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Stephen A. King

Eastern Illinois University, saking@eiu.edu

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The Co-optation of a “Revolution”: Rastafari, Reggae, and the Rhetoric of Social Control

Stephen A. King

In the 1970s, reggae’s international popularity increased the visibility of the Rastafarian movement around the world. It can be argued that while the international popularity of reggae apparently enhanced the Rastafarians’ cultural identity in Jamaica, much of that legitimacy was illusory.¹ While the Rastafarians played a significant role in promoting Black Pride and rehabilitating Jamaica’s African heritage, Jamaica’s neocolonial power structure remained essentially unchanged. Furthermore, the Rastafarians failed to achieve many of their more specific policy goals, including repatriation to Africa and the legalization of marijuana.

KEYWORDS Jamaica, Rastafarian movement, reggae, rhetoric, social control, legitimization.

The world-wide fame that reggae artists such as Bob Marley was bringing to Jamaica and Rastafari, was bringing about a Rastafari Revolution in Jamaica (Lee, 1981, p. 67) . From slick tourist promotional materials to airline commercials, the enchanting sounds of reggae and the image of a smiling “Rastaman” beckon tourists from around the world to Jamaica’s tourist areas. Over the years, the Jamaican government, the Jamaican Tourist Board (JTB) , and local entrepreneurs have promoted reggae music and the exotic Rastafarian movement as the official culture of the island. In 1982, for example, the JTB, with the aid of American producer Barr Fey, put together a vacation concert package that lured over 46,000 visitors to Jamaica (Fergusson & George, 1983) . While in Jamaica, tourists are encouraged to visit several important reggae tourist locations, including the “Bob Marley Museum”— the late reggae star’s house in Kingston—complete with a gift shop, and a restaurant serving traditional Rastafarian foods and juices. Even Jamaica’s most popular reggae festival, Reggae Sunsplash, is supported by the government because that is “where local Jamaican stall holders try to hustle mighty dollars from the hands of enchanted American tourists” (Cosgrove, 1989, p. 46) .

Yet, for many years, the Jamaican government and its supporters viewed the Rastafarians and Jamaica’s popular music as threats to national security. Emerging from Jamaica’s poorest Black communities in 1930, the Rastafarian movement openly deⓈed British colonial rule in Jamaica. Pledging loyalty to the emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie, and demanding repatriation to Africa, the Rastafarians “challenge[d] not only the Caribbean but the entire Western World to come to terms with the history of slavery, the reality of white racism and the permanent thrust for dignity and self-respect by black people” (Campbell, 1987, p. 1) . During

this time, the Rastafarians continued to challenge Jamaica's colonial society by growing locks, an Ethiopian-inspired hairstyle, smoking marijuana, and proudly displaying the colors of the Ethiopian flag. While ridiculed by Jamaica's wider society, the Rastafarian's message of redemption and defiance increasingly gained support from Jamaica's lower classes.

By the late 1950s, the Rastafarians began to explore a new mode of political expression, popular music. Musical experiments involving Rastafarian musicians and musicians associated with a popular form of music known as "ska" began to forge a relationship between the Rastafarian movement and Jamaica's popular music. Over the years, Jamaica's popular music underwent musical and lyrical changes, becoming more political and revolutionary in tone. By the late 1960s, reggae embodied this musical evolution, viewed by many as "the very expression of the historical experience of the Jamaican working class, unemployed and peasants" (Johnson, 1976, p. 589). As a result, the popular music of Jamaica became more than a mode of entertainment; it became perhaps the chief medium of political and social commentary and, ultimately, a threat to the government.

The Jamaican government and its supporters employed a variety of strategies to "control" the movement and its music. Portraying Rastafarians as both lazy and violent, Jamaica's national newspaper, *The Daily Gleaner*, led the way in attempting to discredit the Rastafarians as a threat to national unity and progress. At the same time, Jamaica's security forces arrested members of the movement and the government deported Rastafarian "leaders." The Jamaican government and its supporters also censored and banned Jamaica's popular music. In the early 1960s, some ska songs, an early form of reggae, were banned because the music reflected the class status of poor Blacks (Hylton, 1975, p. 27). In 1964, the ska song, "Carry Go Bring Come," was banned from Jamaican radio for criticizing Jamaican Labour Party (JLP) Prime Minister Alexander Bustamante (Kaufman, 1987, p. 9). During the 1972 national political election, the JLP banned several "anti-JLP" reggae songs, including the Wailers' "Small Axe" (Waters, 1985, p. 102). Despite these efforts, however, the movement and the music continued to gain popularity and political influence throughout the 1960s.

The election of People's National Party (PNP) candidate Michael Manley as Jamaica's new prime minister in 1972 was a significant turning point in Jamaica's affiliation with the Rastafarian movement. Reflecting Manley's dream to turn Jamaica into a democratic socialist nation, the Prime Minister hired reggae musicians to play at political rallies and openly expressed sympathy for the Rastafarians. More importantly, reggae's international popularity during the 1970s increased the visibility and popularity of the movement around the world. As the most visible and prominent advertiser for the movement, reggae propelled "the Rasta[farian] cosmology into the middle of the planet's cultural arenas" (Davis & Simon, 1979, p. 63). As a result, a curious, often perplexed international media spotlighted this "new" religious "cult" (Davis & Simon, 1979, 1982; Salvo & Salvo, 1974), while a new generation of academic scholars approached the Rastafarians

more sympathetically (Brown, 1979 ; Nettleford, 1972 ; Owens, 1976 ; Yawney, 1976) .

The growing international popularity of reggae music no doubt played a major role in changing attitudes toward the Rastafarian movement. For example, Jamaica's dominant classes began reevaluation of their negative images of the movement. As a result, many Jamaicans "perceived Rastafarians as having made a positive contribution to Jamaican culture" (Waters, 1985, p. 176) . Observing these changes, Callam (1980) concluded that for the first time in Jamaica's history, Rastafari had become "part of the taken-for-granted landscape" (p. 43) . de Albuquerque (1979) believed the Rastafarians were as Jamaican as "ackee and salt fish, the national dish of Jamaica" (p. 22) . Garrison's (1976) claim that the movement had become accepted in all "corners of the society," while perhaps a bit exaggerated, contained at least a measure of truth (p. 46) .

In response to the growing popularity of reggae, Rastafarian symbols increasingly became integrated into mainstream Jamaican society, even though the movement achieved few of its specific policy goals. In short, the Jamaican ruling class did not capitulate to the demands of the Rastafarian movement. Instead it tried to co-opt the cultural symbols of Rastafari and reggae music as authentic reflections of Jamaican society. The successful co-optation of Rastafari signalled the movement's transition from posing as an internal threat to becoming one of Jamaica's best-known tourist attractions.

In the first section of this essay, I provide a brief, yet comprehensive, overview of the scholarship on the rhetoric of social control. In general, scholars have failed to provide a clear and consistent definition of social control and often use different labels to categorize identical control strategies. In the second section of this essay, I examine how the Jamaican government and its supporters employed a number of "adjustment" tactics that led to the eventual "co-optation" of the Rastafarian movement. Manley hired reggae musicians to play at political rallies, while Jamaica's national newspaper, *The Daily Gleaner*, promoted reggae music and highlighted the Rastafarian movement's positive contributions to Jamaican society. In the third section of this essay, I argue that while the international popularity of reggae apparently enhanced the Rastafarian's cultural identity in Jamaica, much of that legitimacy was illusory.

The conclusion of this essay will elaborate on the contributions of this research to the study of social movements and the rhetoric of social control. In particular, this essay suggests that since the study of social movements has been restricted, for the most part, to North America and European case studies, the existing model of social control does not accurately reflect the colonial experience of many developing countries. Moreover, this essay offers some new insights into co-optation, a control tactic often ignored by social movement scholars. This study suggests that although music

may be an effective medium for popularizing a social movement, it may make movements more vulnerable to co-optation.

The Rhetoric of Social Control

Not surprisingly, most social movement scholars have focused primarily on how social movements advocate social change (Burgess, 1968 ; Andrews, 1969 ; Heath, 1973 ; Smith & Windes, 1975 ; Cathcart, 1978) . Consequently, far fewer studies have examined how establishments control or “repel any attack from the outside” (Bowers, Ochs, & Jensen, 1993, p. 8) . Furthermore, rhetoricians, sociologists, and political scientists have failed to conceptualize a precise definition for the term “social control.” In an early study on social agitation and control, Smelser (1962) broadly defined social control as all efforts used to avert social protest. In contrast, Gamson (1968) believed it was important to distinguish the term “social control” from “outcome modifications.” Social control measures prevent the protest group from successfully exercising influence on authorities. In contrast, authorities who employ the strategy of outcome modifications appease a social movement in order to prevent more potentially damaging outcomes. As a result, social movements may “falter on partial success, winning small victories which, while leaving basic dissatisfactions untouched, hamper the members in their ability to mobilize resources for further influence” (Gamson, 1968, p. 115) .

Dissatisfied with prior attempts to define social control, Wilson (1977) argued that the term “social control” should be limited to the interplay between social control agents and dissenters. In making the case, Wilson asserted that social control agents and the target group are two distinct groups. According to Wilson, the target group is the establishment policymakers whom the protest group is trying to win over. However, the target group is not the instrument of social control. Instead, the military, the police force, or the Internal Revenue Service often acts as the social control agent for the target group (Wilson, 1977 ; Simons, Mechling & Schreier, 1984) . In other situations, however, the target group and social control agents may work independent of each other because “there are large areas within any government bureaucracy for agents of social control to play autonomous roles” (Wilson, 1977, p. 471) . Unlike the target group, control agents actively criminalize dissenters or seek to claim “revenge, restitution and/or deterrence” against protestors who committed a “perceived infraction of a norm” (Wilson, 1977, p. 470). Critics charged that Wilson’s definition is too limiting, believing instead that both target groups and control agents “prevent, suppress, or minimize the effects of bottom-up efforts in behalf of a cause” (Simons et al., 1984, p. 831) . Recently, rhetorical scholars have favored a more general definition for social control (Stewart, Smith, & Denton, 1989, 1993 ; Bowers et al., 1993) .

Despite disagreeing on a precise definition for social control, scholars have identified a number of social control strategies. Yet, scholars often use different names for the same control strategy (Simons et al., 1984) . For example, two recently published textbooks on the subject, *The Rhetoric of Agitation and Control*

and Persuasion and Social Movements, use different labels to categorize identical strategies.² Yet, as the most recent synthesis of control strategies, Stewart, Smith, and Denton's (1994) classification system provides an appropriate starting point for cataloging these strategies.

Responding to the agitation of a social movement, "establishments" tend to Resort first to "evasion," which involves, in effect, pretending that the social movement "does not exist or that it is too insignificant to recognize" (Stewart et al., 1993, p. 149 ; Oberschall, 1973) . Establishments can postpone action (Lipsky, 1968), appear constrained to grant protest goals (Lipsky) , control or change the social or political agenda (Simons, 1976) , lie and control information (Wise, 1973) , deny protestors the physical means of protest (Bowers, et al., 1993) , deny protestors access to the media (Simons et al., 1984) , and create "dead-end" channels of influence (Wolfe, 1970 ; Simons, 1976) . For example, during the 1960s, several poor, Black communities in Baltimore waged a war on poverty, challenging the dominant White majority who controlled the city's political structure (Bachrach & Baratz, 1970) . In order to thwart the demands of the protestors, Baltimore's political establishment employed a standard evasion tactic, changing the political agenda. The protestors insisted that the city government must invest the necessary time and resources to address Baltimore's impoverished areas. In response, Baltimore's political establishment changed the political agenda to "improve the absolute well-being of the city's entire population, not to effect a redistribution of values in favor of the poverty-stricken blacks" (p. 73) .

The second strategy is called "counterpersuasion." In counterpersuasion, governments and their surrogates seek to discredit movement leaders or to show their ideas are "ill-advised and lack merit" (Stewart et al., 1993, p. 150) . Counterpersuasion may be part of a larger rhetorical matrix called "administrative rhetoric," or the establishment's attempt to undermine a social movement's ideas and influence (Windt, 1982) . A number of counterpersuasion tactics have been identified, including ridicule (King, 1976) , discrediting protest leaders and organizations (Lipsky, 1968 ; King, 1987) , appealing to unity by "crying anarchy" (King, 1976) , and linguistic control (Fanon, 1968 ; King, 1976 ; Simons, 1976) . In a study on the Equal Rights Association, Martha Solomon (1978) argued that the STOP-ERA political campaign employed the tactic of ridicule to paint "an unappealing picture of the feminists' physical appearance and nature" (p. 47) . Portrayed in "devil" terms, ERA supporters were labeled "anti-male," "arrogant," and "abortive." In contrast, ERA opponents were characterized within the ideological framework of the "Positive Woman"—physically attractive, intelligent, and emotionally fulfilled (p. 51) .

When milder strategies prove unsuccessful in counteracting the agitation of a social movement, establishments typically resort to a strategy of "coercion." This strategy may remain largely rhetorical, what Stewart, Smith, and Denton refer to as "coercive persuasion" (1993) . Simons (1972, 1976) coined the term "coercive persuasion" because he believed "elements of persuasion and inducement or

persuasion and constraint are generally manifested in the same act” (1976, p. 253) . For example, police officers combine physical and verbal intimidation to control deviance before a social disturbance breaks out (Oberschall, 1973, pp. 248–249) .

If “coercion persuasion” fails, the conflict can escalate to more physical tactics, such as restrictive legislation, physically attacking demonstrators, firebombing homes, imprisonment, or even assassination. Oberschall (1973) observed that during this conflictual stage “the authorities seek to destroy the organization of the opposition, arrest their leaders, and even set up stooges that allegedly speak for the population from which the protestors are drawn” (p. 244) . In a comprehensive study of how riot commissions interpret and investigate riots, Platt (1971) reported that an estimated 34 people died and over 4,000 were arrested during the 1965 Watts riots. According to Platt, a jury later discovered that the Los Angeles Police Department and the National Guard were responsible for 23 of the 26 “justified” murders. When all strategies have failed, an establishment may employ the “adjustment” strategy, which “involves making some concessions to a social movement while not accepting the movement’s demands or goals” (Stewart et al., 1993, p. 155) . Adjustment tactics can encompass “symbolic” concessions (Lipsky, 1968 ; Platt, 1971) , such as Manley’s public praise of the Rastafarian movement, or establishments might sacrifice some of their own personnel if a “social movement focuses its agitation and hatred upon a single individual or unit” (Stewart et al., 1993, p. 155) . Elites can use economic rewards to satisfy and stratify a protest group (Oberschall, 1973) or establish committees to investigate issues (Lipsky, 1968 ; Bachrach & Baratz, 1970) . If a social movement’s agitation becomes especially intense, the establishment might even incorporate movement leaders and sympathizers into the establishment by appointing them to low-level decision-making positions (Stewart et al., 1993 ; Bachrach & Baratz, 1970) . Or the establishment might incorporate parts of the dissent ideology into the mainstream, entering into a loose confederation with the social movement (Bowers et al., 1993) .

Yet, cooperation with a dissent group “may lead to outright co-optation of the cause” or a literal takeover of the movement by elements of the mainstream establishment (Stewart et al., 1993, p. 156) . Gamson (1968) suggested that establishments use the co-optation strategy when prior control strategies were unsuccessful. Social movements that are co-opted are often “subject to the rewards and punishments that the organization bestows” (King, 1976, p. 132) . In fact, according to Gamson, “new rewards lie ahead if they show themselves to be amenable to some degree of control” (p. 135) .

The final strategy, capitulation, occurs when the social movement’s ideas, policies, and personnel “replace those of the target institution” (Bowers et al., 1993, p. 63) . In the case of the Rastafarian movement, the Jamaican government did not capitulate to the demands of the Rastafarian movement. Instead, the Jamaican government and its supporters co-opted the cultural symbols of Rastafari and reggae music as authentic reflections of Jamaican society.

The Rhetoric of Co-optation

Many of the apparent concessions of the Jamaican establishment to the growing popularity of reggae music in the 1970s might be seen as examples of a strategy of “control” that Stewart, Smith, and Denton have labelled “adjustment.” Yet, when one considers all the “adjustments” made by the Jamaican political and cultural establishment, as well as the significance of some of those supposed “adjustments,” one can argue that the Jamaican ruling class did indeed “co-opt” the Rastafarian movement, embracing its symbolism while deflecting its most substantive religious and political doctrines. This is not to say that Jamaican politicians, journalists, educators, and mainstream musicians all conspired to co-opt the movement, nor is it to say that the co-optation was ever complete. It is to say, however, that even after Jamaica apparently embraced Rastafari as a “cultural treasure,” Rastafarians remained trapped at the bottom of a neocolonial social structure, and that most of their religious and political demands were rejected.

It was during the 1972 national campaign that PNP candidate Michael Manley portended the eventual co-optation of reggae music and the Rastafarian movement. More than any other Jamaican politician, Manley understood that the exploitation of reggae music was an effective method of identifying with Jamaica’s younger voters and dissident groups. Waters (1985) noted the 1972 national campaign was distinguished by the “systematic and deliberate use of reggae music” (p. 137). This tactic of inviting reggae musicians to participate in political rallies might be viewed as an example of incorporating movement personnel into “institutional bodies” (Stewart et al., 1993, p. 156).

Thus, the PNP in 1971 hired reggae musician Clancy Eccles to write what would become two of the PNP’s most heralded campaign songs, “Rod of Correction” and “Power to the People” (Waters, 1985). With Eccles at the helm, the PNP sponsored a weekly musical political bandwagon. Travelling from the urban center of Kingston to the tourist mecca of Negril, the bandwagon featured eight of the top 25 reggae musicians of 1971 (Waters, 1985). Excited by the prospect of mass exposure, reggae stars enthusiastically performed songs earlier banned by the JLP.

Even after Manley was elected as Jamaica’s new prime minister, he continued to sponsor and promote reggae music. In a 1973 interview with the Jamaica Journal, Manley still praised reggae music despite the music’s growing criticism of his economic policies :

There are all sorts of songs that are directed against my Government, or directed against things for which my Government—as you call it—is blamed. If you take, for instance, you know . . . the problem of the cost of living ; with this terrible world inflation—in which the whole world, naturally including Jamaica, is caught—there have been lots of songs protesting against that. And I think that’s entirely healthy. ...If anybody is going to protest against me, at least I want them to do it with style (McFarlane, 1973, p. 43).

During the same interview, Manley suggested that classical music conservatories should open their doors to tutor reggae musicians (p. 43) . Manley even wrote a preface to the book, *Reggae International*, underscoring reggae's "musical pulse" of "survival" (Davis & Simon, 1982, p. 11) . Despite Bob Marley's warning in "Revolution" to "never make a politician grant you a favor," Manley and the reggae star became friends (Bob Marley and the Wailers, 1975, track 9) . Manley often visited the reggae star at his home on Hope Road in Kingston (White, 1992) . During his two terms in office, Manley also seemed to pursue a second adjustment tactic : incorporating part of the dissent ideology. In particular, Manley sympathized publicly with the Rastafarian movement's long-standing goal of reviving Jamaica's African heritage. In a 1973 interview with the *Jamaica Journal*, Manley urged Jamaicans to tolerate Jamaica's multiethnic heritage. Although denying he was "hung up" on Africa, Manley understood that Africa was a "clearly important aspect of development [for Jamaica] " (McFarlene, 1973, p. 44) . A decade later, Manley (1982) continued to emphasize the importance of recapturing Jamaica's African roots : "We were convinced that it was only through the rediscovery of our heritage that we would evolve a culture that reflected the best in ourselves because it expressed pride in what we were and where we came from" (p. 57) .

While recalling Jamaica's African roots, Manley pledged to restructure Jamaica's system of social stratification. In his first book, *The Politics of Change*, Manley (1974) promised to change the "imbalances" of Jamaican society where "people with light complexions enjoy[ed] a psychological advantage and consciously or unconsciously enjoyed a greater 'weight' in society" (p. 57) . The Manley government, according to political scientist Anthony Payne (1988) , tried to build its political base on a "national identity which genuinely crosses racial boundaries" (p. 6) .

The Manley government and the Rastafarians also discovered common ground, at least rhetorically, in denouncing the wide gap between wealth and poverty in Jamaica. Manley surmised that his new form of government, democratic socialism, could best address the multiplying problems of unemployment, inadequate housing, and crime. He believed a new government in Jamaica should "dismantle the apparatus of privilege and replace it with a dynamic social organization designed to provide the channels of opportunity for talent regardless of origin" (Manley, 1974, p.75) . Manley sponsored numerous social programs in Jamaica, from the Special Employment Programme (SEP) , which employed poor Jamaicans in sanitation jobs, to Operation GROW, a program to help boost Jamaica's agricultural sector (Panton, 1993, pp. 43-44) . At first, at least, democratic socialism appealed to the Rastafarian's sense of economic justice. As Callam (1980) put it, "Rastas discovered they had something in common with the proponents of the democratic socialist philosophy" (p. 42) .

Manley employed a third adjustment tactic in agreeing to hold public meetings with Rastafarian "leaders" and groups. In 1973, Manley met with members of a

Rastafarian group, the Jah Rastafari Holy Coptic Church, to examine the movement's demand for land reform in Jamaica. During the meeting, Manley offered the group several thousand acres of land. According to Chevannes (1994), Manley wanted unemployed ghetto youths, who had come to identify with the Rastafarian movement, to become interested in agriculture. Manley believed if ghetto youths became involved in farming, they would be less likely to turn to crime (Chevannes). Other Rastafarian groups chided the Holy Coptic Church for conceding to the government, and the Coptics ultimately rejected Manley's offer because it would have seemed contrary to the movement's goal of repatriation (Chevannes). Nevertheless, Manley's willingness to meet with Rastafarian groups and to discuss their demands marked an important break from the past.

In March 1976, Manley met with another Rastafarian group, the Centralizing Committee of the Rastafarian Selassie I Divine Theocratic Government, to discuss the problem of police harassment ("Rastas Meet," 1976). Three months prior to the meeting, Manley told *The Daily Gleaner* that it was "wrong" for security forces to persecute those wearing locks. In the article, Manley was reported as saying, "the fact that a man has locks does not make him a wrong-doer" ("PM Says," 1976, p. 15). During the March meeting, according to the *Gleaner*, Manley expressed his desire to solve the problem of police intimidation, announcing that the PNP had "completely accepted the rights of the Rasta Brethren to the practices of their religion particularly referring to their style of dress and dreadlocks" ("Rastas Meet," 1976, p.9). Although some Rastafarian spokespersons complained three months after the meeting that Manley had not adequately responded to the issue ("Rastas Seek," 1976, p. 2), police harassment of the Rastafarians reportedly decreased by the late 1970s (Miles, 1978).

The growing international popularity of reggae undoubtedly played a crucial role in bringing about these "adjustments" in the official attitudes toward Rastafari. Chevannes (1990) recalled how Jamaica's colonial ruler, Great Britain, historically had downplayed Jamaica's African heritage and glorified Europe as the beacon of civilization. European cultures had been promoted in Jamaica as more pure, handsome, moral, and civilized than Black or African cultures. Even after independence, the JLP continued to reify themes of European superiority, dismissing Rastafari and reggae as "crude" throwbacks to a "dark" and "silent" Africa.

As the international community increasingly embraced reggae music as an important cultural form, however, middle-class criticism of reggae and Rastafari in Jamaica was "silenced" (Chevannes, 1990, p. 79). Rather than viewing reggae music as a pathological response by Jamaica's dispossessed class, the Jamaican government and many of its supporters co-opted this dissident cultural form as something positive and distinctively "Jamaican."

Reflecting Manley's sympathy for the Rastafarians and the success of "international"

reggae music, even *The Daily Gleaner*, which had long dismissed reggae as “primitive” and “unsophisticated,” changed its tune. In the 1970s, the *Gleaner* now printed information about new reggae releases, interviewed reggae stars, and provided information concerning local and international reggae tours (“Merry Go,” 1975 ; Tafari, 1980) . The *Gleaner* and other Jamaican newspapers and magazines were especially eager to follow the career of Jamaica’s leading reggae band, Bob Marley and the Wailers. The *Gleaner* published articles with headlines such as “Marley—The Revolutionary Messiah ?” and “Golden Year Likely for Bob Marley and the Wailers” (“Bob Marley,” 1976 ; “Golden Year,” 1976) . Dermot Hussey’s (1975) “Bob Marley : The Man of Music for 1975,” was one of the first articles to predict Marley’s ascent as the first “third-world” superstar. Marley was the new international ambassador of Jamaican culture.

The *Gleaner* also changed its tune regarding the Rastafarian movement. In the 1960s, the newspaper characterized the Rastafarians as “violent revolutionaries,” but in the 1970s the paper often supported, even celebrated, the movement. In a 1976 article, “Ganja Revolution,” for example, the *Gleaner* expressed sympathy for the Rastafarian cause and conceded that the Rastafarians were “right” about the destructive effects of “Babylon” (“Ganja Revolution,” 1976, p. 3) . *Gleaner* reporters interviewed Rastafarian school children about Rastafarian beliefs (“A Rasta Youth,” 1976) . The *Gleaner* also printed letters testifying to the Jamaican public’s new respect for the movement. In one letter, Harold Brown (1976) claimed the Rastafarians “can feel a special pride in the fact that they were pioneers in Jamaica, if not throughout the world” (p. 17) . Monty Barrett (1978) championed the Rastafarian presence in Jamaica because “genuine Rastafarians are the unsung heroes of this new socialist trend” (p. 6) . In a letter entitled “Rastas and Contributions to Our Society,” Aderemi Atai (1976) celebrated the movement’s new legitimacy after years of struggle against discrimination and prejudice.

The *Gleaner* even hired two Rastafarian journalists, Dennis Forsythe and Arthur Kitchin. Forsythe’s writings, such as the 1979 article entitled “Rastas and the African Lion,” often celebrated the Rastafarians’ African heritage. Kitchin’s (1980, 1982) editorials explored a variety of Rastafarian issues, from the “pseudo” Rastafarian group, the Ethiopian Zion Coptic Church, to questions about the movement’s future in Jamaica. Reflecting on the movement’s growing political influence, Kitchin (1979) cautioned the Rastafarians, however, to recognize the “obvious trap” of political manipulation.

Other mainstream institutions of Jamaican society also began to appropriate Rastafarian symbols and reggae music as “their own” in the 1970s. Jamaica’s theater companies began to produce plays showcasing Rastafarian themes and reggae music. In 1976, two plays, “Summer Dread” and “I-Man,” played to Jamaican audiences (Waters, 1985) . In a review of the 1978 play, “Explaintations,” *Gleaner* columnist Dawn Ritch expressed a “swelling of emotional pride” during a performance by one of Jamaica’s most popular reggae bands, Third World. Ritch (1978) declared that

“reggae music has rarely been raised to such levels of joyous exhilaration” (p. 6) . In 1980, a Gleaner reporter, writing under the pseudonym “Showman,” proclaimed it a historic day as the first show featuring reggae music opened on Broadway (p. 4) .

Rather than condemning reggae music as an incitement to violence, politicians apparently had come to view reggae music as a force of unity and peace in Jamaica. In 1978, Bob Marley headlined the One Love Peace concert, a festival created to bring political peace to Jamaica. Organized by Bucky Marshall (PNP) and Claudie Massop (JLP)—gang leaders who unofficially affiliated themselves with Jamaica’s two mainstream political parties—the One Love Peace concert was attended and praised by the leaders of Jamaica’s two political parties. According to the Gleaner, Manley and JLP party leader Edward Seaga danced a “short jig” at the concert (“PM, Seaga,” 1978, p. 1) . While generally not known for expressing sympathy for either the Rastafarian movement or reggae music, Seaga even applauded reggae’s “peacemaking” potential. In a 1978 article headlined, “Seaga Thanks Marley,” Seaga praised Marley’s performance at the concert and assured the reggae star that the concert would promote the “efforts of the campaign for peace” (“Seaga Thanks,” 1978, p. 2) .

Reggae Sunsplash, an annual tourist festival created in 1978, was perhaps the clearest example of how the Manley government tried to co-opt the Rastafarian movement. Unlike the One Love Peace concert, Reggae Sunsplash was officially sponsored by the Jamaican government. This tourist event has lured thousands of international visitors to Jamaica every year to listen to some of Jamaica’s top reggae artists. During the one week event, foreign visitors can rent the services of “Rent-ADreads,” non-Rastafarians disguised as members of the movement, as informal tour guides. According to Gleaner reporter Suzanne Dodds (1988) , many “Rentas . . . go on sale as early as two days before Commencement” (p. 6) . Reggae Sunsplash has become an economic boon to a country increasingly dependent on tourism as its main foreign-exchange earner. As a highly popular and profitable tourist event, Reggae Sunsplash has even been duplicated in the United States and Japan (Chevannes, 1994) .

In effect, these “adjustments” did bring about important changes in racial attitudes of most Jamaicans. Before the popularity of reggae music and the Rastafarian movement, many Jamaicans—especially the ruling classes—believed that “Blackness” was akin to “impurity” and “evil” (Chevannes, 1990, p. 62) . In her study on the Rastafarian movement and Jamaican politics, Anita M. Waters (1985) interviewed a respondent, a 1976 JLP political candidate, who had this to say about the Rastafarians’ influence on transforming the meaning of “Black” as a racial category : “I respected the Rasta thing. They have a very proud, positive attitude toward blackness” (p. 176) . In that same study, another respondent observed that “the Rastas sensitised the national consciousness in attitudes toward black and poor” (p. 176) . Cultural critic Stuart Hall (1985) has remarked the Rastafarians were instrumental in rearticulating “Blackness” from a negative to a positive sign.

Indeed, recent empirical studies also confirmed that by the early 1980s there was a dramatic, positive change in Jamaican attitudes toward “Black” as a racial category (Chevannes, 1990 ; Surlin, 1988) . As a result, Chevannes (1990) claimed the Rastafarians had performed an “exorcism” in an attempt to eradicate racism in Jamaica (p. 61) . In this way, the Rastafarians gained a cultural identity as all Jamaicans came to view “Black” as a more positive racial category.

In much the same way, the Rastafarian movement changed Jamaican’s attitudes about Africa. Although Jamaica’s lower classes idealized Africa as their historical and spiritual homeland, the middle to upper classes often dismissed Africa as the “silent” and “dark” continent. In a 1994 interview, Chevannes observed that Jamaica’s middle class “saw their role as one of assimilation and assimilating the cultural values of the colonial ruling class” (B. Chevannes, personal communication, July 6, 1994) . By the late 1970s, however, middle class Jamaicans were more inclined to “identify more with the African reference point than with the European” (Chevannes, 1990, p. 79) . The Rastafarians, according to Rastafarian scholar Leahcim Tufani Semaj (1980) , played a pivotal role in changing a society dominated by European ideals to one where “there is now hope for Black self-determination” (p. 18) . The Rastafarians were successful in encouraging the upper classes to reexamine their African heritage.

At first glance, all of these changes appeared to grant the Rastafarians a “victory” in Jamaica. Yet collectively, these “adjustments” also can be seen as cooptation of the cultural symbols of Rastafari without “capitulation” to the movement’s specific policy demands—much as some pseudo-Rastafarian groups embraced the movement’s symbols and fashion while rejecting its religious practices or political doctrines and goals. Writing for the now-defunct Jamaican Daily News, journalist Trevor Fearon (1974) sensed this possibility as he questioned the sincerity of those Jamaicans who once dismissed reggae but were now “suddenly speaking about them [reggae artists] as their long-time brethren” (p. 21) . As we consider the response of the Manley government and its supporters to some of the Rastafarians’ more substantive political, economic, and religious demands, we shall see that Fearon’s suspicions were indeed well founded. While the Rastafarians’ cultural identity was legitimized in Jamaica, the movement achieved few of its policy goals.

The Illusion of Victory

Anthropologist Leonard Barrett (1988) has maintained that the Rastafarians, as a result of international reggae’s popularity, achieved what rhetorical scholars commonly refer to as “legitimacy.” Legitimacy is the “right” to exercise “authority” (Francesconi, 1982, p. 49) . Groups with “legitimacy” have the power to either reward or punish less legitimate groups. All social movements strive for legitimacy (Stewart et al., 1993) . In his study of European labor movements, Gaston V. Rimlinger (1970) argued that for social movements to be considered successful they

must secure legitimacy from several sources, including the “employers, the government, the public and the workers themselves” (p. 363) .

While Jamaica’s ruling class embraced Rastafarian symbols, the movement did not achieve its specific policy goals. The Jamaican government and its supporters did not, of course, capitulate or willingly transfer political power to the Rastafarians. Instead, the Manley government publically sympathized with the movement but made only token concessions. In fact, critics such as de Albuquerque (1979) contended that Manley and the PNP “publicly identify with the Rastafari[an] movement, while privately condemning it as a barrier to the construction of a socialist Jamaica” (p. 46) .

While the Rastafarians’ cultural identity was legitimized, this victory did little to restructure the class system in Jamaica. While more Jamaicans from the Black class entered the ranks of the traditional “Brown” middle class, Manley stopped short of dislocating the traditional “White” and “Brown” power structure in Jamaica (Kuper, 1976, p. 106) . During this period, according to Waters (1985) , “[e]conomic power in Jamaica still reside[d] to a great extent with the White and fair groups. . . . [W]ith status as well as wealth, Whites have the most and Blacks the least” (p. 29) .

The Rastafarians’ new legitimacy also did little to bring economic justice for Jamaica’s poor people. Many Rastafarians initially approved of Manley’s economic reforms, but Jamaica’s economy deteriorated significantly during the 1970s. While an international energy crisis played a pivotal role in Jamaica’s rapidly shrinking economy, Manley’s own economic policies, according to public policy expert David Panton (1993) , “served as the major cause of the decline in the Jamaican economy” (p. 57) . Whatever the cause, Jamaica’s disintegrating economic base left the Rastafarians and other poor Jamaicans still trapped in the stifling ghettos of West Kingston. Before long, reggae musicians were again protesting against the government’s failure to help Jamaica’s poor people. In 1974, for example, the Ethiopians released a song criticizing Manley, “Promises, Promises,” and in that same year, Max Romeo’s song, “No, Joshua, No,” warned Manley that “Rasta” was “watching and blaming you” for Jamaica’s economic woes (Waters, 1985, p. 184) .

The Manley government did not concede to the Rastafarians’ more specific demands, such as repatriation to Africa. Although Manley was rumored to have met with a Rastafarian group in 1976 to discuss the issue of repatriation, the PNP government never created an official plan for repatriation (Waters, 1985) . Unable to secure the support of the Manley government, the Rastafarian movement attempted to create its own repatriation plan. One Rastafarian group, the Twelve Tribes of Israel, repatriated an estimated 45 followers to a farming settlement in Shashamane, Ethiopia, in 1974 (Campbell, 1987) . In that same year, however, Haile Selassie’s monarchy was overthrown, and the new military government nationalized all of Ethiopia’s land. As a result, the Rastafarians lost their “tractors, land and assets” (Campbell, 1987, p. 226) . Eventually, the new government returned an estimated 109 acres to the Rastafarians who wanted to remain in the

area, but the failure of the Shashamane experiment demonstrated the Rastafarians' inability to successfully repatriate its own followers to Africa (Campbell, 1987) .

Manley also refused to recognize the religious significance of ganja, or marijuana, to the Rastafarians. During his first term in office, Manley promised the Rastafarians he would review Jamaica's marijuana laws and grant pardons to those serving longterm prison terms for marijuana possession (Yawney, 1976) . Yet for the remainder of his time in office, he supported only minor reductions in the penalties for marijuana possession in Jamaica.³ Manley even cooperated with the U.S. government's efforts to eradicate Jamaica's marijuana trade (Campbell, 1987) . In 1973, for example, President Richard Nixon launched an antidrug operation called "Operation Buccaneer," which included "search and destroy" missions aimed at Jamaica's marijuana fields (Campbell, 1987, p. 114) . Manley cooperated fully in this effort, apparently convinced that the ganja trade needed to be controlled in order to achieve political "stability" in Jamaica. Critics claim that Manley's support for Operation Buccaneer was a heavy-handed effort to suppress the Rastafarian movement (Campbell) . At the 1978 One Love Peace concert in Jamaica, reggae star Peter Tosh even went as far as to publicly "lecture Michael Manley and [JLP party leader] Edward Seaga for their failure to support the legalization of ganja" (White, 1992, p. 301) .

Meanwhile, Jamaica's radio stations continued to marginalize reggae music as a form of political discourse. Although Jamaica's radio stations seemed to make concessions to the popularity of international reggae by adding more indigenous music to their playlists, they still played reggae music mostly during the least desirable time slots in the middle of the night (Mulvaney, 1985, p. 104) . In the mid-1970s, one of Jamaica's two national radio stations, Radio Jamaican Rediffusion (RJR) , adopted a policy of playing 50 percent reggae, and 50 percent foreign music (Bembridge, 1976) . Yet Daily Gleaner entertainment columnist Hugh Bembridge remarked, "Guess when they play most reggae music ? Between 1:00 a.m. and 5:00 a.m., when the vast majority of people are sleeping" (Bembridge, 1976, p. 4) . Mickey Dread hosted a program, "Dread at the Controls," from midnight until 4:30 in the morning. Dread explained why Jamaica's radio stations were still reluctant to play reggae music : "They were old-fashioned, you know. Jamaican Broadcasting Corporation [JBC] , I mean they've got help from the British to set up this radio station, so, normally, they followed what they were told to do from their parents, right, instead of actually catering for the local community" (Gordon, 1988, p. 80) .

Even with its new international popularity, reggae was thus "facing a lot of barriers" in Jamaica, as Gleaner columnist Hugh Bembridge observed (Bembridge, 1975, p. 8) . On August 14, 1976, Bembridge wrote a scathing editorial in the Gleaner's entertainment column, "Merry Go Round," criticizing the lack of air time for reggae as an "unpatriotic" policy. "[I] t is stupid and very unpatriotic for the island's leading radio station [RJR] to be defending a policy of 50%reggae and 50% rhythm and blues," Bembridge (1976a) argued, "when it is quite aware that the masses, the vast majority of the people, are consistently pro-reggae" (p. 4) .

Jamaican radio stations also continued to ban outright certain “controversial” reggae songs. In 1975, Jamaica’s radio stations banned three of Peter Tosh’s songs, including the pro-ganja song “Legalize It” (White, 1992) . Unlike the JLP’s hard-line tactics to censor reggae music, Manley claimed not to favor the banning of “Legalize It” and wrote Tosh to express his disappointment over the decision (de Albuquerque, 1979) . Tosh, however, was not appeased :

[Jamaican radio is] a pack of shit and I hate it badly for that. It is trying to defamed [sic] the character of reggae music and make those who are playing reggae music look like fools. When I go to other places, I am treated like a king. In the place where reggae music is originated, the people who make reggae music are treated like dogs (Salaam, 1981, p. 114) .

In short, while the Rastafarians’ cultural identity was legitimized in Jamaica in the 1970s, this did little to improve their political and economic status in Jamaica or to help them realize their more specific policy goals. Jamaica remained a racially stratified society, and most Rastafarians continued to live in poverty in crowded slums and shantytowns. The government continued to resist efforts at repatriation to Africa, and it even stepped up efforts to control an important element in the Rastafarian religion: the smoking of ganja. Even as reggae achieved international popularity, the music remained marginalized on Jamaica’s own radio stations, especially the more political controversial songs. So, in effect, the new legitimacy did not help the Rastafarians achieve their policy goals in Jamaica’s political or economic system.

Conclusion

Perhaps learning from the JLP’s failure to suppress the Rastafarian movement, Michael Manley employed more “adjustment” tactics in responding to the growing international popularity of reggae and the attention it brought to the Rastafarians. Many of Manley’s supporters began to embrace Rastafari and reggae music as something distinctly “Jamaican.” The Daily Gleaner published articles praising reggae’s positive contributions to Jamaica’s society. From the theater to tourism, the Jamaican society seemed to embrace Rastafari and reggae music. Ultimately, however, the Manley government may have embraced many of the Rastafarian movement’s most important cultural symbols, but this did little to change the political and economic status of Rastafarians in Jamaica.

How this came about has implications for understanding social movements and the rhetoric of social control. First, our understanding of social control as a rhetorical phenomenon reflects a North American/European cultural bias (Lucas, 1980) . Since most social movement case studies are centered in North America and Europe, social movement theorists have not typically examined how colonialism (or neocolonialism) serves as the establishment’s chief ideology of control (Fanon, 1967, 1968) . As stated elsewhere, the traditional model depicts control agents (i.e.,

security forces) enforcing policies established by a target group (i.e., government) . The traditional model may look something like Figure 1.

Yet, the traditional model fails to accurately depict the historical experience of (neo) colonialism in Jamaica. Thus, it is important to distinguish between an “external” target group, an outside entity with the legitimate power to influence another country’s political, social, and cultural policies, and an “internal” target group, a local governing body. The new model may be represented by Figure 2. In the 1960s, the Jamaican government (internal target group) and its surrogates perpetuated the neocolonial stratification system, encouraging its citizens to emulate British culture (external target group) . Jamaica’s citizens, especially the ruling classes, denigrated any “Jamaican” or “African” artifact as “backward,” “primitive,” or “unsophisticated.” The Rastafarian movement—with its allegiance to Africa and its demands for repatriation—challenged this neocolonial stratification system. Similarly, Jamaica’s popular music contested the image of an island paradise by highlighting the racial injustice and economic poverty in Jamaica.

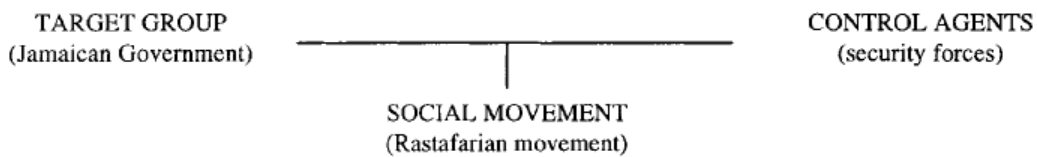


Figure 1

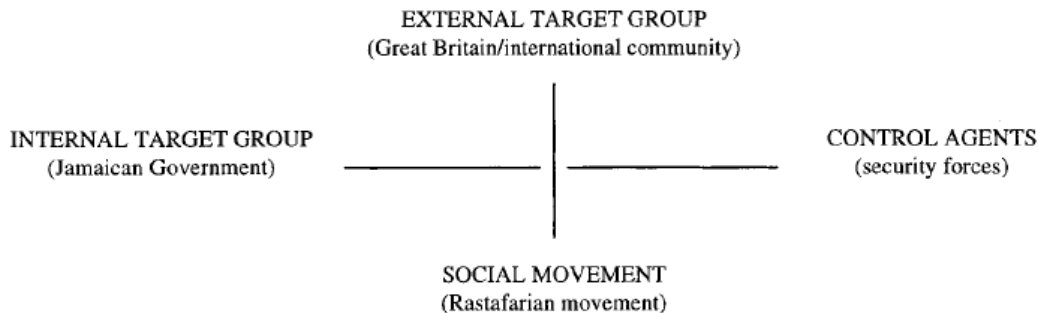


Figure 2

By the early 1970s, Jamaica’s new political leadership (internal target group) and the popularity of reggae and Rastafari signalled, at first glance, the end of neocolonialism in Jamaica. Recognizing Jamaica’s African heritage and implementing new economic policies, Manley seemed to censure Jamaica’s neocolonial stratification system. Furthermore, the growing international acceptance of reggae played a significant role in the popularity of the Rastafarian movement. With the international stamp of approval (external target group) , Jamaicans began to view reggae music and the Rastafarian movement as important and positive symbols of Jamaica’s cultural heritage. Despite Manley’s new democratic socialist government and the “acceptance” of reggae and the Rastafarian movement, a neocolonial social structure continued to exist in Jamaica during the 1970s.

It is important to recognize the external target group's role in perpetuating a neocolonial social structure in Jamaica. Under Colonial rule, Great Britain's influence was profound, reaching virtually every area of Jamaican society. Not only did Great Britain have the right to exercise authority over Jamaica's internal affairs, but this colonial power established the normative cultural practices in Jamaica. Great Britain created what Barry Chevannes (1990) called the "ideology of racism" in Jamaica (p. 62). In this social system, Great Britain established the norms for acceptable skin color, body norms, and moral character. Yet, even after Jamaica's independence from Great Britain and the rise of Manley's socialist government, the Jamaican public, particularly the middle class, deferred to the international community (external target group) to validate the importance of reggae and the Rastafarian movement to Jamaica's cultural heritage. In sum, an external target group—albeit a more benign one—has continued to influence and legitimize Jamaica's political, social, and cultural practices.

This study also rejects attempts to reduce the definition of social control to a series of "turf wars" between control agents and protestors (Gamson, 1968; Wilson, 1977). Although control agents are an important part of the process of maintaining power and social order, "no regime can long survive on the threat of force alone" (Stewart et al., 1989, p. 149). As Simons (1976) has suggested, social control is both rhetorical and physical, ideological and material. As noted above, Great Britain rhetorically constructed the "ideology of racism" to control Jamaica's political, social, and cultural policies. Whereas Jamaica's security forces defended this ideology by physically punishing the Rastafarians and the poor, the political establishment, the media, and the middle class sustained and perpetuated this ideology through public communication and shared symbols. Thus, social control can be defined as any effort to maintain or sustain an external or internal target group's ideology, legitimacy, power, or all of these.

To maintain its power and legitimacy, the Jamaican establishment and its surrogates used "co-optation" as a tactic to control the Rastafarians. Although cooptation has been neglected, for the most part, as an important area of study for social movement scholars, this study offers new insights into the co-optation strategy. First, scholars (Gamson, 1968; King, 1976; Stewart et al., 1989, 1993) have examined how target groups co-opt social movement leaders. Since the Rastafarian movement lacked a central leader, the Jamaican establishment co-opted the religious, political, and cultural symbols of the movement. In several recent interviews, Rastafarian and reggae scholars (B. Chevannes, personal communication, July 6, 1994; C. Cooper, personal communication, July 5, 1994; D. Hussey, personal communication, July 18, 1994) acknowledged that Rastafarian symbols have been "co-opted" by Jamaica's dominant classes. Indeed, Manley and his supporters embraced the superficial trappings of Rastafari—the locks and reggae itself—but threatened to reduce Rastafari to little more than a cultural fad. This study suggests that establishments can co-opt both leaders and symbols of a social movement.

Finally, this study illustrates how music, as a mode of protest, may be especially vulnerable to co-optation. Michael Manley and the PNP apparently had little trouble enticing reggae bands to play at political rallies during the 1972 national election. Similarly, few reggae musicians could resist the opportunity to become international “stars,” even if that meant the commercialization of their music. Many Rastafarian traditionalists were horrified by the role of reggae music in Jamaica’s political elections, and some traditionalists also criticized reggae musicians for commercializing the movement. Nevertheless, reggae musicians willingly participated in the transformation of reggae music into a cultural commodity. Yet, many reggae musicians who have been blamed for the commercialization of the movement were themselves victims of Manley’s failed attempt to restructure Jamaica’s economy in the late 1970s. Indeed, reggae musicians were often forced to play for “profit” as a means of economic survival. Thus, the severe decline in the Jamaican economy after 1976 may have had some effect on the establishment’s ability to co-opt Jamaica’s protest music.

This co-optation of the Rastafarians may have played a significant role in the decline of the movement in the 1980s. As the *Gleaner* reported, the Rastafarian movement appeared “in eclipse” by the late 1980s (Henry, 1987, p. 8). The *Gleaner* speculated that the movement’s decline was related to the rise of both Rastafarian intellectuals (Kitchin, 1982), and “secular” middle-class Rastafarian groups (Boyne, 1992, p. 23), as well as the movement’s failure to unify its various groups (Kitchin, 1983). The Jamaican youth also became decidedly less interested in reggae, preferring new genres of Jamaican music called “digital,” “ragamuffin,” and “dancehall.” As a mainstream cultural commodity and a tourist attraction, perhaps international reggae lost its “edge” as a voice of youth rebellion and political protest. From the perspective of the Jamaican establishment, then, the strategy of co-optation appeared to have been successful.

Notes

1 Culture is defined here as “a historically transmitted system of symbols, meanings, and norms” (Collier, 1997, p. 36). The Rastafarians have principally defined themselves as an ethnic culture, since members share a common heritage and historical narrative “outside of the creation of their present nation state of residence” (Collier, p. 38). Beginning in 1930, the Rastafarian movement attempted to reverse the damaging effects of European colonialism by promoting Africa as Jamaica’s spiritual homeland. Over the last 70 years, the movement has disseminated its historical narrative and “core symbols” to new members which created the movement’s cultural identity (Collier). Specifically, the movement promoted its cultural identity through its religious practices (some members believe that Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie is the living black god), clothing (Ethiopian colors of red, green, and gold), hairstyle (newspaper pictures of Ethiopian warriors inspired, in part, the Rastafarians’ decision to lock their hair), and speech patterns (patios, a combination of English and African languages). In

this way, the Rastafarians have employed “core symbols” to create and maintain their own culture, since culture is “based on what people say and do and think and feel as a result of their common history and origin” (p. 38) . By the mid-1970s, reggae music assisted in enhancing the movement’s cultural identity by popularizing and legitimizing the movement’s core symbols.

2 For example, Stewart, Smith, and Denton (1993) classify the term “counter-persuasion” as a control strategy. In contrast, Bowers, Ochs, and Jensen (1993) list “counterpersuasion” as a tactic under a strategy called “avoidance.” In addition, Stewart et al. and Bowers et al. use different terms— “suppression” and “coercion”—to represent the same strategy. Finally, Simons, Mechling, and Schreier (1984) use different social control labels (e.g., “repression,” “gestures”) not found in the two above sources.

3 During the JLP’s 10-year rule, possession of marijuana carried a minimum sentence of 18 months and a maximum sentence of 5 years. Under Manley’s revised marijuana laws, a standard minimum sentence was abolished and the maximum sentence was reduced to 3 years.

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