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International reggae, democratic socialism, and the secularization of the Rastafarian movement, 1972–1980

Stephen A. King

During the 1970s, the Jamaican people appeared to rise “up in rebellion and revolt to . . . improve their social conditions” (Panton 31). After a decade of struggle against an increasingly repressive Jamaican Labour Party (JLP), Jamaica’s poor and dissident groups embraced the candidacy of People’s National Party (PNP) leader Michael Manley, the son of former Prime Minister Norman Manley, for Prime Minister in 1972. During the national election campaign, Manley attempted to appeal to the Rastafarians and Jamaica’s Black Power movement. Manley even adopted the Biblical name “Joshua” and promised the Jamaican people deliverance from oppression. Two years after winning the election, Manley formally declared Jamaica a “democratic socialist” country. Democratic socialism promised a redistribution of wealth in Jamaica and independence from foreign control (Panton 41).

Meanwhile, reggae music became more popular than ever. As a genre of Jamaica’s continually evolving popular music, reggae music is viewed by many as “the very expression of the historical experiences of the Jamaican working-class, unemployed and peasant” (Johnson, “Reggae Rebellion” 589). Promoted by Island Records President Chris Blackwell and popularized by reggae star Bob Marley, reggae attracted international attention from American and European musicians, rock critics, and fans around the world. As Manley’s reforms failed to bring prosperity and peace to Jamaica’s underclass, reggae remained a voice of protest. Generally, of course, political—and especially radically political—music, is considered less commercially viable. In the case of international reggae, however, U.S. record companies successfully marketed reggae as a new “rebel music” in hopes that it would appeal to white American college students and European youths.

All of these developments created new and intriguing dilemmas for the Rastafarian movement. On one hand, reggae’s international popularity increased the visibility of the Rastafarian movement around the world. As the most visible and prominent advertiser for the movement, reggae spread the Rastafarian gospel to the four corners of the globe. As rock critics Stephen Davis and Peter Simon have observed, reggae propelled “the Rasta cosmology into the middle of the planet’s cultural arenas, and suddenly people want to know what all the chanting and praying and obsessive smoking of herb [marijuana] are all about” (Reggae Bloodlines 63).

On the other hand, international reggae also exacerbated the split between “religious” and “political” Rastafarians. While more traditional, religious Rastafarians seemed appalled by what they considered the commercialization and secularization of the movement, more politically oriented Rastafarians hoped to exploit reggae’s new popularity to further the cause. In addition, the popularity of

reggae spawned a number of pseudo-Rastafarian groups, who imitated the cultural trappings of Rastafari—the dreadlocks, the ganja smoking, and the lingo—without embracing its larger religious and ideological tenets. In effect, the commercialization of reggae music, in the view of more traditional Rastafarians at least, trivialized and degraded the movement. Because the popularity of the music was associated with the movement, the movement itself seemed to become more of a cultural fad than a serious religious and political movement.

In this article, I explore how reggae music became an international musical phenomenon and, in the process, both popularized Rastafari and created new dilemmas for the movement. In the first section of this essay, I examine how Michael Manley's reform government failed to bring an end to Jamaica's economic dependency on foreign countries and to its neocolonial social structure. Although Manley and the PNP government promised sweeping policy changes to reverse the lack of economic opportunities for Jamaica's lower classes, external economic shocks and Manley's own failed policies prevented the Prime Minister from delivering on his promises. As a result, political agitation and violence continued in Jamaica throughout the 1970s. Indeed, some of the worst political violence in Jamaica's history occurred during Manley's two terms as Prime Minister of the island nation.

In the second section, I show how reggae reflected this continued political turmoil in Jamaica, even as it was transformed from an obscure "third-world" music to an international musical phenomenon. Lyrically, reggae songs continued to critique Jamaica's social and economic conditions, including unemployment, inadequate housing, and political violence. Yet, unlike early "roots" reggae (1968-1971), international reggae reflected more awareness of international issues, especially political turmoil in Zimbabwe and South Africa. In addition, some U.S. record companies modified reggae's sound to appeal more to white audiences. The result was a new, international reggae that remained a voice of protest but which broadened its concerns to more universal and international issues and which had a more polished, commercial sound.

In the third section, I examine the origins of the Rastafarian movement. From 1930 to 1966, the Rastafarian movement was a largely passive, apolitical movement committed to worshipping the emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie, and repatriating its members back to Africa. By the mid-1960s, however, the Rastafarian movement began to experience a tension between "religious" Rastafarians and their more "political" counterparts. Selassie's dictum, "liberation before repatriation," inspired some Rastafarians to seek political reform in Jamaica before seeking repatriation to Africa.

In the final section, I investigate the impact of reggae's new international popularity on the Rastafarian movement. While spreading the Rastafarian message to the international community, this "new" reggae exacerbated the rift between political and religious Rastafarians in Jamaica. Inspiring a new wave of secular Rastafarian

groups, as well as the rise of a middle-class Rastafarian intelligentsia and “pseudo” Rastafarian groups, international reggae brought many new “supporters” into the movement. Yet those supporters had very little in common with traditional Rastafarians. The result was new tensions and divisions within the Rastafarian movement.

Jamaica: Michael Manley, Democratic Socialism, and the Politics of Idealism

During the 1972 national election campaign, PNP candidate Michael Manley pulled out all the political stops. Appealing directly to Jamaica’s Rastafarian community, Manley adopted the biblical name “Joshua” and displayed a “magical” walking stick (dubbed the “Rod of Correction”) allegedly given to him by Haile Selassie during Manley’s 1969 visit to Ethiopia. Tapping into the island’s burgeoning popular culture, Manley hired reggae musicians to play at political rallies. In Jamaica’s *Michael Manley: The Great Transformation (1972-92)*, public policy expert David Panton credited Manley’s victory to his oratorical skills, personal charisma, and ability to bring the poor into the political process (33). After winning a landslide victory, Manley told Jamaica’s national newspaper, the *Daily Gleaner*, “I hope that I will be in a position to heal some of the bitter divisions that have entered into our Jamaican life, because I feel that the one thing that a country like Jamaica needs is tremendous goodwill and love” (“Manley Leads” 1).

For the next two years, Manley enacted legislation consistent with his campaign pledges. Manley lowered the voting age to 18, established sugar cooperatives, and supported a bauxite levy in 1974 that helped Jamaica offset higher energy costs due to the international oil crisis of the early 1970s (Manley 15-17). Manley also established a Land-for-Lease Program that made government lands available to farmers, created crash programs to boost employment, offered free secondary education to all Jamaican citizens, and nationalized all foreign-owned electric and telephone services (Payne 67-68). Manley’s policies, in his own words, were designed to shift the “power away from the wealthy apex towards the democratic base” (Manley 87).

Manley avoided specific proposals during the 1972 campaign, but in 1974 the Prime Minister unveiled his vision of democratic socialism to a stunned Jamaican public. Democratic socialism would, according to Manley, provide an alternative to Puerto Rico’s capitalist model and Cuba’s communist philosophy (Panton 39). Democratic socialism promised independence from foreign control, greater access to social programs, new allegiances with other “Third World” nations, and a variety of economic reforms (Panton 41). Depicting “democratic socialism” as both an economic and a “moral” policy, Manley believed the “world must be consciously organized to provide equality of opportunity and social justice for all people” (“PM” 1).

Two dramatic economic developments, however, destroyed Manley’s socialist dream. The international oil crisis of 1973-1974 virtually crippled Jamaica’s

economy. Jamaica's costs for imported oil climbed from J\$65 million in 1973 to J\$177 million in 1974 (Panton 37). While oil prices soared, Jamaica's traditional foreign-exchange earner, bauxite, declined in both production and exportation. According to the 1975 Economic and Social Survey Jamaica, Jamaica's bauxite production fell by 25 percent, and exports of bauxite declined by 31 percent (Jamaica, National Planning Agency 1).

Reeling from the economic slump, Manley found a scapegoat in the United States government, which opposed his new socialist experiment. As Manley geared up for his reelection campaign in 1976, he blamed the CIA for his nation's troubles, suggesting that a CIA conspiracy was at work against his reelection. Manley would later write in his memoirs, *Jamaica: Struggle in the Periphery*: "I have no doubt that the CIA was active in Jamaica that year and was working through its own agents to destabilise us" (140).

Nevertheless, Manley was reelected in 1976 in one of Jamaica's bloodiest political elections. By May of that year, an estimated 100 people died in politically motivated violence (Waters 144). The Orange Street Massacre of May 1976 was among the worst incidents. In retaliation for a gang murder, a rival gang set fire to a block of tenement houses, killing eleven and leaving 500 homeless (Waters 144-45). In an even more bizarre event, six suspected JLP hitmen stormed into musician Bob Marley's house in early December and wounded Marley, his wife Rita Marley, and Don Taylor, the band's manager. In response to this surge of violence, Manley exploded: "violence in our society is the nation's greatest problem. It must be stamped out" ("Curfews" 19).

Manley devised various measures to curb Kingston's escalating urban violence. In January 1976, Manley created community defense groups called "Home Guards]" (Waters 145). The Home Guard task force trained citizens to protect their own communities (Manley 85). In June of 1976, Manley declared a national state of emergency in Jamaica which lasted for one year (Manley 141-42). While Jamaica was under a state of emergency, Manley instructed his security forces to detain political thugs and JLP leaders suspected of treason. One JLP member, Parnell Charles, was detained for ten months and wrote about his prison experience in *Detained*.

By April 1977, Jamaica's economy was in shambles. According to the 1977 Economic and Social Survey Jamaica, unemployment had skyrocketed to 24.6 percent (466-67). International banks stopped extending new loans to the country (Panton 63). Reports of Jamaica's civil unrest persuaded potential tourists to seek alternative vacation spots (Panton 60). Many hotel owners and foreign entrepreneurs left the island, taking with them an estimated \$300 million (Manley 151). Political scientist Anthony Payne assessed Jamaica's growing economic crisis: "For ordinary Jamaicans, the reforms of the Manley government had produced a severe decline in living standards, worse unemployment, acute shortages of basic goods in the shops, and a mood of depression that pervaded the whole economy and society" (79-80).

From 1977 to 1980, Manley reluctantly accepted three loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to reverse Jamaica's economic slide. In retrospect, Manley claimed the IMF agreements were "devastating" to Jamaica's economy. The economic packages forced Jamaica to devalue its dollar and agree to budget cuts and wage limits (Manley 160).¹ By 1979, Manley was so distressed over Jamaica's economic decline, according to his own memoirs, that he contemplated "resigning either on behalf of the government or personally" (Manley 166).

During Manley's last year in office, even the Daily Gleaner, according to Manley, turned against him (Manley 134). Denouncing Manley's political leadership, several Gleaner editorials portrayed him as an incompetent idealist who had defaulted on his political promises. Writing in the January 11, 1980, edition, Thomas Trumann editorialized that Manley had caused "destruction and devastation on the country" (6). Gleaner political columnist Colin Gregory even called for Manley's resignation:

Mr. Manley keeps hoping to lead us to the promised land but continues walking up and down the shore of the Red Sea hoping that, like Moses, he can persuade the waters to roll back and provide passage for Jamaicans. Maybe he once thought that some great socialist country would perform that miracle for us but even he must know by now that none is coming forward to do that. And don't ask me to explain to you why Moses could perform that miracle and "Joshua" Manley can't do it. (6)

By the spring of 1980, Manley's political career was virtually over. In June 1980, there was a failed coup attempt by supporters of the JLP ("JDF" 1). In that same year, 750 Jamaicans died in political violence (Waters 199). Bringing about his own political demise, Manley called for early elections in October 1980. Manley himself looked for a vote of confidence, but instead the Jamaican people elected JLP member Edward Seaga as the new Prime Minister.

Reggae Music in the 1970s: "Bubbling on the Top 100"

Since the inception of ska in the late 1950s, U.S. record companies had been attempting to market Jamaican music to international audiences. While most of these early attempts failed, a few reggae musicians managed to achieve some international success. For example, in 1964, Millie Small's song "My Boy Lollipop" sold more than six million copies and became an international hit. In 1967, Desmond Dekker's song "007" made the top twenty in England (Jones 58).

By 1968, reggae seemed at the brink of exploding onto the international music scene. Desmond Dekker's song "Israelites" became an international hit, reaching the U.S. Top 40 (White 20). Jimmy Cliff released "Wonderful World, Beautiful People" in that same year, enjoying some international success. Bob Marley and the Wailers were also primed for international stardom. In 1968, Marley signed a contract with an American record company, JAD Records, to write songs for Johnny Nash, the

famous African-American actor and musician (White 277). One of the eventual products of this collaboration was Nash's 1972 reggae hit "Hold Me Tight." Despite these efforts, most rock fans continued to ignore early "roots" reggae, presumably because of the music's seemingly "repetitive" and "boring" rhythms (Jones 61). As sociologist Simon Jones has observed, "the widespread hostility towards reggae within the rock market constituted a major marketing problem for those recording companies seeking to 'break' Jamaican music to a wider audience" (61).

In 1972, however, Chris Blackwell, President of Island Records, came up with a scheme to market a "new" and "improved" reggae to American college students and European youths. Casting Jamaica's leading reggae group, the Wailers, as "rock stars," Blackwell launched a massive campaign, using "all the techniques associated with rock bands" to promote the Wailers' new album, *Catch a Fire* (The Bob Marley Story). For example, record companies often use alluring album covers to promote rock-and-roll bands. As such, *Catch a Fire* sported a novelty album cover designed in the form of a cigarette lighter. Furthermore, in order to avoid alienating white audiences unfamiliar with Jamaican patois, the group's second international release, *Burnin'*, featured the printed lyrics of the songs on the album's inner cover. According to Jones, reggae lyrics were now "accessible to white consumers in an unprecedented manner" (65). In addition, in 1973, Blackwell booked the Wailers on an abbreviated tour of the United States and England. While on tour, the Wailers conducted radio interviews and agreed to perform on British television shows like the *Old Grey Whistle Test* program (White 252). Blackwell's marketing genius created "a new and larger audience for reggae," eventually opening "the possibilities of mass white consumption" of reggae (Jones 61-62). Many other reggae artists followed in the Wailers' footsteps, and there was a sudden explosion in reggae's international popularity.

In many ways, this newly popular "international" reggae differed little from early "roots" reggae. Lyrically, international reggae continued to expose and critique the deplorable living conditions in Jamaica's slums. Reggae songs continued to complain about government housing (Toots and the Maytals' "Time Tough" [Funky Kingston]), food shortages (Bunny Wailer's "Fighting Against Conviction" [Blackheart Man]), and political violence (Black Uhuru's "Carbine" [Red] and Junior Murvin's "Police and Thieves" [Tougher Than Tough]). In addition, reggae continued to ground such critiques in historical memories of slavery, with such songs as the Wailers' "Slave Driver" (*Catch a Fire*), Burning Spear's "Slavery Days" (100th Anniversary), and Culture's "Pirate Days" (*Two Sevens Clash*) conjuring up images of slave ships, plantations, manacles, and whips. Finally, reggae songs also continued to denounce "Babylon" as the source of both past and present-day oppression. The Rastafarians' enemy, "Babylon," continued to describe a variety of oppressors, including the police (the Wailers' "Burnin' and Lootin" [Burnin']), a vampire (Black Uhuru's "Vampire" [Sinsemilla]), and even technology (Bob Marley and the Wailers' "Survival" [Survival]).

Like early roots reggae, international reggae's hope for the future of repatriation. Peter Tosh, in "Jah Seh No," promised: "He's coming to tear down the wall of downpression [oppression]/Drive away the corruption/ Tear down Babylon/Set the captives free" (Davis and Simon, *Reggae International* 62). Meanwhile, any number of reggae songs continued to hold out the hope of repatriation as the ultimate solution. In "River Jordon," Sugar Minott sang that Rastafarians must "go back home/Back to Africa" (Tougher Than Tough). In Bunny Wailer's song "Fig Tree," Zion was the "fig tree" where the faithful could "drink wine with me" and "live in peace and harmony" (Blackheart Man). Bunny Wailer's "Dream Land" likewise pictured Zion as a Utopia, a mythical land where starvation, misery, and death would be absent (Blackheart Man). And in "Exodus," Bob Marley assured his listeners: "We're leaving Babylon/Going to our Father's land" (Exodus).

In short, international reggae remained, in many ways, a radical political music, focusing upon oppression in Jamaica and the dream of repatriation. Reggae musicians continued to create violent images of burning (the Wailers' "Burnin' and Lootin'" [Burnin']), shooting (the Wailers' "I Shot the Sheriff" [Burnin']), and fighting against the authorities (Bob Marley and the Wailers' "War" [Rastaman Vibration]). When Bob Marley and the Wailers called for "Revolution" in a 1975 song, they no doubt meant revolution in Jamaica (Natty Dread).

Yet, defying conventional wisdom in the music industry, Blackwell and his imitators successfully marketed this radical political music, not by toning down its politics, but by actually celebrating the ganga-smoking Rastafarian as a universal symbol of rebellion and protest. Blackwell, in particular, was determined to underscore "the social and political content" of reggae music (Hebdige, *Cut 'n' Mix* 79). There were subtle changes in the lyrics of "international" reggae, which gave their themes of protest more universal appeal, but the new popularity of reggae music also resulted from image creation and packaging, as well as from significant changes in the sound of the music itself.

Lyricaly, there were subtle changes in international reggae that universalized its themes of protest. For example, Marcus Garvey, who represented a defiant symbol of black nationalism for blacks throughout the world, became a more prominent figure in international reggae. Burning Spear's first two international releases, *Marcus Garvey* and *Garvey's Ghost*, celebrated the life of Garvey, while "Black Starliner Must Come," by a reggae group called Culture, lamented that Garvey's ships still had not arrived: "We're waiting on an opportunity/We're waiting on the black starliner/For the black starliner shall come" (Two Sevens Clash). In addition, international reggae, unlike "early" roots reggae, cast Rastafarians, not "Jamaicans," as "Africans" who happened to live in lay in faith in Jah (or Haile Selassie), the vengeful God, and in the dream Jamaica. In a blunt statement of African nationality, for example, Peter Tosh sang: "Don't care where you come from/So long as you are a black man/You're an African" (Equal Rights). In "War," an adaptation of a 1968 speech by Haile Selassie, Bob Marley likewise cast Rastafarians as "Africans" fighting

for "the victory of good over evil" (Rastaman Vibration). Finally, Marley's "Africa Unite" urged all blacks to unite with "Africans abroad" (Survival).

In short, international reggae cast the Rastafarians as part of a larger, more "universal," pan-African movement. And this change also was reflected in a greater interest among reggae artists in social and political issues on the African continent. Black Uhuru's song "World Is Africa" (Sinsemilla) typified this new international focus, as did Peter Tosh's second solo album, *Equal Rights*, which included a song entitled "Apartheid." Tosh would even title one of his later albums *Mama Africa*, while Bob Marley dedicated one of his albums, *Survival*, to the black freedom fighters in Zimbabwe. The album's most arresting songs, "Zimbabwe," "Ambush in the Night," "Africa Unite," and "So Much Trouble in the World," all discussed African tribal warfare and apartheid (Survival). In "Zimbabwe," Marley celebrated the "Natty Dread in Zimbabwe," ready to "mash it up" (Survival). In "Africa Unite," Marley claimed that Jamaicans and Africans were united as "children of the Higher Man" (Survival). The songs urged African nations to unite for the "benefit of your people" (Survival).

According to speech communication scholar Ralph Knupp, protest songs are particularly effective if the songs contain a high degree of ambiguity and appeal to a listener's experience and social setting (Knupp 386). While many of reggae's themes grew out of poverty and oppression in Jamaica, they also spoke to the experiences of people around the world. Themes such as "poverty," "oppression," "resistance," and "redemption" are universal themes of protest. Kenneth M. Bilby, noted scholar of Caribbean music, observed that reggae's lyrics had a "general ideological appeal" based on the Rastafarian movement's "rebellious, anti-authority" stance and "utopian thrust" (203).

Ultimately, however, international reggae's appeal to international audiences may have had more to do with changes in the image of reggae artists, the packaging of the albums, and the sound of the music itself. In his efforts to market the Wailers, for example, Blackwell first molded the Wailers' image into that of a rock-and-roll group. While reggae "groups" typically had consisted of a loose collection of singers and hired studio musicians, Blackwell promoted the Wailers as a stable, self-contained "band"—much like the Rolling Stones or Led Zeppelin.

Second, Blackwell led a new trend among Jamaica's record producers toward original, thematic, and full-length LP (long-play) albums, again following the lead of rock-and-roll groups. Previously Jamaica's record producers had distributed mostly singles or cheaply produced compilations of "greatest hits" (Jones 62-63).

Finally, those albums came packaged in glossy, well-produced jackets promoting the image of the rebellious, ganja-smoking Rastafarian. On the back cover of the Wailers' 1973 album *Burnin'*, for example, Marley was pictured smoking a 12-inch spliff, or marijuana cigarette. On Peter Tosh's 1976 album, *Legalize It*, the singer was photographed crouched down in a ganja field. Reggae album covers also emphasized

the Rastafarian's symbol of black defiance, the dreadlocks, or displayed the Ethiopian colors of red, green, and gold. The cover of the Wailers' 1980 album *Uprising*, for example, featured a drawing of Bob Marley, along with the album's title in red, and a background of green mountains and a gold sun.

While most of the major instrumental innovations of international reggae were established during the early reggae period, international reggae was marked by a more sophisticated and polished studio sound (Grass 47). Most early reggae songs were recorded in primitive studios in Jamaica. International reggae, however, generally was recorded in state-of-the-art studios in the United States or Great Britain. According to Jones, this helped to undermine "the common accusation made by rock fans that reggae was a music of 'inferior' quality" (64). In the first attempt to reverse this trend, Chris Blackwell took the Wailers' instrumental tracks for *Catch a Fire*, previously recorded in Jamaica, and remixed, edited, and mastered the tracks in a London studio (Davis 104). Rock critics Ed Ward, Geoffrey Stokes, and Ken Tucker highlighted the dramatic change in reggae's new sound: "*Catch a Fire* was a "revolutionary example of reggae recording, far superior in its technology than most other reggae records" [emphasis mine] (45).

U.S. and British record producers also manipulated the instrumentation in reggae arrangements to create a lighter, "softer" reggae. Some U.S. record producers would deemphasize reggae's dominant instruments, the electric bass guitar and drums, and push the keyboard and electric guitar to the front of the mix. In 1980, Jamaican dub poet Linton Kwesi Johnson provided a clear rationale for the systematic manipulation of the reggae sound: "[there was the] belief that the hard Jamaican sound, with the emphasis on the drum and the bass, would not be as accessible to the non-Jamaican listener as a lighter sounding production would be" ("*Some Thoughts*" 58).

To appeal to international audiences, reggae musicians also incorporated familiar genres of American music into the reggae arrangement. During the remixing of the Wailers' *Catch a Fire*, for example, Blackwell dubbed traditional rock-and-roll instruments, including rock guitar and synthesizer, over the reggae beat (Davis 104). During the recording of the same album, a session guitarist, Wayne Perkins, also added guitar solos. Throughout their career, the Wailers dabbled in blues ("*Talkin' Blues*" [Natty Dread]), funk ("*Is This Love?*" [Kaya]), and folk music ("*Redemption Song*" [Uprising]). Similarly, Toots and the Maytals, in their 1973 *Funky Kingston*, fused R&B and reggae into the album's title song.

In sum, the new international success of reggae music in the 1970s may have been more the result of marketing and changes in its sound than changes in its "message." Reggae was still a "rebel music." Growing up in some of Jamaica's worst slums, reggae musicians still critiqued Jamaica's neocolonial society. Reggae musicians also expressed concern about international affairs, specifically political problems on the African continent. While still sensitive to the problems at home, they also began to identify themselves more as Africans than Jamaicans. In the final analysis, however,

reggae's international success probably was more the result of changes in its sound. Record producers improved and "softened" the reggae sound and incorporated new instruments, such as synthesizers and rock guitars, into the reggae arrangement. Reggae musicians also borrowed freely from musical genres including rhythm and blues and funk. Yet whatever the explanation, reggae's sudden status as an international musical sensation focused unprecedented attention on the Rastafanan movement and exacerbated tensions within the movement. Indeed, the music created whole new groups of supposed Rastafarians apparently attracted to the movement by little more than the image of the "Rastaman" and the music itself. These "pseudo" Rastafarians had little in common with traditional Rastafarian principles and beliefs.

The Origins of the Rastafarian Movement

The official coronation of Ras Tafari Makonnen as the new emperor of Ethiopia in 1930 signalled the emergence of the Rastafarian movement in Jamaica. During the coronation, Makonnen took the throne name Haile Selassie I, along with other royal titles including "King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah, [and] Elect of God and Light of the World." When the Gleaner published photos of Selassie's coronation, some Jamaicans consulted their Bibles and subsequently believed Selassie was literally the "King of Kings," the black messiah (Chevannes, Rastafari 42).

Most of the new Rastafarian converts were admirers of Jamaican black nationalist Marcus Garvey. Garvey was responsible for influencing the Rastafarian movement's theme of repatriation to Africa. According to anthropologist Barry Chevannes, Garvey "linked the dignity and equality of blacks to their ability to claim a land they could call their own" (Rastafari 95). Garvey also inspired the Rastafarian's belief in a living black God. Garvey was influenced by a particular brand of black nationalism called "Ethiopianism." Challenging the prevailing argument that blacks were judged inferior in the Bible, Ethiopians articulated a new, more positive role for blacks in the Bible. Influenced by Ethiopianism, Garvey "glorified in the African past and taught that God and Christ were black" (Berry and Blassingame 410).

Although Leonard Howell has been identified as the first Rastafarian preacher in Jamaica, there were at least three other Rastafarian groups in existence during the 1930s.² While each group exemplified a different style of worship and emphasized distinctive aspects of the Rastafarian "doctrine," there were at least four overarching themes uniting these factions. First, all four groups condemned Jamaica's colonial society. Second, all believed repatriation to Africa was the key to overcoming oppression. Third, all of these early groups advocated nonviolence. Finally, all four groups worshipped the divinity of Haile Selassie. In addition, the four early Rastafarian groups reflected the movement's history of diversification and lack of centralized leadership. The Rastafarians' historical commitment to diversification

stemmed from the powerful influence of Revivalism, a rural peasant religion in Jamaica (Chevannes, Rastafari 119).

By the mid-1950s, the Rastafarians were viewed by many in Jamaica as bearded drug addicts, a national eyesore, or a “cult of outcasts]” (Patterson 15). The Gleaner reported frequent clashes between Rastafarians and police, and the work of sociologist George Eaton Simpson confirmed the stereotype of the Rastafarians as black racists who wanted to rule over the white man (Simpson 134-35). While the Rastafarian movement did indeed promote racial pride, the movement in reality posed little threat to Jamaica’s ruling class. Largely lower-class, politically passive, and nonviolent, most Rastafarians were committed only to repatriating members to Africa and to worshipping the divinity of Selassie. For the most part, Rastafarians avoided the political world for meditation and prayer.

Stigmatized as a “cult of outcasts,” the Rastafarian movement nevertheless began attracting more attention because of the growing consciousness among Jamaican blacks of their African heritage. The Rastafarians’ appeal slowly spread into middle-class neighborhoods, as young blacks became “sensitive to their ambiguous place in a sharply divided society” and to aspects of white culture that had “served to alienate them from the black masses” (Beckford and Witter 77). Declaring Jamaican folk hero Marcus Garvey a prophet and embracing African nationalism, the Rastafarians stimulated “popular remembrances and resentments in a way that others in the society could not” (Gray 146). As Obika Gray summarized the Rastafarians’ appeal in the mid-1960s: “No other ideology or group appeared capable of competing with them” (146).

In 1966, the Rastafarian movement gained still more public notice with the arrival of Haile Selassie, who visited Jamaica by invitation of the Jamaican government. During his only trip to Jamaica, Selassie met with several Rastafarian leaders and a new tenet of repatriation emerged: Rastafarians should liberate themselves in Jamaica before repatriation to Africa. Some writers have claimed that Selassie’s apparent change on repatriation inaugurated a new wave of Rastafarianism, in which the movement’s apolitical philosophy gave way to more immediate, more political demands (Jacobs 87). This new political philosophy created, in turn, a division between “political” and “religious” Rastafarians.

From its inception, however, the Rastafarian movement was a mixture of both religious and political elements. Rastafarians were certainly “political” in that they claimed African citizenship, openly expressed their racial pride, and argued that Jamaica’s independence from Great Britain was a “farce” (de Albuquerque 24). Moreover, Rastafarians critiqued the “prevalent individualis[m]” and “imperialistic capitalism” that were responsible for the “African slave trade” and “massive poverty.” However, anthropologist Yoshito S. Nagashima distinguished “political” Rastafarians from their “religious” counterparts in terms of active political involvement in Jamaica. Thus, Rastafarian groups such as the Rastafarian Movement Association (RMA) were considered “political” in that they argued for active

involvement in Jamaican politics. Religious Rastafarians, on the other hand, maintained that the movement must refuse to “participate in Jamaican politics as they have often felt betrayed” (Nagashima 2). In short, while political Rastafarians argued that active engagement in Jamaican politics would “provide them with the authority and power to improve their living conditions,” religious Rastafarians believed in the “depoliticisation of the Rastafarian movement” (Nagashima 31).

By the late 1960s, some of the more political elements of the Rastafarian movement increasingly gave reggae its ideological content and musical direction. Rastafarian scholar Horace Campbell noted that the influence of Rastafari “on the development of the popular culture was evident by the fact that most serious reggae artists adhered to some of the principles of the Rastafarian movement” (Campbell 134). In the next ten years, the Rastafarian movement increasingly became associated with reggae music.

The Rastafarian Movement: "Coming In from the Cold"

By the mid-1970s, reggae music was widely perceived as “Rastafarian music” (Ahkell 15). As Rastafarian scholar Leahcim T. Semaj has suggested, the fusion of reggae and Rastafari popularized the movement throughout the world (“Rastafari” 23). This marriage of “movement” and “music,” however, also created tensions within the movement. Increasingly divorced from the poor Rastafarians in the Jamaican ghettos, the movement became more “political,” “secular,” and, critics would argue, preoccupied with superficial symbols rather than genuine religious practices. Attracting middle-class intellectuals, and spawning pseudo-Rastafarian groups around the world, reggae’s international popularity was both a blessing and a curse for the movement.

Throughout the world in the 1970s, reggae’s new “international” sound was praised by critics and imitated by other musicians. In 1973, *Time* correspondent Joan Downs described reggae as “lilting pop rock” and called it the “most captivating musical export since steel bands” (79). Writing in a 1974 issue of the entertainment magazine *Sepia*, journalists Patrick and Barbara Salvo similarly praised reggae, claiming that it had “the energy and momentum to get the fans up out of their concert hall seats and dancing in the aisles once again” (37).

American rock stars acknowledged the influence of reggae in their own musical compositions. Blues artist Taj Mahal recorded the Wailers’ “Slave Driver,” while Barbara Streisand recorded another Wailers’ song, “Guava Jelly,” for her 1973 *Butterfly* album (Davis 134). Paul Simon, the first white American musician to record a reggae-influenced song—“Mother and Child Reunion”—told *Time* magazine in 1973 that although reggae music “is hard to explain . . . I love it” (Downs 79). Of all the American and European musicians influenced by reggae music, rock guitarist Eric Clapton played the foremost role in popularizing reggae in the United States. Clapton’s 1974 cover of the Wailers’ “I Shot the Sheriff” outsold the original version and became an international hit.

In the United States and Britain, the punk “movement” also had embraced reggae themes by the late 1970s. The punks identified with reggae’s themes of rebellion and alienation. Some punks wore Ethiopian colors and began to use the language of Rastafari (e.g., “Babylon”). Punk groups like the Patti Smith group and the Clash weaved reggae themes into their songs and introduced reggae numbers into their sets (Hebdige, *Subculture* 36). At the same time, Marley recorded a song, “Punky Reggae Party,” to acknowledge this meeting of cultures.

In the late 1970s, several reggae bands, including Bob Marley and the Wailers and Jimmy Cliff, toured Africa. In 1979, the Wailers’ released *Survival*, an album that addressed the political turmoil in Africa. African militants chanted the album’s hit song “Zimbabwe” during the civil war in Rhodesia. Writing for the *New Society*, Roy Kerridge claimed “reggae and Marley have made an enormous impression on Africa” (343). The popularity of both reggae and Rastafari in Africa influenced some Africans to “wear dreadlocks, smoke ganja and do their best to imagine that they are Jamaicans” (Kerridge 343).

Although Rastafarian camps had been spotted in Great Britain since the 1950s, by the late 1970s the movement had, in the words of one sympathetic study, “flowered and the wind [had] dispersed the seeds far and wide” (Semaj, “Rastafari” 22). In Japan, a self-proclaimed Rastafarian named Jah Hiro promoted the movement as a spiritual alternative to the “dead” culture of Europe (Eastham 1). The African countries of Zimbabwe and Nigeria sprouted several Rastafarian collectivities, and closer to Jamaica, the Rastafarian presence was strongly felt in the Eastern Caribbean countries of Barbados and Trinidad. So common did Rastafarian groups become around the world that Rastafarian scholar Horace Campbell dreamed that the Rastafarian movement eventually could form the basis of a “universal culture” (234).

While one might think all this attention would be welcomed by Rastafarians, it in fact served to widen the traditional conflict between “religious” and “political” elements of the movement. Over the years, religious and more politically oriented Rastafarians had been split on such issues as the movement’s involvement in Jamaican politics. Religious Rastafarians now complained that the use of reggae as campaign songs and a source of campaign slogans during the 1972, 1976, and 1980 national elections demeaned the movement. Some traditionalists even believed the movement’s involvement in politics was “‘satanic’ because it has caused divisions and stamped a mark of disgrace on the Rastafarian movement” (Nagashima 26).

Many Rastafarian traditionalists also criticized reggae for commercializing the movement. Some reggae musicians of the 1970s, according to Rastafarian Barbara Makeda Lee, worried more about generating “profits” than “spiritual uplift” (40). Traditionalists ridiculed reggae musicians as international stars who deliberately diluted the Rastafarian message in order to appeal to large, often white audiences.

According to sociologist Yoshito Nagashima, traditional Rastafarians found it “intolerable” that the “distorted artificiality” of international reggae was “accepted as genuine” by so many listeners (181).³

Not only did the popularity of reggae contribute to this wider schism between political and religious Rastafarians, the music also played a significant role in the development of “pseudo-Rastafarian” groups—groups drawn to the movement primarily by its fashions and association with reggae music. Cedric Brooks, a member of the ska band the Skatalites, expressed the concern of many more traditional Rastafarians that the movement had become more of a cultural fad than a religion: “People coming into the faith are not really grounded in the hard-core religious philosophy, and some tend to go only by the paraphernalia and outward appearances of the culture” (Burke 15). According to Bob Marley’s biographer Timothy White, by the mid-1970s some middle-toupper-class Jamaicans began to embrace Rastafarian fashions while disregarding the movement’s “strict dietary rules, the religious beliefs and the humility of the authentic” Rastafarian (259-60). According to cultural critic, Dick Hebdige, one Rastafarian raged against these “pseudo-Rastafarians” for “smashing the Father [Haile Selassie] around They think it’s a fashion, you see, but Rasta is not fashion. . . . Rasta is pureness” {Cut V Mix 53}. Carolyn Cooper, one of Jamaica’s leading experts on Jamaican dancehall music, agreed in a 1994 interview that many mainstream Jamaicans had adopted the movement’s symbols—Ethiopian colors, dreadlocks—without “necessarily seeing themselves as Rastas.”

Even some middle-class intellectuals in Jamaica “converted” to the Rastafarian faith (Chevannes, “Healing” 78-79).⁴ This too pushed the movement further away from its religious heritage and more into the secular, “intellectual” realm. Rastafarian Leahcim T. Semaj was the leading voice for a new wave of Rastafarian intellectuals. Semaj announced on more than one occasion that traditional nonpolitical Rastafarians would have to “put up” with Rastafarian intellectuals or “cease to visibly identify themselves with Rastafari” (“Inside Rasta” 38). Traditionalists, according to Semaj, would have to learn to transcend their religious beliefs and embrace “social theory.” According to Semaj, Rastafarians needed to become “activists” engaged in creating social organizations as a “tool for liberation” (“Rastafari” 23). The development of a Rastafarian social theory, according to Semaj, would allow the Rastafarians to share in the “state power” and act as a “vehicle through which the feelings and reality of significant sectors from the labor class . . . the ghetto culture . . . can be articulated.” Ultimately, a Rastafarian social theory would increase the opportunity for a “revolutionary conflict” in Jamaica (“Inside Rasta” 38).

Still other “pseudo-Rastafarian” groups rejected the movement’s traditional views altogether. Founded by Jamaican Keith Gordon in the late 1960s, the Ethiopian Zion Coptic Church, for example, was started in Jamaica but relocated to Miami, Florida, in the early 1970s. From the start, the Coptics encouraged American and European whites to join the group. More importantly, the Coptics denounced their Rastafarian

brethren in Jamaica as “ropeheads,” repudiated Haile Selassie’s divinity, and criticized reggae for promoting lust and violence (Blake 1). Brother Louv, a Coptic spokesperson, criticized even reggae’s most influential star, Bob Marley, for what he considered to be a disservice to the movement:

Is it Bob Marley who has the song, “I Shot the Sheriff? To me, that’s not a contribution; to me, that’s a great damage that can do nothing except inspire violence. Are the followers who follow after him doing anything conscious? I’ve yet to hear of it. Reggae music is doing a lot of damage to the ganja argument. For when you try to show the non-smoker what ganja is about, they look to the Rasta. (Blake 1)

Back in Jamaica, even the Gleaner denounced the Coptics as “Star Island hippies” (Kitchin 8) and insisted that neither the “white rastas’ from Miami nor their paid black minions have any authority to speak about Africa where, they say, Rasta originated” (Kitchin 13). Critical of the Coptic’s materialism, the Gleaner observed “crisp expensive European cars” parked at the Coptic settlement (Ritch 6) and accused the group of acquiring its wealth through shady land deals and drug trafficking (Campbell 115-16).

Nevertheless, the Coptics provided the most extreme example of what had become a real problem for the Rastafarian movement—the proliferation of “pseudo-Rastafarian” groups claiming to speak for the movement. Typically embracing only the superficial trappings of Rastafarianism—the ganja-smoking, the dreadlocks, or reggae music itself—these groups threatened to reduce Rastafari to little more than a cultural fad.

Conclusion

While the Rastafarian movement seemingly was becoming something of a cultural fad, Michael Manley was implementing radical social and economic changes in Jamaica. Manley and the PNP government touted democratic socialism as the answer to Jamaica’s social ills. Yet under Manley’s leadership, the Jamaican people suffered from the worst economic conditions to hit the island in nearly thirty years. Challenged by an international recession, a reduction in tourism, and political gang violence, Manley was defeated in the 1980 national elections by JLP rival Edward Seaga.

Meanwhile, international record companies successfully marketed reggae to international audiences. Rather than suppressing reggae’s association with the Rastafarians, record producers like Chris Blackwell exploited reggae’s dissident qualities, marketing reggae as rock and roll’s new “rebel” music. As such, reggae musicians continued to sound many of the same protest themes evident in early “roots” reggae. International reggae artists did widen their lyrical scope to focus more on international issues, including the political turmoil in Africa. Yet more than any lyrical changes, packaging and changes in the sound of reggae best account for its sudden appeal to white American and European audiences. Rather than an

indigenous music of Jamaica's poor and oppressed, "international reggae" was sold more as a new brand of rock and roll.

In Jamaica, this contributed to a widening of the gap between religious and political Rastafarians, and it created a schism between "true believers" and simple followers of reggae fashion. Middle-class Rastafarian intellectuals and "pseudo-Rastafarian" groups further pushed the movement in directions traditional Rastafarians found objectionable. While never a highly organized movement with strong central leadership, Rastafarianism became, in the 1970s, even more fragmented, more diverse, and less unified by common religious or political tenets. Without a central leader to unify the various groups, the Rastafarians became vulnerable to "pseudo-Rastafarians" claiming to speak for the movement. More traditional Rastafarians resisted the government's token concessions and the commercial exploitation of the movement and its music, but a sufficient number of the Rastafarians benefitted from these changes to blunt the movement's political edge.

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 1970s. Indeed, reggae musicians were often forced to play for profit as a means of economic survival. Thus, the severe decline of the Jamaican economy after 1976 may have had some effect on the increasing fragmentation and commercialization of the Rastafarian movement.

Notes

1. According to Manley, the IMF deal forced Jamaica to devalue its dollar from "a position slightly better than parity with the US dollar to an exchange rate of J\$1.76 for US\$1.00" (160).
2. As Chevannes suggests, beyond Howell's group, there were at least three other Rastafarian groups in existence during the 1930s. In one, Rastafarian preacher Joseph Hibbert emphasized the powers of the occult to his members. Another called the "King of Kings Mission" followed Hinds and sponsored baptism and fasting. A third group, under the leader of Archibald Dunkley, rejected the Revival practice of spirit possession, or the belief that good or evil spirits could invade and temporarily take control of a human body (Rastafari 119-44).
3. According to Nagashima, many religious Rastafarians favored Nyabynghi music. In the late 1930s, Rastafarians adopted and modified the sound of burra drumming, an African-influenced drumming, and created Nyabynghi drumming, the movement's first musical expression. Played at intimate religious Rastafarian ceremonies, Nyabynghi drumming was considered more "religious" and "natural" because the music relied entirely on percussions and traditional Rastafarian hymns.

4. Chevannes explains that not all of Jamaica's middle class were defecting to the Rastafarian faith: "Not only the working class youths, but the middle classes as well were now defining themselves closer to the Rasta than to the white reference point. . . This does not mean that the middle-class is becoming Rasta. Far from it. But it does signify a tendency to identify more with the African reference point than with the European" ("Healing" 78-79).

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