are outside of government control and are used with drug trafficking (6). The result has been a nightmare. Today, Jamaica has one of the world’s highest murder rates, alongside South Africa and Colombia, as “young gangs high on crack cocaine and armed with M-16s and AK-47s fight to kill (Biswas par. 22). Between 1999 and 2001, there were more than 2,760 murders in Jamaica, which translates to a homicide rate of around forty murders per 100,000 citizens (Clarke 420). Many schools are being closed down because of the rising gang violence; in Kingston, the number of students attending school has dropped forty percent (Biswas par. 20).

If reggae music is a reflection of the Rastafarian faith, then the Rastafarian faith suffered amidst the declining economy and increasing violence of the 1980s. In the mid 1980s and through the early ‘90s, Jamaican music saw a decline in Rastafarian-inspired protest music and an increase in slack music, or songs featuring lyrics of graphic sexuality, gangster life, gunplay, and violence. Price explains, “the themes in Jamaican popular music during the 1980s were the

antithesis of a critique of capitalism, inequality, and poverty. Instead these artists were concerned with money—making lots of it” (24). This led the Jamaican Police Commissioner to outlaw gun lyrics in 1994, claiming these lyrics were creating an atmosphere of violence and undermining the authority of the police (Wexler par. 5). Thus, even though more people than ever were aware of the Rastafarian theodicy, few grasped the intricacies of the ideology and identity. The 1980s were a period of refocusing for the Rastafarian movement. The numbers of true believers declined, reducing the Rastafarian ranks to the faithful (21).

However, in 1994, Rastafarian reggae star Buju Banton released the song “Murderer,” which boasted anti-gun lyrics. Like Garvey, Banton roots his argument in specific biblical imagery. Banton directly addresses murderers, singing, “Murderer!/Blood is on your shoulders.” He continues, “Yes, you can hide from man but not your conscience/You eat the bread of sorrow drink the wine of violence/Allow yourself to be conquered by the serpent/why did you disobey the first commandment?” (See Appendix A). “Murderer” hit number one on the reggae charts in Kingston, New York, and London and sparked a change in reggae from slackness back to the conscious music so popular in the 1960s and ‘70s (Wexler par. 12). The resurgence of a Rasta-influenced music scene reflects a spiritual reawakening in Jamaica during a time of great trial. Carlene J. Edie, Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst explains that, as a result of the CBI’s devastating structural adjustment program, ““Many [Jamaican] people are seeking religious options now, because the political parties seem to have failed everybody”” (par. 7). A return to protest music by prominent artists like Capelton, Sizzla, and Bob Marley’s sons Damian and Ziggy Marley reflect the reawakening of the Rastafarian movement in Jamaica.

In the song “Back to My Roots,” Steel Pulse attributes the decline in protest music to an ingestion of Babylon values. They explain, “We took that commercial road/
Searching for some fame and gold/And gained the whole wide world/And almost lost our souls./
Some say we should have lead the way/Take it over from Bob Marley/Got brainwashed by the
system yeah/What a heavy price we paid.” Steel Pulse, speaking both for themselves and for reggae artists in general, promising the people that reggae will return to singing songs protest music: “So here's my promise to everyone/I'll serve the sufferers from this day on” (See Appendix A). The song is the reggae artists’ apology to the people for having neglected the Rastafarian message during a time when it was needed most. The song reflects the fact that reggae is a way to spread the Rastafarian message and, in doing so, is a vehicle of social change.

The Rastafarian Theodicy: A Source of Empowerment or an Opiate?

The Rastafarians have created a theodicy for black Jamaicans who remain shackled in ghettos suffering from poverty, unemployment, and devastating violence. The Rastafarian theodicy has identified the Babylonian system as the cause of continued oppression. Yet rather than maintaining the social order, the Rastafarian theodicy directly opposes it and poses an alternative vision for society. The effectiveness of the Rastafarian theodicy in creating social change is debatable. Some would argue that the theodicy is simply a coping mechanism that has not created liberation. Nevertheless, the problems facing Jamaica are much larger than any religious theodicy can change: the Jamaican economy is devastated by U.S.-backed IMF’s structural adjustment program, and this has created a domino effect of rising unemployment, poverty rates, and violent crime. Indeed, the Rastafarian theodicy has provided strength for the disenfranchised and articulated a vision for peace. Thus, at a microcosmic reality, the Rastafarian theodicy is contesting a macrocosmic reality.

Appendix A

1. “Not King James Version” by Steel Pulse

(Chorus)

A dis ya version
A no King James version
Cause out of Africa
Came the Garden of Eden

Hidden from me I was never told
Ancient prophets black and gold
Like Daniel, King David and Abraham
Israel were all black men
I don't wanna lose you

Japhet tried his best to erase
The godly parts we played
I says he came and took
And never mention in his book... so

Chorus

In Esau's chapter of history
So little mention of you and me
We rulers of kingdoms and dynasties
Explored this Earth for centuries
I don't wanna lose ya
Phoenicians, Egyptians and the Moors
Built civilisation, that's for sure
Creators of the alphabet
While the West illiterate..yeh

Chorus

African heritage
I don't wanna lose ya
Oh, no

Slavery came and took its toll
In the name of John Bull Dog
Said we turned our backs on God
Lost the powers that we had
Now our backs against the wall
Ask ourselves about the fall
Rise rise rise

Hold on to your culture
Chorus

2. “Slavery Days” by Burning Spear

Do you remember the days of slav'ry?
Do you remember the days of slav'ry ?
Do you remember the days of slav'ry ?

And how they beat us
And how they worked us so hard
And how they used us
Till they refuse us
Do you remember the days of slav'ry?

Mm, And a big fat bull
Mm, We usually pull it ev'rywhere
Mm, We must pull it
Mm, With shackles around our necks,
Mm, And I can see it all no more
Do you remember the days of slav'ry?

Some of us survive,
Show ing them that we are still a live
Do you remember the days of slav'ry?
History can recall, History can recall
History can recall the days of slav'ry
Oh slav'ry day

3. “Slave Master” by Gregory Isaacs

No competition, I make you my decision, yeah

Everytime I hear the music and I make a dip, a dip
Slave master comes around and spank I with his whip, the whip
But if I don't get my desire
Then I'll set the plantations in fire
My temperature is getting much higher
Got to get what I require

'Cause everytime we do the work sometimes we are hurt, oh yeah
Boss never do a thing but hold on to his girth
But if I don't get my desire
Then I'll set the plantations in fire
My temperature is getting much higher
Got to get what I require

Everytime I hear the music and I move my hip, my hip
Slave master comes around and spank I with his whip, a whip
Slave master, I'm the shepherd you're my pastor
Say you rock ?? so long we make the work
And if I don't get my desire
Then I'll set the station on fire
My temperature is getting much higher
Got to get what I require

But if I don't get my desire
Then I set the stations in fire
My temperature is getting much higher
Got to get what I require

4. "African" by Peter Tosh

Don't care where you come from
As long as you're a black man
You're an African
(CHORUS)
No mind your nationality
You have got the identity of an African

'Cause if you come from Clarendon
And if you come from Portland
And if you come from Westmoreland
You're an African

Chorus

'Cause if you come Trinidad
And if you come from Nassau
And if you come from Cuba
You're an African

CHORUS
No mind your complexion
There is no rejection
You're an African

'Cause if your plexion
High, high, high
If your complexion low, low, low
And if your plexion in between
You're an African

CHORUS

No mind denomination
That is only segregation
You're an African

'Cause if you go to the Catholic
And if you go to the Methodist
And if you go to the Church of Gods
You're an African

CHORUS

No mind your nationality
You have got the identity of an African

'Cause if you come from Brixton
And if you come from Weesday
And if you come from Wingstead
And if you come from France
...Brooklyn
...Queens
...Manhattan
...Canada
...Miami
...Switzerland
...Germany
...Russia
...Taiwan
here

5. "Marcus Garvey" by Burning Spear

Marcus Garvey's words come to pass
Marcus Garvey's words come to pass

Can't get no food to eat,
Can't get no money to spend, wo-oo-oo
Can't get no food to eat,
Can't get no money to spend, wo-oo-oo

Come little one and let me do what I can do for you
And you and you alone
Come, little, one, wo-oo-oo
Let me do what I can do for you and you alone

Hw who knows the right thing

And do it not
 Shall be spanked with many stripes
 Weeping and wailing and moaning
 You've got yourself to blame, I tell you.
 Do right do right do right do right do right,
 Tell you to do right, wo-oo-oo
 Beg you to do right, wo-oo-oo

Where is Bagawire, he's nowhere to be found
 He can't be found
 First betrayer who gave away Marcus Garvey
 Son of Satan, First prophesy,
 Catch them, Garvey old
 Catch them, Garvey, catch them woo-oo-oo
 Hold them Marcus, hold them, woo-oo-oo
 Marcus Garvey, Marcus woo-oo-oo

6. "No White God" by Sizzla

Don't seduce to reduce mi knowledge,
 Because I will always break those barriers and break down bondage
 Oh Lord God Almighty grand me all privilege
 You see I have overcome all the wicked,
 Them and them false things

(Chorus)
 I have no white god
 Don't teach me anything wrong
 Could the white god save me from white man oppression?
 I have no white god it's just a Black Messiah,
 If a white god ah bless you him no bless Sizz

I want what is rightfully mine
 So me nah stay mute
 Your system is designed to distract me from the truth
 But it will come to pass unknown not to the youths
 In the process of time we will know the truth
 You give me white god to praise in slavery
 The doctrine follow on in the black community
 The black Messiah you try to shield with fantasy,
 But we nah guh mek you destroy the love with luxury
 That's why,
 Have to go through I have no place in Babylon
 As I go they make mi victim to their unjust action oh God
 I won't be conquered in this region oh yes
 I have to stand and go strong

Chorus

Ooh mi face con thought with anger cause that no right
 How could all things good and valuable must be white?
 What about the black that did the most in life?
 You and you white supremacy want treat me as you
 You change the version of the Bible, who you a trick?
 Membra all who do evil won't go unpunished
 Bear your iniquity you have no wisdom nor wit
 All evilous people shall sink in a a

Chorus (x2)

Cause when I and I ah trod its like Moses with the rod
 With one strong backative Almighty Father God
 He's the only second party that Sizzla have
 Fi fuide mi through the darkness weh the heathen dodge
 There wasn't any doubt but a voice yah made it shout,
 Behold!
 Jah Jah youth complete the route

Chorus

7. "Move out a Babylon, Rastaman" by Johnny Clarke

(Chorus)

Move out a Babylon, Rastaman
 And leave all the wicked men
 Only righteous men shall prosper
 In the kingdom of Jah the Almighty

8. "Jah Live" by Bob Marley

(Chorus)

Jah live, children, ye-ah!
 Jah - Jah live, children, yeah!
 Jah live, children, ye-ah!
 Jah - Jah live, children, yeah!

The truth is an offence,
 But not a sin.
 Is he who laugh last,
 Children, is he who win.
 Is a foolish dog
 Bark at a flying bird.

One sheep a-must learn, children,
To respect the shepherd.

Chorus

Fools say in their heart,
"Rasta, your god is dead!"
But I'n'I know:
Jah - Jah Dread;
It shall be Dreader Dread.

Chorus

Let Jah arise
Now that the enemies are scattered!
Let Jah arise:
The enemies - the enemies are scattered.

Chorus

9. "Bush Doctor" by Peter Tosh

Warning!
Warning! The Surgeon General warns
Cigarette smoking is dangerous, dangerous
Hazard to your health
Does that mean anything to you

To legalize marijuana
Right here in Jamaica
I'm say it cure glaucoma
I man a de Bush Doctor

So there'll be
No more smokin and feelin tense
When I see them a come
I don't have to jump no fence

Legalize marijuana
Down here in Jamaica
Only cure for asthma
I man a de Minister(of the Herb)

So there'll be no more
Police brutality
No more disrespect

For humanity

Legalize marijuana
Down here in Jamaica
It can build up your failing economy
Eliminate the slavish mentality

There'll be no more
Illegal humiliation
And no more police
Interrogation

Legalize marijuana
Down here in sweet Jamaica
Only cure for glaucoma
I man a de Bush Doctor

So there be
No more need to smoke and hide
When you know you're takin
Illegal ride

Legalize marijuana
Down here in Jamaica
It the only cure for glaucoma
I man a de Minister

10. "Rally Round the Flag" by Steel Pulse

(Chorus)
Rally round the flag
Rally round the red
Gold black and green

Marcus say sir Marcus say
Red for the blood
That flowed like the river
Marcus say sir Marcus say
Green for the land Africa
Marcus say
Yellow for the gold
That they stole
Marcus say
Black for the people
It was looted from

They took us away captivity captivity
 Required from us a song
 Right now man say repatriate repatriate
 I and I patience have now long time gone
 Father's mothers sons daughters every one
 Four hundred million strong
 Ethiopia stretch forth her hand
 Closer to God we Africans
 Closer to God we can
 In our hearts is Mount Zion
 Now you know seek the Lion
 How can we sing in a strange land
 Don't want to sing in a strange land no
 Liberation true democracy
 One God one aim one destiny

Chorus

Rally round the flag
 Remember when we used to dress like kings
 Conqueror of land conqueror of seas
 Civilization far moved from caves
 Oppressor man live deh
 I curse that day
 The day they made us slaves I say

How can we sing in a strange land
 Don't want to sing in a strange land
 Liberation true democracy
 One God one aim one destiny

Chorus

Rally round the flag
 Red gold black and green
 A bright shining star--Africa
 Catch star liner right now--Africa
 A history no more a mystery--Africa
 Respect and authority--Africa
 Climb ye the heights of humanity
 Rally come rally rally come rally

11. "War" by Bob Marley

Until the philosophy which hold one race superior
 And another

Inferior
Is finally
And permanently
Discredited
And abandoned -
Everywhere is war -
Me say war.

That until there no longer
First class and second class citizens of any nation
Until the colour of a man's skin
Is of no more significance than the colour of his eyes -
Me say war.

That until the basic human rights
Are equally guaranteed to all,
Without regard to race -
Dis a war.

That until that day
The dream of lasting peace,
World citizenship
Rule of international morality
Will remain in but a fleeting illusion to be pursued,
But never attained -
Now everywhere is war - war.

And until the ignoble and unhappy regimes
that hold our brothers in Angola,
In Mozambique,
South Africa
Sub-human bondage
Have been toppled,
Utterly destroyed -
Well, everywhere is war -
Me say war.

War in the east,
War in the west,
War up north,
War down south -
War - war -
Rumours of war.
And until that day,
The African continent
Will not know peace,

We Africans will fight - we find it necessary -
And we know we shall win
As we are confident
In the victory

Of good over evil -
Good over evil, yeah!
Good over evil -
Good over evil, yeah!
Good over evil -
Good over evil, yeah!

12. "Police and Thieves" by Junior Murvin

(Chorus)
Police and thieves in the streets
Oh yeah!
Scaring the nation with their guns and ammunition
(Repeat)

13. "How Do You Feel?" by Anthony B

It's the question
To the big man sitting up on their chair
What are you doing for the poor across a people that livin down here
Is a question

(Chorus)
How do you feel?
To see the suffering in the streets
Kids go into bed hungry
With no food to eat
How do you feel?
Violence and crime are increased
Jamaica is a one love country
But still there's no peace

Nah see dung anthon papa
When mi look pon mi son and mi daughta
Nah they are outside a beg wata
Dem mi a victim mi a go ???
Life serious a no time fi di laugha
Anthony b di who babylon afta
One tile like we inna pasta
Is a question to all slave masta

Chorus

Crime rate too high
 And dem waan think get low
 But still dem pass di ghetto youth like dem dem nuh know
 Why so much innocent blood a float
 He come to your window gunman through your door
 Where is the better politician
 Not even ??? council and mi see fi this division
 Every time the leaders go round
 That send mi hear the world opposition

Chorus (x2)

Babylon raze still dem raze deh
 And a too you relax
 My time are siddung inna yuh bed
 Di youth dem dung inna di ghetto with di led
 Yuh cyaan stop di violence from escalate
 And yuh cyaan trick di ghetto youth like ???
 How much more a mi black sista yah go rape
 And then yuh put up di yellow tape

Chorus

14. “Congress Man” by Groundation

(Chorus)

Congress man
 Let us stop exploiting our children
 To all the gangsta man
 I beg you stop harassing our women too

You seal yourself behind dem walls
 Thinking nothing could ever get to you
 You don't even care about the children
 Lootin' and shootin' dem brothers and sisters down
 Meanwhile our country is bombing
 Somewhere in the middle of Afghanistan
 And they don't even care about the people
 Who suffering and dying inna Oakland
 Well that's not I plan

Chorus

You hide yourself behind your dollar

Which one day crumbles down to the ground?
You don't seem to care about the youth man
As you glorifying the murderer you know
Today we're living in illusion
Between reality and what is on MTV
You don't even listen to the prophet saying
"Half the story has not yet been told"

Chorus

As the world goes down in flames
No the youth men are not to blame
To all evil workers underneath the sun
Your time is done; your time is done (x 2)
Your time is done, your time is done

15. "Murderer" by Buju Banton

(Chorus)
Murderer !
Blood is on your shoulders
Kill I today you cannot kill I tomorrow
Murder !
Your insides must be hollow
How does it feel to take the life of another

Repeat Chorus

Yes, you can hide from man but not your conscience
You eat the bread of sorrow drink the wine of violence
Allow yourself to be conquered by the serpent
Why did you disobey the first commandment
Walk through the valley I feel no pestilence
God is my witness and he is my evidence
Lift up mine eyes from whence cometh help
You coulda never escape this judgement

Chorus

I tell you, all men are created equal
But behind the trigger it's a different sequel
Some are murdering people to collect medals
Stop committing dirty acts for the high officials
You could wash your hands until you can't wash them any more
It is like an epidemic and you won't find a cure
Upper class you could be rich, middle class whether you are poor

Only the righteous won't feel insecure
Have you ever thought about your skill getting bored

Chorus

Drinking sulphur bitters won't bitter like your end
Only God can help you, no family or friend
Don't let the curse be upon your children's children
Abdenigo, Shadreck, Meshek, Daniel in the Eden
Jonah in the whale's belly, but he was never condemned
Job with the leprosy, and he still reached heaven
He will do for you everything He has done for them.

Chorus

16. “Back to My Roots” by Steel Pulse

Woe Na Na Na
Hey Yeh Yeh Oh Yeh
This is to whom it may concern
Raggamuffin rastaman return
Says we all got a lesson to learn
This is the reason that

I'm back to my roots
Back to my roots
I'm back to my roots

We took that commercial road
Searching for some fame and gold
And gained the whole wide world
And almost lost our souls

Some say we should have lead the way
Take it over from Bob Marley
Got brainwashed by the system yeah
What a heavy price we paid

It's time to go back
The way we was
Reggae Raggamuffin rub-a-dub
Back to my roots
Back to my roots
Back to my roots
There ain't no turning back
We pon de culture track

Some a seh that we gone soft
Whatever happened to the pulse so hard
They use to take a militant stance
Now all we're hearing is a song and a dance

Well we tried all the pop and jive
To keep the band and the music alive
So here's my promise to everyone
I'll serve the sufferers from this day on

It's time to go back to the way we was
Reggae Raggamuffin rub-a-dub

Back to my roots
Back to my roots

It's time to go back to the way we was
Reggae Raggamuffin rub-a-dub

Back to my roots
Back to my roots

This is to whom it may concern
Raggamuffin rastaman return
Says we all got a lesson to learn
Help I and I mek babylon burn yah!
Back to my roots
There ain't no turning back
We pon de culture track

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