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The Rastafari as a Modern Day Pariah Group in Jamaica

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April 28, 2006

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This paper examines why the Rastafari—a religious group comprised mainly of poor, disenfranchised, black Jamaicans—can be labeled within a Weberian framework as a pariah group. This author has chosen to commence her analysis by providing an abridged history of the group beginning with their enslavement in Jamaica during the 1790s. Through an examination of primary sources by the Jamaican Rastafari community as well as secondary sources by scholars of Jamaican history and the Rastafari movement, the author has employed pariah group theory as developed by Max Weber and Hannah Arendt, in order to explain the unique circumstances that led to the emergence of the Rastafari movement in the 20th century. By comparing the Rastafari to other researched pariah groups like the Jews and the Dalits, the author has created a compelling case study for any sociologist interested in analyzing how a pariah group functions in post-colonial society. Moreover, the Rastafari's emergence in the twentieth century is of special significance since it led to the actualization of the black power movement in Jamaica and the spreading of a doctrine that promoted African pride, repatriation, reggae music, and ital living to the world.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my boyfriend Matthew who remains committed to supporting me in all of my endeavors, be they academic or professional.

Thank you for your patience and understanding these past 18 months.

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I would like to thank Prof. Veljko Vujacic for all of *his* hardwork on this thesis. Both your criticism and compliments have meant so much to me.

I would also like to thank my mother and father who have done their best to lighten my load and raise my spirits throughout my time at Oberlin. I love you both so much.

Jah Bless.

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I. Introduction

As a teenager I remember realizing the socio-cultural significance of my parents' decision to name me Alexandra Marley Bartolf after the legendary reggae artist, Bob Marley. This project began as an attempt to make sense of who Marley was and what he stood for. Despite listening to his music from the time I was born, I only began to try and make sense of Marley's lyrics while in college. At Oberlin, Bob Marley adorns the walls of countless campus bedrooms, usually posed smoking a large spliff of ganja or playing the guitar. However, when I began to listen more analytically to the music of Bob Marley I realized that his music was not just about free love or hedonistic bliss. On the contrary, there was an entire world of Bob Marley that I had somehow neglected to notice: his devotion to Jah Ras Tafari. I became fascinated with the influence the Rastafari have exerted not only on Bob Marley but on every liberal arts student who attempts to 'dread' their hair and play "Redemption Song" on their guitar at campus get-togethers.

The Rastafari abide by a unique ideology that is a result of both their long-term alienation and the choice to follow a distinct path that leads them to translate their low-status in Jamaican society as one that is holy and special. Weber, Arendt, and other theorists have not explicitly labeled the Rastafari as a pariah group, but it is clear that their practices, beliefs, and historical experiences are in accordance with the features of other noted pariah groups, such as the Jews and Hindu Untouchables. However, unlike the Jews and Untouchables, this pariah group has achieved international popular acclaim for its unique culture.

Many popularized status markers of Rastafarian culture such as smoking ganja, growing dreadlocks, and listening to reggae music have become global symbols not of

Rastafarianism but of resistance. However, the widespread dissemination of Rastafarian culture has not resulted in political action or even support; rather, the cultural underpinnings of Rastafarianism have been untied from their moorings in Jamaica and have lost the social significance of the Rasta. Indeed, while the number of people throughout the world who call themselves “Rastas” continues to rise, the plight of the Rastafari is not gaining momentum. By mimicking the physical and behavioral attributes of the Rastafari, these pseudo-Rastas have transformed the religious movement into one that is strictly cultural.

The Rastafari population of Jamaica are no closer to repatriating to Ethiopia as they were in the 1960s, yet ironically, the Rastafari have inspired native Ethiopians to partake in practices that are culturally associated not with Africa but with the Rastafari of Jamaica. For example, the wearing of dreadlocks, the smoking of ganja, and the listening to music of Bob Marley have become staples of what being an African means to Africans themselves. As white, educated students across America don dreadlocks and wear red-gold-green attire in supposed support of the Rastafari movement, few know the plight or principles of the Rastafari and moreover, the circumstances that catalyzed their emergence as a globally recognized culture.

II. Theoretical Framework

Weber's analysis of the distribution of power within a society and the concept of status continues to influence arguments about social stratification and the role of class. For Weber, status encompasses more than economic standing, it determines an individual or group's ability to wield power within political, social and educational institutions. In fact, the term *stand*¹ or status group implies that an exclusive arrangement exists between a group of individuals who share similar styles of life and a sense of superior social honor.

Weber initially used the term *stand* when analyzing the position of *Junkers*² or conservative landlord capitalists and civil servants who exerted considerable power in Prussia. In his analysis of the Junkers, Weber realized that economic terms alone were insufficient in determining the social rank of the group. Thus, Weber began to analyze why certain ideas structured the subculture of both the Junkers and their opposition, the farm workers of Germany, and how these beliefs related to their economic interests.³

Although the term *stand* was initially used only in reference to higher social ranks, Weber used it for all social groups, stressing that distinctions in prestige could have had both positive and undesirable effects. For example, the Junkers' refusal to associate with the middle class could not be reduced to mere snobbery; it was indicative of their desire to preserve a specific relationship that existed throughout Prussian history between the higher and lower classes of society.⁴

¹ Bendix, Reinahrd. *Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1960: 85.

² *ibid*

³ *ibid*

⁴ *ibid*

In contrast to classes, *status groups* are normally communities. They are, however, often of an amorphous kind. In contrast to the purely economically determined 'class situation' we wish to designate as 'status situation' every typical component of the life fate of men ... is determined by a specific, positive or negative, social estimation of *honor*. This honor may be connected with any quality shared by a plurality, and, of course, it can be knit to a class situation: class distinctions are linked in the most varied ways with status distinctions.⁵

Status honor is accorded on the basis of how honorable a community is perceived in comparison to other groups in the society. Thus, status distinctions are often linked to class distinctions. However, while class is determined on the basis of property and wealth, status honor is rarely given to individuals solely because of their property and acquisitions. Rather, status honor refers to any distinction, respect, or prestige that is accorded to an individual or group by others.⁶

Status honor can change according to circumstance; for example, a person who violates important social norms can lose status honor. Moreover, status honor can result in either positive or negative outcomes and is therefore determined by social rather than economic superiority:

Only with the negatively privileged status groups does the 'sense of dignity' take a specific deviation. A sense of dignity is the precipitation in individuals of social honor and of conventional demands which a positively privileged status group raises from the department of its members.⁷

Exclusive communities of persons who share the same status by virtue of their ritual practices use status honor as the means to distinguish among members of the group.

⁵ Weber, Max. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Translated and edited by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills. New York: Oxford UP, 1958: 186-187.

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ *ibid*

Both Hindu castes and Protestant sects exclude members who have disobeyed ritualistic practices or challenged widely held values. The ostracism that occurs when a person violates a ritual of his caste in Hindu societies is similar to the ostracism that occurs in Protestantism. For example, depending on the seriousness of the violation a member of either religion could be banished, shunned, or excommunicated from their group or caste. Thus, status honor is a crucial determinant for any hierarchy that exists within either religious communities. More than the Protestant sects, Hindus use an existing moral code identified with dharma:

A man who accepts the caste system and the rules of his particular subcaste is living according to dharma, while a man who questions them is violating dharma. Living according to dharma is rewarded, while violated of dharma is punished, both here and thereafter.⁸

Weber believes that Hindu castes are distinctive in their status grouping in several other ways. The hereditary nature of castes intensifies the familial pressure to follow rituals and to obey social norms. In addition, Weber noted the importance of familial charisma in preserving the caste status of the family:

“By ‘familial charisma’ we want to designate certain personal qualifications, which originally were thought to be magical and which are in any case extraordinary and not readily accessible to other persons by virtue of their membership in a kinship group.”⁹

A status group evolves into a closed caste when group status distinctions are superimposed upon ethnic ones and shared values, experiences, and rituals of group members become more rigidly defined. The importance of rituals is obvious from the fact

⁸ Srinivas, M.N. *Religion and society among the Coorgs of South India*. Oxford: the Clarendon Press, 1952: 26

⁹ Weber, Max. *Religion of India*. Translated and edited by Hans H. Gerth and Don Martindale. London: South Asia Books, 2000: 49-50.

that any physical contact with a member of a caste that is lower in status is considered to be ritualistically impure and must be recompensed by a religious act.¹⁰

In order for the consequences of interacting with a lower-standing group to develop to such an extreme degree, ethnic differences must exist between the two groups. Different ethnic communities juxtaposed on the same land often create a vertical social and economic system as a means of differentiating which groups have higher and lower status honor. In the case of the Hindus, skin-color and profession are important factors in determining social status.

Correctly formulated: a comprehensive societalization integrates the ethnically divided communities into specific political and communal action. In their consequences, they differ precisely in this way: ethnic coexistences condition a mutual repulsion and disdain but allow each ethnic community to consider its own honor as the highest one; the caste structure brings about a social subordination and an acknowledgement of 'more honor' in favor of the privileged caste and status groups. This is due to the fact that in the caste structure ethnic distinctions as such have become 'functional' distinctions within the political societalizations.¹¹

Moreover, caste structures are more likely to occur in rural, less market-oriented communities and hold particular importance in the realms of kinship and marriage. Each caste is part of a locally based system of inter-dependence with other groups and holds particular importance regarding occupational specialization. Thus, the division of labor is yet another factor that cements the caste system of Hindu society. Members of each caste are forced to maintain the economic, cultural and social values and rituals of their caste:

¹⁰ McIntosh, Ian. *Classical Sociological Theory*. New York: New York UP, 1997: 139.

¹¹ Gerth, Hans and C. Wright Mills, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, New York: Oxford UP, 1958: 186-187.

“The caste structure transforms the horizontal and unconnected coexistences of ethnically segregated groups into a vertical social system of super and subordination.”¹²

One consistent element that appears in all castes societies is the pariah group. Weber defined *pariavolk*¹³ or pariah people as characterized by “political and social disprivilege and a far-reaching distinctiveness in economic functioning.”¹⁴ In *Ancient Judaism*, Weber identified the Jews as a pariah group:

Sociologically speaking, the Jews were a pariah people, which means, as we know from India, that they were a guest people who were ritually separated, formally or de facto, from their social surroundings.¹⁵

Other characteristics that identified Jews as a pariah people included their habitation in the interstices between nations, without being concentrated in a single territory;¹⁶ their choice to voluntarily segregate themselves primarily for religious reasons, and finally, their preservation of a “double morality” one which existed within the community and the other which governed their relations with the outside world.¹⁷

In addition, a group’s pariah status is reinforced by beliefs in its own religious promise. The religion of a pariah people is based on a “status legend of the disprivileged group”¹⁸ which culminates in the conviction that they are a chosen people. Because a pariah people is powerless to seek revenge and/or equality, its members rationalize

¹²Weber, Max. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Translated and edited by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills. New York: Oxford UP, 1958: 186-187

¹³Weber’s definition of Jews as pariahs was a scientific category that attempted to embrace their socioeconomic role in Europe during antiquity and the Middle Ages.

¹⁴Weber, Max. *Economy and Society*. Translated and edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. New York: Bedminster Press, 1968: 493.

¹⁵Weber, Max. *Ancient Judaism*. Translated and edited by Hans H. Gerth and Don Martindale. New York: Free Press, 1967: 3

¹⁶Traverso, Enzo. *The Jews & Germany*. Translated by Daniel Weissbort. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995: 47.

¹⁷Weber, Max. *Max Weber on Law in Economy and Society*. Max Rheinstein (ed.). Translated by Edward Shils and Max Rheinstein. New York: Simon and Schuster. 1968: 492.

¹⁸Abraham, Gary. *Max Weber and the Jewish Question*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992: 8

mistreatment as part of a complex religious existence. The misfortune and low status a pariah group experiences is interpreted as compensation for its inimitable relationship with God and for the higher purpose it serves both during and after life in this world.

Weber theorized that these beliefs arose from a theodicy of suffering:

One can explain suffering and injustice by referring to individual sin committed in former life, to the guilt of ancestors . . . to the wickedness of all people. As compensatory promise one can refer to hopes of the individual for a better life in the future of this world or to the for the successors, or to a better life in the hereafter.¹⁹

A pariah caste like the “Untouchables” or Dalits in India developed a common religious culture, but were deemed ethnically inferior because of physical, cultural, or social attributes such as skin color, economic status, or spiritual rituals. The Jews and the Hindu pariah castes had similar reactions in response to their low status:

The more depressed the position in which the members of the pariah people found themselves, the more closely did the religion cause them to cling to one another and to their pariah position and the more powerful became the salvation hopes, which were connected with the divinely ordained fulfillment of their religious obligations.²⁰

Both the Jews and the Dalits rarely owned the land they worked. Furthermore, their sense of dignity was derived from what they would achieve in the world beyond the present. The most important similarity between the two pariah groups lay in the fact that both the Untouchables and the Jews accepted their condition of exclusion as natural and immutable law, and believed that messianic deliverance would put an end to their suffering and re-establish the true social order. “Certainly the need for vengeance has

¹⁹ Weber, Max, *The Sociology of Religion*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1993: 275

²⁰ Weber, Max. *Economy and Society*: 493.

had a special affinity with the belief that the unjust are well off in this world only because hell is reserved for them later.”²¹

Theorist Hannah Arendt expanded on Weber’s definition of pariah group to include a sense of homelessness and worldlessness that evokes Durkheim’s concept of anomie. Arendt’s conceptualization of a “pariah group” was less concerned with its economic significance and more focused on political and spiritual connotations.²² According to Arendt, the lack of “a privately owned share of a common world”²³ is a distinctive characteristic of pariah group identity. Arendt agreed with Weber that a condition of world-wide alienation often led to the development of new forms of religion as well as new cultural expressions and alternative political views.

Arendt’s theorizing of pariah groups was strongly influenced by Bernard Lazare, author of *Anti-Semitism: Its History and Causes*. Lazare believed that the existence of a pariah group was indicative of pending revolutionary change. According to Lazare, the emergence of a pariah group is less based on the choice to establish and promote a new cultural and religious identity; rather, it is a direct response to instances of alienation and exclusion by the dominant culture.²⁴ Lazare viewed the pariah as a bearer of a hidden tradition, which was a cause of great pride among its people.

In her analysis of the Jews in Europe after the Enlightenment, Arendt built on Lazare’s work and distinguished between conscious pariahs and parvenus.²⁵ Parvenus were those Jews who tried to succeed in the world of the Gentiles by escaping their own

²¹ Gerth, Hans and C. Wright Mills, 276

²² Traverso, 47.

²³ Arendt, Hannah. *The Jew as Pariah and Other Essays*. New York: Grove Press, 1978: 99.

²⁴ Lazare, Bernard. *Antisemitism, its history and causes*. Tr. from the French. (New York, The International library publishing co. 1903; repr. London, Britons Publishing Co., 1967).

²⁵ Arendt, Hannah. *The Jew as Pariah and Other Essays*. New York: Grove Press, 1978: 101.

community and religious or ethnic ties. As a product of assimilation, the parvenu felt ashamed of his group identity. In contrast, conscious pariahs did not want or need to conceal their group identity, and as a result were often marginalized. Moreover, conscious pariahs were outwardly proud of their heritage and customs and confronted the current social order with a new, liberated narrative. DeCosmo elaborated on Arendt's concept of a conscious pariah by positing that conscious pariahs manifest their pride through the art, poetry and music they create.²⁶

In Arendt's redefinition of the pariah and parvenu dichotomy, she theorized that the parvenu was far more concerned with his status honor and ability to achieve an illusory respectability by submitting to prevailing social norms and assimilating to the dominant culture. For Arendt, the features that defined the pariah above all were his lack of rights, statelessness, and outlaw status, which made him a scapegoat in all the crises that affect the dominant group of the society.²⁷

Arendt believed that the pariah's condition implied positive privileges, which included an intellectual and spiritual nature, awareness of grave injustices, a lack of prejudice, and the ability to survive and persevere in oppressive circumstances. In fact, she wrote "this warmth, which is the pariah's substitute for light, exerts a great fascination upon all those who are so ashamed of the world as it is that they would like to take refuge in invisibility."²⁸ According to Arendt, the pariah's sensitivity led him to encounter shame on such an intense emotional level that he believed his experience could

²⁶ DeCosmo, Janet L. "Pariah Status, Identity, and Creativity in Babylon: Utopian Visions of 'Home' in the African Diaspora. *Identity*. 2002. Vol. 2, No. 2: 148.

²⁷ Traverso, 51

²⁸ Arendt, Hannah. *Men in Dark Times*. London: J Cape, 1970:16.

only have occurred through divine intervention. When the improvement in his social status seemed impossible, the pariah accepted his condition; subsequently, the shame of his status was transformed into pride. Moreover, as an individual with no roots, the pariah could not afford to have a narrow perspective; he had to adapt to circumstances beyond his control and do so in a way that does not attract increased hostility.

W.G. Runcimen's conceptualization of the theory of relative deprivation aids in furthering our discussion of Arendt's pariah/parvenu dynamic. Modern sociology has expanded on the notion of ideal interests and its connection to perceptions of social injustice by developing relative deprivation theory. This theory is centered on a group's perception that the dominant groups in society have prevented it from achieving wealth and honor. Specifically, the subordinate group is deprived of achieving culturally and historically important goods that are valued by the dominant culture. This deprivation is not merely economic but intrinsically linked to status. Thus, relative deprivation can be described as the "tension that develops from a discrepancy between the 'ought' and the 'is' of collective value satisfaction."²⁹ However, a group may be subjectively deprived with reference to its expectations even though an objective observer might not judge its members to be in want. Thus, a group's point of reference may be its own past condition, an abstract ideal, or the standards articulated by a leader and/or reference group.

Merton³⁰ built on Durkheim's work by introducing the concept of reference group. For Merton, the reference group exemplified how relative deprivation could mediate between social structure and interpersonal patterns of behavior. While Merton

²⁹ T.R. Gurr. *Why Men Rebel*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1970: 23

³⁰ Merton, R. *Social Theory and Social Structure*. New York: Free Press, 1968: 149.

does not specifically suggest reasons why individuals choose certain adaptations over others, he distinctly points to normative concerns as evidence of anomie at the individual level. When society is interrupted by significant structural changes, individuals suffering from anomie begin to compare themselves to others, and evaluate their own condition by reference to the general conditions of their peers and associates.

Runciman refined the concept of relative deprivation by differentiating between egoistic deprivation and fraternalistic deprivation.³¹ Egoistic deprivation stems from comparisons within a person's own group and fraternalistic deprivation originates through comparisons between a person's own group and other groups in society.

Prosperity can break the vicious circle between poverty and conservatism by making people aware of the possibility of a higher standard than it would previously have occurred to them to hope for. Conversely, a decline in prosperity, if not too violent, can restrict the sense of relative deprivation by inhibiting comparisons with more fortunate groups.³²

Determining why individuals suffer from fraternalistic or egoistic deprivation means analyzing whether they want to rise out of their group membership or within the group itself.³³ The distinction between the two is important since fraternalistic deprivation generates agitation for or against structural change, whereas egoistic deprivation does not. According to Runcimen, the key factor that causes fraternalistic deprivation is "lateral solidarity"³⁴ or a kinship with other associates in one's membership group. According to Weberian scholar Herbert Hymen, a reference group often mirrors the

³¹ Since Runcimen's breakthrough work, the terms egoistic and fraternalistic have been replaced by individual and group/collective deprivation.³¹

³² W.G., Runciman. *Relative Deprivation and Social Justice*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969. pg. 23-24.

³³ W.G., Runciman. *Relative Deprivation and Social Justice*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969: pg 31

³⁴ *ibid*

subordinate group in terms of economic status. Even within an egalitarian-oriented society, it is more likely that the reference group is located in terms of class status closer to the pariah group than the dominant group.³⁵ However, this is only true when relative deprivation represents the *comparative* influence of a reference group. For example, the racist practices of Jamaican society that hierarchically placed dark skinned people at the bottom of the social order created a system where two men both considered black would be treated differently because of their respective skin tone. Thus, rather than compare themselves to the elites of Jamaican society, the dark-colored blacks evaluated their socio-economic status in relation to the Creoles.

As Weber examined different religious practices throughout the world, he too realized that defining deprivation only in economic and material variables was not sufficient for understanding the formation of lower-caste groups. While these variables were important, Weber focused on the connection between material and ideal interests and on how they influenced religious belief systems.³⁶ Weber realized that how a social group responds to their perceived deprivation is influenced by pre-existing worldviews and can be re-conceptualized because of new ideal and material interests.

If the mores and values of a group's existence are threatened, an altered ideology and lifestyle is developed to cope with these uncontrollable changes. The group can either choose to escape both physically and socially from the society and seek salvation elsewhere or endeavor to find a mode of adjusting to it and accepting it.³⁷ Weber refers

³⁵ Hymen, Herbert. "The Value Systems of Different Classes," in Reinhard Bendix and Seymour M. Lisbet, eds. *Class, Status and Power*. Glencoe: The Free Press, 1953: 448.

³⁶ Weber, Max. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Translated and edited by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills. New York: Oxford UP, 1958: 280

³⁷ Hunt, Stephen J. "Deprivation and Western Pentecostalism Revisited: The Case of 'Classical' Pentecostalism. *PentacoStudies*. Vol. 1, No.1, 2002.

to those who choose to reject the new world order as having an “other-worldly” orientation; the decision to accept the world is defined as an inner-worldly orientation. In an early theoretical essay on deprivation as a source of religiosity, prominent sociologist Charles Glock argues that a group chooses to reject the new society only when “the nature of the deprivation is inaccurately perceived or where those experiencing the deprivation are not in a position to work directly at eliminating the causes.”³⁸ In addition, “if people have no reason to expect or hope for more than they can achieve, they will be less discontented with what they have, or even grateful simply to be able to hold onto it.”³⁹

The Rastafari experienced extensive relative deprivation during Jamaica’s post-emancipation period. Stereotypes developed during slavery that specifically focused on facial appearances such as tightly curled hair, broad noses, thick lips, and other features, continued to be rated negatively throughout the 20th Century. In addition, African names/languages were considered to be the language of the illiterate and to use it then was to ‘talk bad.’⁴⁰ Immediately, feelings of resentment and distrust developed between those who composed the dark-skinned group (the Rastafari) and the light-skinned group (the Creoles). Despite having historically similar origins, the Rastafari were never able to compensate for their status honor. It is for this reason that the Creoles act as reference group for the Rastafari.

³⁸ C. Y. Glock, "The Role of Deprivation in the Origin and Evolution of Religious Groups," in *Religion and Social Conflict*, ed. R. Lee and M. E. Marty. New York: Oxford UP, 1964: 29

³⁹ W.G. Runciman. *Relative Deprivation and Social Justice*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969: 9

⁴⁰ Chevannes, B. *Rastafari: Roots and Ideology*. Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1994: 132

The objective of this thesis is to prove that the Rastafari are a pariah group located in Jamaica. The social order of colonial society left blacks at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder and while the majority of blacks became parvenus a handful of poor, disenfranchised, rural blacks chose to create a new identity for themselves. This identity eventually manifested itself as the Rastafari and greatly influenced the rest of Jamaica's population, as well as the Black Pride Movement as a whole, through their cultural practices and political actions. The formation of the Rastafari is a complex theoretical and historical account; the application of pariah group theory as well as relative deprivation theory will aid in deciphering how and why the Rastafari came to exist.

III. Historical Background and Doctrine of the Rastafari

We are neither Africans, though most of us are black, nor are we Anglo-Saxon though some of us would have others to believe this. We are Jamaicans! And what does this mean? We are a mixture of races living in perfect harmony and as such provide a useful lesson to a world torn apart by racial prejudice.

-In Nettleford's Mirror Mirror

The racial harmony of Jamaica rarely comes to mind when listening to the music of Bob Marley, the Caribbean island's most famous musician and social commentator. However, during the years immediately precipitating Jamaican independence in 1962, racial pride was considered a subversive attempt at spreading anarchy and divisiveness throughout the nation. Until the Black Power movement took hold in the Caribbean during the late 1960s,⁴¹ a government committee chose the slogan "Out of Many, One People" as the motto of the newly independent Jamaica. While the country prepared for its first autonomous election in 1967, the British Broadcasting Company filmed a documentary discussing "the way in which coloured people in Jamaica had found a solution to the problem of integration."⁴² How did race relations in Jamaica transform into violent chaos? Where are the roots of the Black Power movement in Jamaica? Who is responsible for destroying the myth of racial harmony? Many scholars point to a small group of poor disenfranchised black Jamaicans who call themselves the Rastafari.

During the 1950s, when the Rastafari began emigrating to urban centers like Kingston, Jamaicans were still unwilling to accept that they were a black nation. Despite

⁴¹Waters, Anita M. *Race, Class and Political Symbols: Rastafari and Reggae in Jamaican Politics*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1985: 79

⁴²Daily Gleaner 1/28/67: 17

the fact that 76 percent of the population was black⁴³, many Jamaicans sought to promote a non-racialized Jamaican identity. As the Rastafarian population infiltrated urban communities, Jamaicans believing in a non-racial or multi-racial identity met their most aggressive opponents. The Rastafarians' commitment to their black identity and the power and importance of being black contradicted many of the sentiments felt by Jamaicans who refused to see themselves in terms of black, brown, or white. The introduction of the Rastafari ideology to poor, urban populations launched the Black Power Movement in Jamaica and united and divided Jamaica's socio-economic classes around issues relating to race.

The convergence of official and popular culture is of great importance to understanding the influence of Rastafarians on mainstream Jamaican society. Black Jamaicans of all socio-economic origins adopted many of their modes of hair, diet, and speech. As the Rastafari raised black consciousness in Jamaica to new heights, people around the world began copying Rasta culture and incorporating it into their respective identity. The recognition of the late Bob Marley as a national hero is one manifestation of this important shift "away from a European cultural orientation of the elite toward an African orientation of the folk."⁴⁴

This chapter will give a historical background and elucidate what circumstances catalyzed the emergence of the Rastafari movement. By examining the socio-economic conditions of Jamaica during the colonial era, particularly the social stratification that reproduced the colonial racial hierarchy, it will become clear why black Jamaicans

⁴³ Nettleford, Rex. *Mirror Mirror: Identity, Race, and Protest in Jamaica*. Kingston: LMH Publishing, 2001: 34.

⁴⁴ Broos, Diane J. Austin. "Race and Class; Jamaica's Discourse on Heritable Identity." *Caribbean Sociology: Introductory Readings*. Ed. Christine Barrow & Rhoda Bedrock. Princeton, Markus Wiener Publishers. 2001: 251.

related to the Rastafari messages of empowerment and freedom. This chapter will also explore how plantation society influenced the post-colonial order of Jamaica and the deliberate development of a large, stigmatized class of people. This discussion will lead to a better understanding of how the philosophy of Marcus Garvey was received in Jamaica and why the Rastafari religion surfaced. Later, the reader will gain insight into the foundation and transformation of the Rastafari from a class of outcast and discriminated black men into a widely mimicked group of actors who revolutionized black identity in Jamaica and throughout the world.

I. Religion in Plantation Society

In colonial Jamaican society, African slaves adapted their religious roots to Jamaican plantation culture in two distinct forms: obeah and myalism. If a person possessed obeah it meant that he had supernatural powers that enabled him to find methods of weakening a specific enemy or oppressor. Myalism also allowed a person to have supernatural spiritual abilities, including powers that made him able to elude capture when trying to escape.⁴⁵ According to Erskine, the major difference between obeah and myal is that “whereas the obeah man is usually a private practitioner hired by a client for a specific purpose, the myal practitioner is a leader of a group devoted to organized religious life.”⁴⁶

In order to stop the spread of obeahism and myalism, slave owners “procured baptism for the Negroes⁴⁷” and fused myal beliefs with those of Native Baptists during the

⁴⁵ Erskine, Noel Leo. *From Garvey to Marley: Rastafari Theology*. Gainesville: UP of Florida, 2005: 7

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ Stewart, Dianne. “The Evolution of African-Derived Religions in Jamaica: Toward a Caribbean Theology of Collective Memory.” Ph.D diss. Union Theological Seminary, New York, 1997.

1790s.⁴⁸ Native Baptists were the first church to contact the enslaved population in Jamaica and their loose religious structure enabled them to use newly converted laymen to supervise the African converts.⁴⁹ George Liele, an American Baptist preacher and ex-slave, named the first Baptist Church on the island the Ethiopian Baptist Church in 1783.⁵⁰ Liele found stories in the Bible that paralleled the cruelty of plantation life in Jamaica. The story of Israel's exodus from Egypt and the prophecy of the destruction of Israel's enemies were two examples that Liele used to encourage the slaves to find hope in the Christian God. Liele compared the enslavement of Blacks to that of the Israelites; he preached that just as Israel's enemies were punished, so the slave-owners would suffer just retribution for the brutality of slavery.⁵¹ By including traditional African music and dance and merging African perspectives with Christian beliefs, Native Baptists like Liele reinterpreted Christianity so that other conversion efforts that did not incorporate traditional African culture appeared inherently less appealing.⁵² While leaders such as Alexander Bedward emerged in the late 19th Century and swelled the population of Native Baptists in Jamaica, economic and social conditions dispersed many blacks throughout the countryside.⁵³ When Bedward ferociously challenged white racism and injustice in Jamaica, the government decided to arrest him and his followers and quelled the Native Baptist movement for decades.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ Erskine, pg 9

⁴⁹ Barrett, Leonard E. *The Rastafarians*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1997: 105

⁵⁰ Clarke, Peter B. *Black Paradise: The Rastafarian Movement*. London, 1986: 35

⁵¹ *ibid*

⁵² Curtain, Phillip D. *Two Jamaicans*, New York: Antheneum Press, 1970: 12

⁵³ Satchell, Veront. "Jamaica" *World History Archives*. 1/3/1999. Hartford Web Publishing. 1/23/2006.

<<http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/43/130.html>>

⁵⁴ *ibid*

II. Blacks Post-Emancipation

The Baptist War of 1831 signified the slave owners' loss of power to control the slave populations of Jamaica. Many slaves, following the example of the rebel group known as the Maroons, began fleeing the plantations for the hills and organizing attacks on the British. In response, the British introduced an act that was intended to free slaves who had worked for a certain amount of years for their master. The slave population found this arrangement to be totally inadequate and after continued rebellions the British emancipated all slaves in 1838.

Emancipation created a new agricultural class of free-slaves that were divided into three separate groups: small farmers, peasants, and laborers.⁵⁵ The small farmers owned their own land and did not labor on former plantation estates. The peasants acted as freeholders and occasionally drew earnings from estates. The largest and poorest group within the agricultural class consisted of the laborers. The laborer differed from the peasant in that the laborer provided the labor for the white-owned estates, but did not have his own plot of land on the side.⁵⁶

The Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865 prompted the British to abolish the representative system of government and introduce the crown colony government, a system of imperial trusteeship, in 1866.⁵⁷ With the new government, land policies were introduced to resolve land conflicts and to resuscitate the failing plantation economy. By enacting a law that required landowners to produce clear titles of their property, hundreds of black peasants who held receipts but had no title to their land were evicted.

⁵⁵ Hall, Douglas. *Free Jamaica 1838-1865: An Economic History*. London: Caribbean UP, 1978: 162

⁵⁶ *ibid*

⁵⁷ Satchell, Veront. "Jamaica" *World History Archives*. 1/3/1999. Hartford Web Publishing. 1/23/2006. <<http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/43/130.html>>

The racial hierarchy of agricultural society is not often discussed; however, the socio-political implications of why certain Afro-Jamaicans belonged to each agricultural group is undoubtedly linked to enduring racist ideologies that stem from slave society.

“Although color distinctions were less absolute, the distances and grievances between white, brown, and black widened after emancipation. Whites who had formerly wooed free-coloured support now rebuffed them, intolerant of coloured equality.”⁵⁸ As the Brown middle-classes or “Afro-Saxons”⁵⁹ worked their way to the fringes of the owning class, they began to disassociate themselves from their Black counterparts in order to maintain their newly assigned, but uncertain positions in White Jamaican society.

As slaves, all Afro-Jamaicans had become indoctrinated in a British imperial value system that placed White people and culture in a place of eminence and all things of African origin in an inferior position. Thus, the agricultural groups that emerged were organized around the enduring racial hierarchy that was typical of the era of slavery. As Afro-Jamaicans pursued a much longed for socio-economic independence within post-colonial society, it became detrimental to associate with darker-colored Blacks who had traditionally been seen as undesirable by White society. Therefore, dark-skinned Jamaicans who were traditionally given the fewest opportunities within the plantation system were again relegated to the lowest rung of the socio-cultural ladder. Ultimately, this meant that any chance for social mobility was denied to those with objectionable physical attributes, dark skin tone being the most undesirable physical feature. Within the agricultural hierarchy, the group categorized as laborers primarily consisted of dark-skinned Afro-Jamaicans.

⁵⁸ Lowenthal, David. *West Indian Societies*. New York: Oxford UP, 1972: 50.

⁵⁹ Campbell, Horace. *Rasta and Resistance: From Marcus Garvey to Walter Rodney*. Trenton: Africa World Press, Inc. 1987: 44

From the time of emancipation until the 1960s, dark-skinned Afro-Jamaicans held the lowest class status and consequently endured the most difficult socio-economic hardships of any group in Jamaica. Unable to own and work arable land of their own, the dark-colored Afro-Jamaicans were forced to scavenge for food. Many were forced to resort to unbearable conditions when working on other lands. In order to avoid this abusive treatment, many moved to the only lands where farming and mining were not taking place. One such place became known as the land of "Look Behind" located in a region known as Cockpit County. According to one resident interviewed during the 1960s:

This is the baddest land in the whole country. There's a lot of bad land here. There are holes called sinkholes and cliffs that when you drop over there you will die and never be seen again. We need help in the Cockpit. We want someone to help us. Investors to come in, put up machinery, stone mill, industry, build houses. No human being should live here...live here like this.⁶⁰

III. Garvey And the National Movement

Throughout the late 1800s and early 1900s, race relations in Jamaica remained relatively stagnant. According to one scholar:

While the entente cordiale between the whites and the colored people is apparently strengthening daily, a very different state of feeling exists between the negroes or Africans, and the brows. The latter shun all connection by marriage with the former, and can experience no more unpardonable insult than to be classified with them in any way. They generally prefer that their daughters should live with a white person upon any terms, than to be married to a negro.⁶¹

This accepted color-based structure of society motivated Marcus Garvey to begin the first black pride movement in Jamaica. Garvey grew up in the parish of St. Ann during the 1880s and 1890s and he was greatly influenced by the tense race relations between black

⁶⁰ *Land of Look Behind*. Dir. Alan Greenberg. Videocassette. Rhapsody Films/Solo Man Production, 1982.

⁶¹ Bigelow, John. *Jamaica in 1850*. London: Greenwood Press, 1976: 26

and brown Jamaicans. At the age of fourteen Garvey quit school to move to Kingston and work as a printer's apprentice. It was there that he became increasingly aware of how the hierarchical structure of Jamaican society was predicated on racial make-up, and how his fellow black citizens accepted their low-status in society as immutable. Garvey continued to witness the favoritism shown to men of white or near white parentage specifically regarding occupational and educational opportunities.⁶² This disparate treatment inspired Garvey to create a theological base with which to counter the racial discrimination he experienced in Jamaica.

Unfortunately, Garvey was initially unsuccessful in connecting his message of empowerment with the Jamaican people who believed that striving to embrace white values would be more fruitful than accepting their black heritage. Journeying to see his friend Booker T. Washington after World War I, Garvey found support in the unemployed, newly urbanized black population in New York City.⁶³ As his slogan "Africa for the Africans" became popular in the States during the 1920s, the Jamaican population quickly took note of this revolutionary who was creating publications, organizations, and industry to promote his goal of repatriation to Africa. "Garvey challenged African Jamaicans and indeed all person of African descent to set themselves the task of building a racial as well as national consciousness, to liberate themselves from colonialism, to build self-esteem and race pride."⁶⁴

Jamaicans who supported the United Negro Improvement Association, as well as his Back-to-Africa mission met Marcus Garvey's return to Jamaica with sincere

⁶² Erskine, 31

⁶³ Cronon, Edmund, D., *Black Moses*. London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1969: 22

⁶⁴ Bennett, Hazel and Phillip Sherlock, *The Story of the Jamaican People*. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 1998: 295

enthusiasm. Those who proclaimed themselves as “Garveyites” studied Garvey’s speeches and literature; among them were Leonard Howell, Robert Hinds, Joseph Hibbert and Archibald Dunkley.⁶⁵ According to scholar Leonard Barrett, these men understood the crowning of Ras Tafari in 1930 to be a fulfillment of a prophecy spoken by Garvey in 1927.⁶⁶ His declaration: “Look to Africa, where a Black King shall arise—this will be the day of your deliverance” became the basis for believing that Ras Tafari was the Messiah who would deliver black Jamaicans from Babylon.

It is important to note that the relationship between the Rastafari and the Garveyites in the 1930s was tenuous at best. While the Rastafari believed that Garvey was a prophet, they did not agree with his ideology regarding capitalism and the work ethic. Because the Rastas emerged from the black underclass in Jamaica and were often subjugated by the white and colored elite, they believed that capitalism and materialism perpetuated racist and classist practices which caused the exploitation and oppression of African people. In Rupert Lewis’ analysis of the relationship between the Rastafari and the Garveyites it is clear that Garvey and his followers were critical of the Rastafari’s dogma as well. As Garvey became more focused on the economic progress of black Jamaicans, he moved away from lower class interests and aligned himself with the middle classes who showed more economic promise.⁶⁷

Garveyism looked to the future and economic progress while Rastas looked to the traditions of an Africanized peasantry. The Rastas never sought to reconcile blackness with modern concepts of economic development, nor did they participate in reformist programs for the humanization of capitalism, such as labor unions and political parties...The Rastas also shunned the work ethic and Christian concept of charity, which, along with an acceptance of the inferiority of Blackness, were ideas espoused by the rising white and mulatto middle classes in Jamaica.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Erskine, 31

⁶⁶ Barrett, Leonard E. *The Rastafarians*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1997: 62

⁶⁷ Lewis, Rupert. *Marcus Garvey*. Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 1998: 89

⁶⁸ *ibid*

When the National Movement was initiated in 1938, independence from Britain became the primary focus for governmental leaders. However, in order to be granted full sovereignty, the Jamaican government realized that they needed to create a singular, autonomous, national identity that the British government would recognize and respect. For Garveyites and the Rastafari, the discussion of a non-racial identity for Jamaica appeared problematic; however, because their groups only made up a small portion of the Jamaican population, their concerns were at first overshadowed. As other Caribbean nations gained independence from Britain, the Jamaican government and its elite were divided as to how to maintain or build a cultural identity that would simultaneously assert a distinctive way of life that was defined by neither Britain or America, and that would revitalize cultural norms that had been actively discouraged throughout colonial rule. Beginning in the 1940s, Jamaica's national motto became "Out of Many, One People." This motto encompassed efforts to "legitimize select elements of previously disparaged Afro-Jamaican cultural practices in order to foster a sense of national belonging among Jamaica's black population."⁶⁹

Between the late nineteenth century and the labor rebellions of the late 1930s, the predominant ideology that unified Jamaicans across lines of race and class was that of pride in the British Empire.⁷⁰ Despite the emergence of political parties and universal suffrage, there was little commitment by persons of all races and classes to the idea of Jamaica as an independent cultural and political entity. Scholars such as Katrin Norris believe that the Euro-centric emphasis engrained in the minds of all Jamaicans coupled

⁶⁹ Thomas, Deborah. A. *Modern Blackness: Nationalism, Globalization, and the Politics of Culture in Jamaica*. Duke University: Duke UP, 2004: 166

⁷⁰ Patrick Bryan. *The Jamaican People, 1880-1902: Race, Class, and Social Control*. London: Macmillan Press, 1991: 31.

with the de-legitimization of African culture throughout the colonial period, created a weak national identity.⁷¹ Other scholars like Rex Nettleford and Richard Hart argue that the slow development of nationalist agitation after emancipation was due to an ensconced loyalty to British culture which was manifested in an inferiority-complex regarding Afro-Jamaican culture.

The influx of immigrants from Southern China, India and Lebanon further complicated issues of national identity. Although various ethnic groups attempted to maintain their cultural institutions in their ethnocentric enclaves the “occurrence of miscegenation prompted and perpetuated disunity and instability.”⁷² In addition, if a hybrid identity were to gain greater status and acceptance this could lead to “a mixed-blood idealization with a middle-class uncton which is unacceptable to lower class blacks”⁷³ who believe that “the African” is the constant element of Jamaican identity and all other racial strains are based in this fundamental racial character.⁷⁴

IV. Independence and the 1960 Report

Contrary to expectations, Jamaican independence did not produce widespread prosperity for the country and its citizens. Rather, it was accompanied by increased unemployment, a contraction of the urban middle class and a large population movement from rural areas to the expanding shanty-towns around West Kingston.⁷⁵ The appeal of a Jamaican society that preserved socio-economic inequalities in order to present a strong nationalist identity infuriated many Jamaicans who thought that if Independence were to

⁷¹ Norris, Katrin. *Jamaica: The Search for Identity*. New York: Oxford UP, 1962:71

⁷² Silva, Jorge L. “The Caribbean Identity Crisis: A Study of Jamaican Culture and Society.” 9 Sept. 1999. 3 March 2006. <http://www.trincoll.edu/~jsilva/final.htm>

⁷³ Nettleford, Rex. *Mirror Mirror: Identity, Race, and Protest in Jamaica*. Kingston: LMH Publishing, 2001: 27

⁷⁴ *ibid*

⁷⁵ Lacey, Terry. *Violence and Politics in Jamaica 1960-1970*. Totowa, NJ: Frank Cass & Co, Ltd., 1977: 54

be achieved, greater opportunities for black Jamaicans would follow. The message of black power that had taken root in Jamaica's poor, urban slums for years suddenly exploded in popularity. The group responsible for the introduction of the black power movement in Jamaica was the Rastafari.

The Rastafari movement has strong roots in the regions of non-arable land where dark-skinned Afro-Jamaicans live in loosely organized villages and counties without schools, jobs, or any means of upward mobility. The race-based alienation from light-skinned middle class society coupled with the exploitation they experienced, made the Rastafari ideology of the 30s, 40s, and 50s, particularly appealing to blacks in these isolated communities. Ultimately, the lectures and sermons of the Rastafari dogma throughout both rural and urban areas catalyzed an examination of the social conditions between black Jamaicans and brown and white Jamaicans that had not previously been explored.

The controversial 1960 report commissioned by the government in response to the growing number of Rastas in urban communities was completed by the University College of the West Indies in 1960. The major objective of the study was to collect information on the doctrines, history, and needs of the Rastafari population in Kingston and to publish a series of recommendations for the government in dealing with this group. The report was a major site of discontent among the Rastafari; some felt that this attention by the government was long overdue whereas others believed that any involvement the government had in their culture would undoubtedly hinder their own social progress. The first recommendation the study made to the Government of Jamaica was to create a mission to African nations to discuss the immigration of Jamaican

citizens. Their reasons for this recommendation included: the high population and unemployment rate in Jamaica, the strong religious and emotional ties the Ras Tafari had to Africa, and the fundamental right every citizen has to emigrate and change nationality if he so desires. This recommendation gave the Rastafari considerable hope that repatriation could occur with the help of the Jamaican government.

The 1960 Report helped mitigate feelings by the general populace that the Rastas were unpatriotic members of Jamaican society by comparing the Rastas desire to return to Ethiopia with that of the Jamaican middle-class' aspirations to migrate to England or America. In addition, the report helped many to see that the Rastas' yearnings to leave Jamaica were due to the geographic areas and housing slums with which they were forced to reside. In response to the report, the government began building low-rent housing where the Rastas and other impoverished people could live. The government also sent a delegation of Rastafari and government leaders to African countries to explore the possibility of repatriation.

With regards to defining the Rastafari physically, the report showed the diversity of the Rastafari movement in terms of cultural practices, ideology, and physical characteristics. In addition, the Rastafari were portrayed as opposing the vestiges of colonial practices and provided the movement with much needed contextual relevance.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, widely held opinions that the Rastafari were little more than a menace to society and to the State remained.

⁷⁶ Nettelford, Rex. *Mirror Mirror*: 55

V. The Concept of Babylon

While some scholars have chosen to define the Rastafari as a religious movement, I suggest that the Rastafari are primarily a political movement with a very strong religious foundation. The Rastafari critique of both western religion and politics demonstrates that they are “a collective enterprise whose political motivations and goals are intertwined with religious symbolism and interpretations.”⁷⁷ The establishment of Jamaica feared the Rastafari for several major reasons. As previously noted, their alliance to a foreign power and anti-nationalist sentiments were considered to breed political separatism and the destruction of Jamaican nationalism. Moreover, their vocal opposition to the Church, which had served as one of the few common cultural institutions for all Jamaicans, was strongly detested. The Rastafari’s rebuking of the political and religious institutions of Jamaica, coupled with seemingly bizarre cultural rituals and philosophies, elucidates the rationale behind their pariah-group status.

What distinguishes the Rastafari from other movements that seek to promote black pride and black consciousness is their belief in the divinity of Ethiopian King Haile Selassie I, and their conviction in the redemption of black people. Also known as Ras Tafari, Haile Selassie claimed to be a direct descendent of King David and was 225th in a line of Ethiopian kings stretching in unbroken succession from the time of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba.”⁷⁸ Early Rastafari preachers used biblical texts to illuminate why Selassie was the Living God. Texts such as Ezekiel 37:19, Isaiah 43:1-15, 24-28, and Revelations 1:14 were all used as evidence of his messianic presence. For example, when Selassie made an impassioned plea to the League of Nations in 1936 to stop the

⁷⁷ Kebede, Alemsegehe and Knottnerus, David. “Beyond the Pales of Babylon: The Ideational Components and Social Psychological Foundations of Rastafari.” *Sociological Perspectives*, Vol 41. No. 3, 1998: 511

⁷⁸ Nicholas, Tracy. *Rastafari: A Way of Life*. Garden City, NJ: Anchor Press, 1979: 23

Italian invasion of his empire, he was perceived by many in Jamaica to represent the Lamb in Revelations: "And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword that with it he should smite the nations." Rastafari preachers understood his return from exile in 1941 to reference the Revelations 19:20: "And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that he had received the mark of the beast, and them that worship his image." According to Erskine, it is important to remember that the discourse concerning the divinity of Haile Selassie and the use of biblical texts are being made in the "sociopolitical context in which the vast majority of Rastafari are at the base of the social and economic ladder. The bottom line is that the Rastas have to contend with life in Babylon on a daily basis."⁷⁹

The concept of Babylon is the nucleus of Rastafarian existence. The experience of enslavement and the poverty and social conditions of today are equated with the Jewish enslavement in Babylon. The Rastafari desire to "beat down Babylon" begins with the delegitimization of the negative status that the African diaspora has been given in Jamaica.

The appeal of the Rastafarian theory lay in the range of effects imputed to a single malevolent cause—Babylon. This was the source of all evil in the world and its destruction would presage the start of what Rastas called "the new age" the entry into Zion.⁸⁰

Thus, the Rastafari postulate that since black people first came into contact with white people their entire existence has been threatened; Babylon represents the manifestation of white people's desire to destroy black civilization.

⁷⁹ Erskine, Noel Leo. *From Garvey to Marley: Rastafari Theology*. Gainesville: UP of Florida, 2005: 74

⁸⁰ Cashmore, Ernest. *Rastaman*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1979: 129

Babylon takes many forms; some Rastafari see the Jamaican police who brutalize and harass them as the personification of Babylon. For other Rastafari and persons of the lowest socio-economic echelon, racist practices that denigrate people on the basis of their dark skin-tone are the feature most indicative of Babylon. The Church represents yet another symbol of Babylon. While the Rastafari base a great deal of their teachings on the Bible, they believe that the Bible was written by black people about black people. For example, in Genesis 1:26, the Rastafari interpret the phrase “Let *us* make man in *our* image” to mean that the language indicates that God was talking to someone—the “sheeplike people”—whom they believe refers to them.⁸¹ When God said “be fruitful and multiply” the Rastafari claim that he was instructing the black and colored peoples to replenish the earth. However, when God created Adam and Eve he did *not* tell them to be fruitful and multiply so from the time of Adam and Eve’s fornication they were condemned.⁸² In Solomon’s Song of Songs, a reference to God’s own dark skin tone is made: “I am black, but comely...Look not upon me, because I am black, because the Sun hath look upon me...His head is as the most fine gold, his locks are bushy, and black as a raven.” (1:5-6, 5:11) All of these statements act as evidence for how Jah is black and how Babylon has intentionally misinterpreted the texts so that God is viewed as speaking to whites and is indeed white himself.

Although the Christian Church regards the Bible as the authority on matters of life and faith, the Rastafari engagement with the Bible occurs outside of the context of the Christian church. The Rastafari are critical of the Christian church because they see it as a proponent of poverty and inequality in Jamaica. The Rastafari regard the Church as

⁸¹ Nicholas, 32

⁸² Nicholas, 33

representing the white, bourgeois class and subsequently the economic interests of the bourgeois class as well.⁸³ Alliance with the state is one of the “weightiest charges that Rastafari levy against the Christian establishment: ‘Government’ and ‘Jesus’” are two closely associated words in Western society and both bespeak oppression for the Rastas.”⁸⁴

Just as Liele paralleled the struggle of the slaves to the struggle of the Israelites, the Rastafari connect their struggle in Jamaican society for solidarity and dignity with the struggle of oppressed Israel. For the Rastas, the Bible exists to elucidate issues of indignity in Jamaica and affirm the Rasta identity. The biblical personalities and writers of the Bible were all blacks and were designated to instruct black people on the proper ways to live and worship God. The Rastafari assert that the Europeans took these scriptures and translated them so that blacks would be ill represented and for this reason the Bible can never be the authoritative source of truth for Rastas. The authoritative source of truth is ‘Jah’⁸⁵ as “Jah reveals Jah’s ways in national or world events or in the Bible.”⁸⁶ Thus, the Rastafari first look at the sociological context of their existence and then move to the biblical text for further elucidation and confirmation of what they conclude Jah is doing in the world.

An amalgamation of social context and biblical literature is exemplified in the Rastas’ interpretation of the coronation of Ras Tafari in 1930. The declaration by Marcus Garvey that a Black King would rise from Ethiopia led Rastas to turn to the Bible for answers and to cast Garvey as the modern-day John who prophesized the coming of the

⁸³ Erskine, 67

⁸⁴ *ibid*

⁸⁵ Jah is the name commonly used for God in the religious Rastafari movement. It comes from the Hebrew Yah. Jah is often thought to be a shortened form of the name Yahweh or Jehovah.

⁸⁶ Erskine, 68

Messiah. Eventually, many of Garvey's followers understood the coronation of Ras Tafari to signal the beginning of African redemption. Therefore it can be contended that Garvey "linked the dignity and equality of blacks to their ability to claim a land they could call their own."⁸⁷

Moreover, the Rastas blame themselves for their own enslavement. They recognize that the Europeans "imposed the power of the gun" but Rastas believe that if their African ancestors had not strayed from the holy way of living and sinned against their Creator, Jah would not have punished them.⁸⁸ According to the Rastas, since the beginning of time Africans have violated their own holiness and happiness by worshipping more than one god, killing each other, lying, stealing, and engaging in other sinful actions. Whether or not their African ancestors had access to the Bible itself, Rastas believe they should have known the word of God. Thus, their enslavement and subsequent experience in Jamaican Babylon is understood as punishment by Jah for straying from the righteous path. For these reasons blacks are now poor, uneducated, powerless and oppressed and their civilization is in shambles. The transformative process that leads a black man to become a Rasta is the only way for him to rediscover the divinity of Jah as well as his own potential to be upright and live properly again.⁸⁹ Garvey's prophecy signaled the end of four hundred years of collective suffering and many Rastas contend that this was the reason why their repatriation should be carried out under the auspices of Haile Selasie I, the Living God.

The divinity of Haile Selassie was a shared belief by all four of the major Rastafari groups that emerged during the 1930s seeking to spread the message of Garvey

⁸⁷ Chevannes, Barry. *Rastafari: Roots and Ideology*. Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1994: 95

⁸⁸ Nicholas, 29

⁸⁹ Nicholas, 29

and bring empowerment and change to the people of Jamaica. Faced with social and economic disenfranchisement, the preachers who led these four sects all realized the truth of Garvey's message when the coronation of Ras Tafari as Emperor of Ethiopia occurred in November of 1930. These men, each separately aware of the prophetic words of Garvey, set to carve out a social, cultural and political space for themselves where they could enlighten other Jamaicans about Jah Ras Tafari. While each group exemplified a different style of worship and emphasized distinctive aspects of what would become the Rastafarian "doctrine," there were at least four overarching themes uniting these factions. The characteristics each group shared were: their condemnation of Jamaica's colonial society, the belief that repatriation to Africa was critical in overcoming oppression for black people, the importance of nonviolence in achieving social change, and their conviction that Haile Selasie was the Messiah.⁹⁰

VI. Physical, Verbal, and Philosophical Staples of the Rastafari Identity

The concept of "livity" is central to the Rastafari philosophy. Livity is a Rastafarian term designating the distinction between their lifestyle and that of Babylon. Livity centers on the practice of living harmoniously with nature and to refer to one's relationship with nature as singular or individual denies the collective presence that all living creatures share. Livity can be summarized as the practice of living organically and using the Earth as a means for healing, eating, and philosophizing. Any attempt to interfere with course of nature, including the cutting of one's hair, is viewed as evil. Furthermore, the practice of vegetarianism is based on the contention that it is barbaric to

⁹⁰ Chevannes, 138

kill and consume animals because no human being should be preoccupied with conquering other living things for his own personal gain.

As one of the most salient and visible symbols of Rastafari identity, dreadlocks represent the concept of livity and the Rastafari commitment to naturalness. Debates surrounding the first appropriation of locks range from the adoption of images of the Jomo Kenyatta's Freedom Fighters⁹¹ to the reference of Levitical laws that forbade the trimming of hair.⁹² The longer the dreadlocks one has, the longer his devotion to the holy ways of living has been. The name "dreadlocks" represents "the unholy peoples' fears of the dreadful power of the holy."⁹³ Because dreadlocks can only be grown by black people, they are an indisputable racial characteristic. A Rasta without locks is a "baldhead" and cannot be taken seriously because he has not fully accepted his faith and the lifestyle of the righteous.

Dreadlocks have an inherent political significance because throughout the 20th century police were more likely to target those with locks than other blacks; the reason for why the police targeted Rastas is multi-fold. Their rejection of standard cultural, political, and economic practices makes Rastas automatically suspect for any crimes or misdemeanors that may occur in neighborhoods. Secondly, because Rastas were the poorest and least privileged of all blacks in Jamaican society, they lived in areas which were crime-ridden and were often wrongfully accused of committing acts of violence and theft. Thus, in order to stop the sprees of crime attributed to many Rastas, police have adopted the practice of cutting off their dreadlocks as soon as the Rastas are arrested or brought in for questioning.

⁹¹ Campbell, 45

⁹² Leviticus 19:27. *King James Bible*. New York: National Publishing Company, 2000

⁹³ Nicholas, 55

Many scholars believe that the first group of Rastas to sport locks were the guardsmen at Pinnacle. The eventual growing of locks by other Rastafarian groups was perceived as troubling and as an indication that violence and crime were on the rise. In fact, most Rastas began growing locks as a means of rejecting Babylon's definition of beauty and European social norms regarding grooming.⁹⁴ For these men, dreadlocks signified a rekindling of pride regarding all things African and the "marrying of blackness to positive attributes... so as to render white stigmatic conceptions of blacks impotent."⁹⁵ In addition, locks are understood as providing a mystical link between Rastas and Jah and "are a kind of 'psychic antenna' with which to connect with God and his mystical power."⁹⁶ The shaking of locks is said to unleash a spiritual energy that will bring about the destruction of Babylon; thus, the wearing of locks allows every Rasta to take part in the defeat of Babylon.⁹⁷

Another distinctive aspect of Rasta culture is ital living. Ital living refers to the Rastafari's dedication to using things in their natural or organic states. Rastas forbid the use of synthetic materials because they theorize that these chemicals were created to destroy the minds of black people. The strong disapproval of eating fish that are predators stems from the belief that digesting fish that unnecessarily harm other living things would be comparable to condoning the harming of living things. Concurrent with the maintenance of the ital diet is the Rastafari commitment to using various herbs, which they believe promote wellbeing. Ganja, also known as *cannabis indica*, is often referred

⁹⁴ Edmonds, 59

⁹⁵ Cashmore, 158

⁹⁶ Semaj, Leahcim. "Rastafari: from Religion to Social Theory." *Rastafari*, 22-31. Kingston, Jamaica: Caribbean Quarterly, University of the West Indies, 1985: 29.

⁹⁷ Edmonds, 59

to as the “holy herb or wisdom weed.”⁹⁸ Citations in the Bible, specifically in Genesis, make the argument that ganja was created by God for human use: “And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of the earth, and every tree in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed, to you it shall be for meat.”⁹⁹ The Rastas also thought that white Babylonian society is afraid ganja will lead people to see that obeying the norms of Babylon is wrong.¹⁰⁰

However, the criminalization of ganja by the government limited a fundamental aspect of Rastafari culture that existed in the most common and the most sacred of rituals. Reasoning or “the open-ended, dialogical discourse between two or more brethren, which is aimed at the exploration of intersubjectivity”¹⁰¹ and reflection on their faith or on current and past circumstances occurs while smoking ganja. Often, reasoning sessions occur in yards outside a group of government housing projects or in open spaces that many Rastas are temporarily squatting. Ganja is smoked in these Rastafarian gatherings as a sacrament which provides healing and insight into Jah’s will. Reasoning is a very intense activity and can go on for many hours; it serves the same purpose as catechism or Bible study in a Church in that it inducts new initiates into the movement and confirms old adherents in the precepts of Rastafari.¹⁰² New members are often recruited in the context of the yard, through their involvement in ganja smoking and reasoning. Thus, by banning the smoking of ganja, the government is taking a way a crucial strategy that the

⁹⁸ Kenneth Bilby “The Holy Herb: Notes on the Background of Cannabis in Jamaica.” *Rastafari*. Kingston: Jamaica, University of the West Indies, 1985: 85

⁹⁹ Genesis 1:29, King James Version

¹⁰⁰ Nicholas, 51

¹⁰¹ Yawney, Carole, and Clemanda Yawney. “As Smoke Drive Them Out: Rastafarians and the Sacred Herb.” Paper presented at the Bucke Memorial Society Conference on the Transformation of Consciousness, Montreal, Oct. 24, 1973.

¹⁰² Edmonds, 6

Rastafari rely upon in recruiting new members as well as hindering the proliferation of Rasta teachings and philosophy.

Because of the Rastas' desire to leave Babylon, some scholars have defined the Rastafari as an "escapist movement."¹⁰³ Yet, the unswerving symbolic resistance they have directed against the prevailing social, economic, and political order of their society indicate a belief system clearly interested in opposing the social system rather than escaping it.¹⁰⁴ Those with power have made numerous attempts to prevent the Rastafari from gaining power in society. However, the organizational structure of the Rastafari makes successful suppression by the government rather difficult. Instead of relying upon a "complex organization with a charismatic or formal leadership and a highly codified ideological system (which would have provided a quite visible and easy target for the opposition)"¹⁰⁵ the Rastafari developed a system of informal networks. Informal group relations became the major avenue through which the social influence, socialization and communication among actors occurred within the movement.

VII. Rastafari as Agents of Black Power

While the gap between rich and poor continued to grow throughout the early 60s, Jamaicans of all classes were beginning to realize the effect these inequalities were having on their national culture. From 1943 to 1970, the biggest movement of the population took place since the time of slavery, when over 560,000 rural, mainly impoverished Jamaicans were uprooted from their "provision grounds by the bauxite

¹⁰³ Lanternari, Vittorio. *The Religions of the Oppressed: A Study of Modern Messianic Cults*. Translated by Lisa Sergio. New York: Knopf, 1963.

¹⁰⁴ Kebede & Knottnerus, 507

¹⁰⁵ Cashmore, 33

tractors and earthmovers."¹⁰⁶ This mass urbanization led to a rise in crime; quickly, the designation of certain neighborhoods as dangerous for light-skinned and white Jamaicans infuriated many citizens. The Jamaican middle-class intelligentsia became especially aware of the lack of funding and structural support the government had bestowed upon Jamaica's poorest. Stigmatized as a "cult of outcasts," the Rastafarian movement nevertheless began attracting more attention because of the growing consciousness among Jamaicans of African heritage. As the University College of the West Indies 1960 Report reads:

The slums of Kingston are an excellent breeding ground for black nationalism. Unemployment is endemic and widespread in Kingston, and many persons who actively seek employment have for years had only occasional casual labour. The areas where many Ras Tafari brethren live have no water, light, sewage disposal or collection of rubbish. It is not strange that those who live in these conditions would like to emigrate.¹⁰⁷

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."¹⁰⁸

According to Edmonds, the radical intellectuals found a ready critique of Jamaican society in the ideology of the Rastafari. One such intellectual named Walter Rodney was exceptionally acute at articulating the concerns of the intelligentsia while simultaneously synthesizing the message of the Rastafari. Both black and white middle-class intelligentsias agreed that if Jamaica were to move forward politically, economically, and culturally it was important to rid itself of a national integration ideology that slighted the majority of its populace. It became important to speak of the

¹⁰⁶ Campbell, 3

¹⁰⁷ Smith, M.G., R. Augier, and R. Nettleford, *The Ras Tafari Movement in Kingston, Jamaica*. Mona, Jamaica: Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1960: 23.

¹⁰⁸ Beckford, George, and Michael Witter. *Small Garden ... Bitter Weed: The Political Economy of Struggle and Change in Jamaica*. Morant Bay, Jamaica: Maroon, 1982: 77

atrocities of slavery and discuss the nation's African heritage. After the release of the 1960 report, many scholars at the University of the West Indies became more involved in the plight of the Rastafari, embracing the progressive elements of the Rastafari ideology.¹⁰⁹ These exchanges ultimately resulted in the merging of the Black Power movement with the Rastafari movement.

The interest in the philosophy of Black power was greeted with apprehension by the Jamaican Labor Party (JLP) government.¹¹⁰ When Rodney was exiled from Jamaica in 1968 for supposedly inciting rioting and advancing communist views; however, he inspired numerous persons in opposition to the JLP government to organize themselves into new ongoing associations, which included *Abeng*. *Abeng* was an important symbol of the joining of middle-class intellectuals and Rastas. *Abeng* took the form of a newspaper whose purpose was to "expose the issue of racial discrimination which had been smothered by other newspapers."¹¹¹ According to Waters, *Abeng* was important in that it explicitly merged the Rastafari doctrine and reggae music with issues of racial and class conflict. The paper mainly focused on issues of black nationalism and dealt regularly with issues such as ganja laws, and reports of the Rastafari's harassment by the police. While *Abeng* was only published from February to October of 1969, its influence was immense for both the Rastafari and the misunderstood poor black Jamaicans, who received the opportunity to have their plight spoken of clearly and accurately.

While the marginalization of the Rastafari has been discussed at length, the political power they wielded as cultural representatives of the largest class of Jamaican citizens has not been analyzed. Beginning in 1967, several candidates used Rastafarian

¹⁰⁹ Erskine, 153

¹¹⁰ Waters, 94

¹¹¹ "Abeng Sounds A Call to Action" *Abeng*. 2/1/69: 2

symbols and reggae music to attract voters to their side; however, this practice did not occur in the national parties' advertising until much later. Nevertheless, it is clear that the middle and upper classes of Jamaica were cognizant that reggae music and other indigenous recorded popular music was rooted in the culture of Jamaica's lower classes, as was the philosophy of the Rastafari.

The Walter Rodney incident, massive flow of migration into Jamaica's cities, and the publishing of *Abeng*, were highly important in the 1972 election of Jamaica's Prime Minister. Inspired by the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S, the middle-class intelligentsia rallied behind the Rastafari's message of black power and demanded governmental reform regarding the treatment of Jamaica's darkest and poorest citizens. Michael Manley, leader of the People's National Party, was mindful of the influx of support for the black power movement within both the upper and lower classes of Jamaica and vocalized his support for their causes throughout this campaign. His entire election campaign was characterized by a systematic and deliberate use of reggae music, some of which was distinctly Rastafarian, of Rastafarian language and of symbols particularly meaningful to Rastafarians.¹¹² Manley even adopted the Biblical name "Joshua" and promised the Jamaican people deliverance from oppression.¹¹³ In response, the ruling party in power attempted to ban music that promoted the Black Power ideology and continued to persecute the Rastafarians. Manley's victory in 1972 signified the political importance imbued in the support of the Rastafari and their ability to mobilize the large urban poor population into voting for a specific candidate.

¹¹² Waters, 137

¹¹³ Panton, David. *Jamaica's Michael Manley: The Great Transformation (1972-92)*. Kingston, Jamaica: Kingston, 1993: 9

By 1976 the Rastafari were considered a semi-legitimate cultural faction of Jamaican society. Many people pointed to Manley's open endorsement of Rastafari culture as the reason for this positive recognition and acceptance.¹¹⁴ Others believed that the integration of Rastas into the academic community and other social institutions had "put a little melanin into the authority structure."¹¹⁵ Both parties used Rastafarian symbols and language throughout the election in 1976. One example of this incorporation was the JLP campaign slogan; the phrase "High-Up" was based on a common Rasta greeting "I-up" but the JLP used 'high' to imply that the JLP was above the PNP.¹¹⁶ The PNP in contrast used the slogan "A Time for Reasoning" which references the Rasta practice of reasoning. Party officials also donned Rasta inspired suits and hats. When asked why the Rasta symbols were important in this election one official responded:

Any movement which must seek mass support must address Rasta culture. Political campaigners use its colours, language, in a special appeal to that culture, in recognition that its values are widely held and intimate to people...It's projected mostly to the lower classes.¹¹⁷

VIII. Rastafari and Reggae

The Rastafarian version of reality is based on a very distinct frame of reference which allows the Rastafari to interpret history, predict the future, and respond to challenges against the movement. Cashmore calls this frame of reference the "Babylonian Conspiracy Theory" because it provides the Rastas with a set of ideas to interpret their social reality. According to this framework, the Babylonian world is responsible for all undesirable aspects of the Rasta's living conditions and all avenues that would allow for

¹¹⁴ Waters, 176

¹¹⁵ *ibid*

¹¹⁶ Panton, 111

¹¹⁷ Waters, 181

the actualization of a black person's potential are obstructed. Consequently, the redemption of black people can only occur when the destruction of Babylon is complete.

It is important to note that this destruction of Babylon is non-violent; a major weapon the Rastas use in "fighting" Babylon is reggae music. According to Edmonds, reggae has three-fold significance. The first is as a medium through which people can be restored to self-awareness and be educated about their African roots, history, and culture. This knowledge will lead them to reject what they have previously learned by those in Babylon. Secondly, reggae is the medium through which people learn the truth about the system under which they live and again, this leads to a rejection of the values and institutions of Babylon. Lastly, reggae is the medium through which the poor can express their frustrations and demand repatriation or change in the social order. In addition to using reggae, the Rastas believe that ultimately Babylon will self-destruct because of its abusive actions towards nature and its valuing of artificiality.

Reggae music was a powerful tool for the Rastafari in fighting the oppression of Babylon and receiving critical attention for their cause. While initially a local genre, the explosion of reggae led by artists such as Culture, the Wailers, and Burning Spear meant that the Rastas were confronted with a serious dilemma regarding whether or not to embrace this commercialization of their culture. As Stephen Davis and Peter Simon noted, "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 are all about."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ Davis, Stephen, and Peter Simon, eds. *Reggae Bloodlines: In Search of the Music and Culture of Jamaica*. Rev. ed. New York: Anchor, 1979: 63

While not every reggae artist was a Rastafari, many grew up in poor urban slums populated by the Rastafari and grew familiar with their teachings and lifestyle. The popularity of reggae was enormous within Jamaica, but a bold producer named Chris Blackwell decided to try to market reggae to American college students and European youths. He chose the reggae group, the Wailers, as the ambassadors of this new style of music. Blackwell's marketing strategies created a "new and larger audience for reggae" eventually "opening the possibilities of mass white consumption of reggae."¹¹⁹

According to King, the Wailers were ideologically similar to most of the reggae groups from Jamaica; however, their harsh critique of Jamaican society associated them with other important international artists who also focused on political radicalism and the fight for equality. Thus, Blackwell chose to promote the radical elements of reggae music and subsequently, Rastafarian culture. However, he also wanted to universalize the struggle of the Rastafari and of Jamaicans, so he sometimes insisted upon lyric changes to songs in order to universalize these themes for a variety of audiences. Thus, evocations of Marcus Garvey increased and mentions of socio-economic issues that were specific to Jamaica were adjusted so as to include Africa as well. Ultimately, "the dichotomy between preaching rebellion and the belief that a better life existed, made reggae's message more appealing to the masses."¹²⁰

Regardless of specific attempts by white or non-Jamaican producers, reggae songs continued to complain about issues specific to Jamaica. Black Uhuru performed the song "Carbine" which discussed the political violence on the streets of Kingston while Toots and the Maytals song "Time Tough" focused on the decrepit government housing

¹¹⁹ Jones, Simon. *Black Culture, White Youth: The Reggae Tradition from JA to UK*. Houndsmills, England: Macmillan, 1988: 61-62

¹²⁰ King, 3

conditions. In addition, reggae continued to ground such critiques in historical memories of slavery, with such songs as the Wailers' "Slave Driver", Burning Spear's "Slavery Days" and Culture's "Pirate Days" 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 and the Wailers song "Burnin' and Lootin'" and "Survival" named the oppressors of Babylon as the police, and technology, respectively. In addition, popular reggae cast Rastafarians, not "Jamaicans," as "Africans" who happened to live in Jamaica and Bob Marley even adopted a speech by Haile Selassie I in the song "War" to demonstrate how Rastafarians were in fact Africans.

While Blackwell realized the importance of maintaining the Wailers' political rebelliousness, he also realized that the Rasta culture was gaining acceptance and the mimicking of their cultural artifacts by middle-class Jamaicans was becoming fashionable. Thus, he focused on several aspects of Rastafari culture that would underscore "the social and political content" of reggae music.¹²¹ In particular, Blackwell encouraged the Wailers and other reggae artists he managed to promote aspects like smoking herb, using Rasta-lingo, and growing dreadlocks so that an audience of whites could feel that if they practiced these activities they too, were protesting and creating positive change.

By the mid 1970s, reggae music was perceived to be the music of the Rastafari due to its ideologically infused message; by 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 and the hit song "Zimbabwe" from the album was chanted by African militants during the civil

¹²¹ Hebdige, Dick. *Cut 'n' Mix: Culture, Identity and Caribbean Music*. New York: Methuen, 1987: 79

war in Rhodesia. Writing for the *New Society*, Roy Kerridge claimed "Reggae and Marley have made an enormous impression on Africa."¹²² Ironically, the popularity of both reggae and the Rastafari in Africa influenced some Africans to "wear dreadlocks, smoke ganja and do their best to imagine that they are Jamaicans."¹²³

¹²² Kerridge, Roy. "Marley in Africa." *New Society* 6 Sept. 1985: 343

¹²³ *ibid*

IV: Theoretical Application to Rastafari Case

This chapter will explain how Weber's model of a pariah group can be applied to the Rastafari of Jamaica. Driven from their native homeland of Ethiopia to Jamaica where they were enslaved for centuries before their emancipation in 1838, the Rastafari religious movement emerged during the 20th century when Marcus Garvey and his "Back to Africa" movement inspired many dark-skinned Afro-Jamaicans to reevaluate their political, social and economic subjugation by white and Creole Jamaicans alike.

When referring to Weber's definition of a pariah people it is important to note the following: Weber used the term pariah to describe the Jews as a "guest people" who have a minority status within society. For example, when the Jews were made captives during the wars of the third and second centuries B.C., their enslavement and geographic confinement to the least arable lands did not lessen their commitment to remain faithful to their cultural and religious rituals. For the Rastafari, like the majority of blacks in Jamaica, the slave trade from Africa forced them to work in foreign lands; however, the dark pigmentation of their skin limited their social mobility within a skin-color based hierarchy.

The Europeans evolved a sophisticated and carefully calibrated hierarchy of skin tones, beginning with themselves at the very top and descending to pure African at the very base. To this pure African was affixed the eponym *Quashee*, the English corruption of the Akan and Ewe day-name *Kwesi*, "male born on Sunday." Quashee was depicted as not only black and ugly. He was, morally debased, lazy, lascivious, and a liar.¹²⁴

The importance that skin tone can have in determining a group's status within a specific society is exemplified in the Hindu caste system. Caste systems are traditional, hereditary systems of social stratification. Each caste is organized according to two interrelated

¹²⁴ Chevannes, Barry. *Rastafari: Roots and Ideology*. Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1994: 9

characteristics: skin color and occupation. The Hindu caste system has four major groups and those with the lightest skin are at the top, whereas those with the darkest skin are at the bottom. Correspondingly, those with the most money and prestige have the lightest skin shade and those with the darkest skin color perform the jobs that no other caste will do. The group known as the Untouchables or the Dalits are considered below the four castes because they do the jobs that are regarded as ritually impure: for example, any occupation involving killing or handling dead bodies, or disposing of refuse or human waste fall under the jurisdiction of the Dalits. As a result, their dark skin limits their occupational status, and intern, their occupational status restricts their social mobility

The problems faced by the Dalits in the Hindu caste system are similar to those faced by the dark-skinned Afro-Jamaicans in colonial plantation society. Within Jamaican plantation society, a caste system also existed. Slaves with the darkest skin were required to do the worst jobs, whereas slaves with lighter skin or more 'human' (re: European) features were able to do less taxing physical labor. However, even after Emancipation, remnants of the colonial racial hierarchy remained.

The inability of freemen to compete in any local sphere with slave labor complemented and intensified a sort of manorial self-sufficiency in plantation areas, sharply inhibiting the development of occupationally diverse communities of freemen in the same region.¹²⁵

In the words of Bob Marley in the song "Slave Driver"

Ev'ry time I hear a crack of the whip/My blood runs cold
I remember on the slave ship/How they brutalised their very souls
Today they say that we are free/ Only to be chained in poverty

Communities in which the Rastafari resided were mainly those with the poorest quality of land, and least amount of industry. Since many of the Rastafari were among those

¹²⁵ Mintz, Sidney. "The Caribbean as a Socio-Cultural Area." *Journal of World History* Vol. 9: 4, 1966: 914.

freeman who had the darkest skin, they in turn possessed the least social mobility, and the fewest skills. As the Jamaican writer Michelle Cliff explains:

There was no cash compensation for the people who had labored under slavery. No tracts of land for them to farm. No employment for the most part. No literacy programs. No money to book passage back to Africa. Their enslavement had become an inconvenience—and now it was removed. All the forces which worked to keep these people slaves now worked to keep them poor. And poor most of them remained.¹²⁶

The status of the Rastafari during colonial plantation society greatly affected their ability to be socially mobile after Emancipation. Clearly, Weber was correct in theorizing that status is based on more than economic terms. Like the Dalits and the Jews, the Rastafari were unable to own their own land and this was the foremost symptom of their low socio-economic status in society. As Weber theorized, status distinctions are often linked to class distinctions, characterized by the possession of property and skills.

A hierarchy exists between members of a pariah group that is predicated on status honor. Status honor is rarely given to individuals solely because of their class status; rather, it is first and foremost determined by a subjective belief in social or cultural superiority. While the majority of Rastafari did not own property or hold jobs with high occupational status, this was not the only determinant of their honor. In opposition to the prevailing status hierarchy, pariah groups develop internal mechanisms of status compensation. Typically, a hierarchy within every pariah group determines whether a member is dedicated to the rituals and norms of the group's culture.

¹²⁶ Cliff, Michelle. *Abeng*. New York: Penguin, 1995: 28

I. Rastafari as Chosen People

Arendt theorized that if the improvement of social status of a pariah group is very difficult, the pariah will conclude that his low status must exist to further a specific purpose. Eventually, this specific purpose evokes a sense of pride and this pride is manifested in intra-group relations. A well-known example of how a pariah group interprets its low status in a way that gives them a greater sense of self-worth appears in the Bible. According to a scripture in Deuteronomy 14:2, God told the Jews that they were “ a holy people unto the Lord your God, and the Lord has chosen you to be a peculiar people unto Himself, above all peoples that are upon the face of the earth.” Because Rastafarianism is a syncretic, Abrahamic religion, they too believe that they are God’s chosen people and use this biblical reference to justify their low status. Often, how strictly a pariah group member abides by dietary, social, or physical laws of conduct is indicative of how great their status honor is within the pariah group. In the case of the Rastafari, the ritual known as “Reasoning” is used not only to attract new members but also to determine whether a member is fit to remain within the pariah group itself. Chevannes’ eyewitness account of several reasoning sessions indicates how the Rastafari elders hold the greatest status honor.

They [those with the greatest status honor] derive their position not by appointment or election, but by virtue of the initiative they show. For example, out of fifty or more Rastas present, only about one-half dozen individuals dominated the three-hour reasoning. They happened to be the most knowledgeable or the most forceful participants... this knowledge or forcefulness [can be] derived from venerable age or experience in the movement, or from native intelligence.

In order to compensate for the disrespect and dishonor they experience by the rest of society, the Rastafari, like the Jews and the Dalits, followed what Weber termed “the theodicy of suffering.” The theodicy of suffering or the misfortune and low status a

pariah group experiences is interpreted as compensation for the group's unique relationship with God, whose higher purpose the group serves both during and after life on Earth. The Rastafari view themselves as Jah people—the people of Jah, or Yahweh—and believe that Haile Selassie I is meant to lead them on an exodus to Ethiopia from Jamaica. Below is an excerpt from the article written by Garvey that many Rastafarians refer to as “the prophecy;” they believe Garvey's words foretell the end of their suffering and the beginning of messianic deliverance. It was published November 8, 1930 in his Jamaican newspaper, *The Blackman*:

The Psalmist prophesied that Princes would come out of Egypt and Ethiopia would stretch forth her hands unto God. We have no doubt that the time is now come. Ethiopia is now really stretching forth her hands. This great kingdom of the East has been hidden for many centuries, but gradually she is rising to take a leading place in the world and it is for us of the Negro race to assist in every way to hold up the hand of Emperor Ras Tafari.

Bob Marley's song entitled “Keep on Moving” depicts how the ostracism and oppression experienced by all former slaves in the Americas will end once they leave Babylon. In this sense, the Rastafari act as missionaries in spreading the words of Jah to others in Jamaica, so that they can be united and redeemed in Africa when Babylon falls.

I've been accused on my mission
Jah knows you shouldn't do
For hanging me they were willing yeah! yeah!
And that's why I've got to get on thru
Lord they coming after me

Lord I got to keep on moving
Lord I got to get on down
Lord I've got to keep on moving
Where I can't be found
Lord they're coming after me

I know someday we'll find that piece
Of land somewhere not nearby Babylon
The war will soon be over and Africa
Will unite the children who liveth in
Darkness have seen the great light

The Rastafari religious view has several major tenets that explain why they are an elect group chosen by God; a group that will experience divine righteousness once their suffering on Earth is over. As mentioned earlier, the Rastafari have integrated both post-colonial biblical texts and the ideology of Marcus Garvey to create a belief system that centers on the divinity of the Emperor of Ethiopia, Ras Tafari Haile Selassie I. A document known as the *Divine Announcement* written in 1976 by the Annual Issemble of Rastafarians of the Haile Selassie I School, gives a brief introduction to Haile Selassie in the greater Judeo-Christian context:

This divine spiritual inheritance
 Referred to in the ancient scriptures
 As the Blessing of the Children of Israel
 Was Transferred from the old Hebrew of the Chaldeans
 The Sons of Abraham: descended of Adam's fallen race,
 To I and I the Israelites
 The people of the Almighty
 The ancient Ethiopians: the Sons of Jah Rastafari
 In the reign of Solomon
 King of Hebrews: the Son of David
 The Son of Jesse, the Ephastite of Bethlehem Juda
 The same Melchisedec: the Dreaded King of Salem
 Prince of Peace
 King of Kings: Lord of Lords
 Wonderful, Counselor
 Haile Selassie I, Jah Rastafari¹²⁷

According to the Rastafari creed, the Bible was written by Black people for Black people. Thus, the Rastafari are being punished in Jamaica for disobeying God's commandments¹²⁸ and breaking their covenant with God.¹²⁹ According to the Rastas, since the beginning of time Africans have violated their own holiness and happiness by worshipping more than one god, killing each other, lying, stealing, and engaging in other

¹²⁷ Wint, Eleanor. "Who Is Haile Selassie? His Imperial Majesty in Rasta Voices." *Chanting Down Babylon: A Rastafari Reader*. Eds. Nathaniel Murrel, William Spencer, and Adrian McFarlane. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1998: 160

¹²⁸ Exodus 20:3-17

¹²⁹ (Genesis 12:1-3, 7; 13:14-18; 15:4, 5, 13-18; 17:1-8; 18:17-19; 22:15-18).

sinful actions. Whether or not their African ancestors had access to the Bible itself, Rastas believe they should have known the word of God. Thus, their enslavement and subsequent experience in the Jamaican Babylon is understood as punishment by Jah for straying from the righteous path. In particular, their enslavement and the subsequent formation of master/slave relations between whites and blacks, is punishment for these past sins. The Rastafari accept their condition of exclusion and enslavement as natural and immutable law, and believe that messianic deliverance will put an end to their suffering and reestablish the true social order. Because the Rastafari lack the political and social power to seek revenge and/or equality, its members rationalize their mistreatment as part of a complex religious existence. In "Redemption Song" Marley hints that when the slave ships arrived in Africa, his people were living savagely in a "bottomless pit." Thus, Jah intentionally enslaved all black people in order to punish and teach them how to live according to his laws.

Old pirates, yes, they rob I;
Sold I to the merchant ships,
Minutes after they took I
From the bottomless pit.
But my hand was made strong
By the 'and of the Almighty.
We forward in this generation, triumphantly.
Won't you help to sing
These songs of freedom?
'Cause all I ever have:
Redemption songs

Thus, just as the Jews rationalized their exile to Babylon on the grounds of their lack of faith and obedience, the Rastafari believed that their captivity in Jamaica transpired for similar reasons.

II. Rastafari & Repatriation

The Rastafari concept of repatriation arose from what Arendt theorized as “the lack of a privately owned share of a common world.”¹³⁰ If one were to compare the Jewish cultural concept of *aliyah* to the Rastafari idea of repatriation, it is obvious that both are founded on the belief that God promised the descendants of the Hebrew patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that they would have a promised land for eternity where their people could live in peace. Both the Jews and the Rastafari sought to return to their promised lands (Israel and Ethiopia respectively) for ideological and spiritual reasons, as well as because of the oppression and mass persecution they experienced elsewhere. It is necessary to distinguish that repatriation to the promised land is not migration, but a return to what was owned before. Bob Andy spoke of the hardships of Jamaican society when he sang:

This couldn't be my home
It must be somewhere else
Can't get no clothes to wear
Can't get no food to eat
Can't get a job to get bread
That's why I've got to go back home.

This relates to another aspect of Arendt's theorizing about pariah group identity, which is characterized by a sense of homelessness and worldlessness. For both the Jews and the Rastafari, their ancient homeland constitutes a place where they can potentially live free of poverty and persecution. However, before they are able to repatriate, they experience a perpetual state of anomie in which they are out of date with the cultural norms of the surrounding society.

¹³⁰ Arendt, Hannah. *The Jew as Pariah and Other Essays*. New York: Grove Press, 1978: 99.

While the repatriation of the Rastafari was a major site of discontent for political leaders and the public alike, it is important to understand why returning to Africa was so spiritually and politically critical for the Rastafari. Foremost in their desire to return to Africa was the yearning to live under the rule of Haile Selassie and establish his divinity for all Africans to see. However, their focus on repatriation during the 1950s and 60s also occurred because of the realization that multiracial policies and propaganda would not benefit the poor black masses, and that no hope for social and economic salvation existed in Jamaica. The massive migration to Britain was indicative of how this new approach by the government was perceived by many poor Jamaicans, not all of them Rastafari. Spurred by reports of Ghana's independence and Liberia's desire to have West Indian immigrants, the Rastafari believed that by focusing on repatriation they could leave Jamaica for a better life. Following in the footsteps of Marcus Garvey, the Rastafari hoped to make 'Africa for the Africans' and insisted that redemption from God was directly tied into the physical return to Africa. As one Rasta stated, "Our deity is African, our prophet is African, our signs and symbols are also African. Therefore to live according to the principles of Rastafari is to live in Africa."¹³¹

III. Rastafari & Ganja

Weber theorized that pariah groups have specific status markers that are unique to their culture; in the case of the Rastafari, their habitual use of ganja is a marker of their pariah group status. Arendt's conjecture that pariah groups often have an outlaw status that functions to limit their rights is certainly true for the Rastafari. The outlawing of a

¹³¹ Williams, Ishon Ras. "The Seven Principles of the Rastafari." *Caribbean Quarterly*. Rastafari Monograph 2000. Kingston: University of the West Indies, 2000: 18

popular Rastafari custom, the smoking of ganja, was initiated because it was said to cause violent behavior among those who used the substance. However, after the violence associated with Pinnacle, an early Rastafari commune, the war on Rastas and on ganja became one.

As mentioned in the 1960 Report, the public likened the Rastafari to criminals and believed that they were responsible for the rise in crime and the proliferation of drugs throughout Jamaica. This widespread judgment has its roots in the Pinnacle commune led by one of the first, and most corrupt, Rastafari leaders known as Leonard P. Howell. Howell began as a preacher on the streets of Kingston proclaiming the divinity of Haile Selassie and the prophecy of Marcus Garvey. Howell became one of the most well-known leaders because of his use of propaganda. In 1934, he was arrested for selling more than 5,000 photographs of Haile Selassie as “passports” to Ethiopia. After his release from prison two years later, Howell purchased an abandoned estate northwest of Kingston and founded “Pinnacle” a Rasta community of sixteen hundred.

Under Howell’s direction, the residents grew yams for subsistence and ganja for cash.¹³² Newspaper and Rastafarian reports of Howell claim he represented himself as God and lived in the ‘big house’ with 13 or more common-law wives.¹³³ Throughout 1941, the police raided Pinnacle and arrest Rastafari on charges of growing ganja and committing acts of violence. Howell was eventually convicted on assault charges. Upon his return to Pinnacle in 1943, Howell developed a corps of guardsmen who grew their hair long and were known as “locksman” or “Ethiopian warriors.”¹³⁴ A clear doctrine of violence emerged as Howell’s warriors disputed property claims and raided their

¹³² Nicholas, 24

¹³³ *ibid*

¹³⁴ *ibid*

unprotected neighbors. Over the next 10 years, police surveillance grew in proportion to the spread of the Rastafarian movement. In 1954, some 163 members of the Pinnacle community were arrested in a ganja 'bust.'¹³⁵ Howell was tried and acquitted but returned to Kingston scarred by rejection: his Pinnacle brethren refused to accept his claims of divinity. In 1960 Howell was confined to a mental hospital.

For the Rastafari, the smoking of ganja is said to have strong healing powers as well providing spiritual, mental and physical health and enlightenment. Dr. Lambos Comitas, the author of *Ganja in Jamaica*, believes it is important to stress the political and cultural underpinnings of this legislation:

Outlawing a popular custom is also a very convenient control device. The ganja legislation in Jamaica is very clearly like the legislation against illegitimate children or against obeah, a particular form of lower class religion. It can be used by the elite to control the lower classes, with no loss in world opinion.¹³⁶

Moreover, Arendt's perception that a pariah group's outlaw status allows others to impugn the group for any crises that affect the dominant class in the society was confirmed when some prominent members of the Ras Tafari brethren, along with three faculty members of the University College of the West Indies, published a survey of "the movement, its organization and its aspiration."¹³⁷ This 1960 study presented the first opportunity for the Rastafari to let the public and the government gain insight into their culture, their political intentions, and their mistreatment. Issues such as unemployment, violence, and communism, which much of the public associated with the Rastafari, were all addressed throughout the Report.

¹³⁵ Nicholas, 24

¹³⁶ Comitas, Lambros. Interview with Dr. Lambros Comitas, *High Times*, No. 32, 1978: 33.

¹³⁷ Smith, M.G., R. Augier, and R. Nettleford, *The Ras Tafari Movement in Kingston, Jamaica*. Mona, Jamaica: Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1960: 51.

The general public believes in a stereotype Ras Tafari, who wears a beard, avoids work, steals, smokes ganja, and is liable to sudden violence. This type exists, but it is a minority. The real danger is that if all Ras Tafarians are treated as if they are like this, more and more will become extremists...A movement which is so deeply religious need not become a menace to society.¹³⁸

IV. Rastafari & National Identity

Another example of how the Rastafari were culturally alienated from mainstream Afro-Jamaicans concerns the issue of a national non-racial identity. During the 1940s when the Rastafari were migrating in greater numbers to the urban centers, Jamaicans were still unwilling to accept that they were a black nation. As the Rastafarian population began to infiltrate urban communities, Jamaicans believing in a non-racial or multi-racial identity met their most aggressive opponents. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s when cultural pluralism and a non-racial politics were embraced by many black Jamaicans, the Rastafari and their black power rhetoric was denounced as anti-Jamaican. The Rastafarians' rejection of the Jamaican government and their loyalty to a separate country and leader were seen as a threatening to both whites and leading rulers.¹³⁹ Thus, "To many, the Rastas were retrogressive and their cause was seen as political separatism, a betrayal of the movement towards self-government and a disrespect for the carefully nurtured Jamaican nationalism."¹⁴⁰

Citizens who accused the Rastafari of attempting to destroy the tolerant, progressive climate of Jamaica had problems opposing the claim by the Rastafari brethren that they had been 'left behind' through no fault of their own. The Rastafari argued that their experience in Jamaica was marked by enslavement and that their desire

¹³⁸ Smith, M.G., R. Augier, and R. Nettleford, *The Ras Tafari Movement in Kingston, Jamaica*. Mona, Jamaica: Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1960: 27

¹³⁹ Nettleford, *Mirror Mirror*, 58

¹⁴⁰ *ibid*

to return to Africa was their only hope of achieving the freedom and equality, which had been taken from them. By refusing to benefit from a society that oppressed them, they were under no obligation to sacrifice anything for the greater good of the society.

By promoting a cultural heritage that was “the same” for all Jamaicans, the Creoles attempted to provide a broad, generalized narrative of their racial experience that they hoped would supersede any racially oriented account that the Black majority could present.¹⁴¹ Thus, the campaign for a non-racial Jamaica protected the ruling classes from losing power to the black majority. The propagation of a pluralized non-racial society ensured that brown and white groups would be able to maintain the economic power and political influence they were accustomed to. Even though they comprised the majority group, blacks were victims of the “myth of multiracialism.”¹⁴² Exploited by ethnic minorities whose cultural status in the society was elevated above Afro-Jamaicans, Jamaicans of all races sought to promote a non-racial national Jamaican identity.

Why was there a resistance among the majority of Jamaicans to admit that while they certainly had a considerable population of peoples from mixed West Indian and white origins, they were in fact a black country? One argument is that no one, including the blacks, wanted to establish blacks as their desirable symbol of national identity. The psychological and cultural effects of living in a post-colonial society that had validated a racial hierarchy whereby black African culture and values were inferior to those of white British ideals precluded the majority of Jamaicans from wanting membership in a black

¹⁴¹ Thomas, 266

¹⁴² Gray, Obika. *Radicalism and Social Change in Jamaica, 1960-1972*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991:155.

nation. Ultimately, a hankering for values alien to the realities of the Caribbean cultural experience occurred.¹⁴³

The black nationalistic elements of Rastafarian ideology hindered the development of the “Out of Many, One People” racial ideology of the politically powerful in Jamaica. The Rastafari claim that this motto did not include a narrative that was culturally and racially specific to the experience of the poor black population in Jamaica resonated with the black masses and led to greater public acceptance and popularity of other Rasta dogmas. An excerpt from the poem “This Fire Must Burn” written by Rastafari poet Ras Tyehimba Salandy illustrates how the Rastafari attempted to re-emphasize the importance of the black narrative in everyday Jamaican life.

Don't you see that the tide is turning
Do you see consciousness slowly growing?
Do you see truth spreading? Slowly but surely
Where are you heading?
Down the road of carnal gratification?
Can money buy salvation?
Can the car I'm driving, the life I'm living
make me forget my divine self; that I'm black?
Must I just stay silent in the back
And do nothing while you attack... me?

My African heritage is not a badge of servility
But rather a fiery banner for uncompromising revolutionary activity
The spear of the nation is burning
The tide is turning

Because the Rastafari were among those who suffered during slavery as well post-Emancipation, their unswerving resistance to advancing a non-racial national identity was perceived by the black masses as legitimate. In particular, poor, black Jamaicans embraced the Rastafari leaders because of their ability to articulate their concerns and publicize the violence, lack of housing, employment opportunities, and medical facilities

¹⁴³ Nettleford, Rex. *Caribbean Cultural Identity: The Case of Jamaica*. Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2003: 4

that existed throughout the urban and rural slums of Jamaica; consequently, the Rastafari became increasingly popular and well-respected leaders in these communities.

Ultimately, this initial support from the black community led them to attract others toward their religious and political philosophy. As black power grew, the unimportant black majority was now perceived by the government as a constituency to be reckoned with; no longer could they be ignored.

The discord between black Jamaicans and the Rastafari on the issue of national identity stems from the psychological and cultural effects of living in a post-colonial society that promoted the suppression of “inferior” or black culture and values. Thus, the Rastafari represent a separate group from the black population of Jamaica, most of which can be labeled as parvenus. Parvenus were those Afro-Jamaicans who tried to succeed in the world of the White Jamaicans by escaping their own community and religious or ethnic ties. By denying Jamaica’s colonial heritage, Afro-Jamaicans were embracing a culture that had denigrated their African roots. According to Arendt’s writing, as a product of assimilation, the parvenu feels ashamed of his group identity. In contrast, the Rastafari are pariahs who are conscious, if not proud, of their cultural differences, customs and heritage and this resulted in their marginalization by White, Creole, and Black Jamaicans alike.

The white Creole is, as a double outsider, condemned to self-consciousness, a sense of inescapable difference and even deformity in the two societies by whose judgments she always condemns herself.¹⁴⁴

Throughout Arendt’s redefinition of the pariah and parvenu dichotomy, she theorized that the parvenu was far more concerned with his status honor and ability to

¹⁴⁴ Tiffin, Helen. “Mirror and mask: Colonial motif in the novels of Jean Rhys.” *World Literature Written in English*. Vol: 17, 1978: 328

achieve an illusory respectability by submitting to prevailing social norms and assimilating into the dominant culture. The Blacks and Creoles' rejection of an African culture and identity coupled with their subsequent decision to orient themselves towards European social norms, exemplifies this emphasis on status honor. However, because the Creoles in particular, chose to distance themselves from the large, poor, black population of Jamaica, they existed in a state of limbo: the white population did not accept them as white, and the black population resented them for their supercilious behavior.

V. The Creoles and Relative Deprivation

The relationship between Afro-Jamaicans and Creole Jamaicans can be explained with the help of Runcimen's theory of relative deprivation. As previously noted, Weber believed that the response of a social group to their perceived deprivation is influenced by pre-existing worldviews and can be re-conceptualized because of new ideal and material interests. The traditional racial dynamics that existed in colonial society during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, made it necessary for the Creoles to distance themselves from Black Jamaicans who lacked the social mobility of light-skinned Black Jamaicans. Consequently, as the Creole buffer group emerged, they were thoroughly oriented towards European values and culture.¹⁴⁵ However, this mulatto group was never totally accepted into the intensely racialized White colonial society; thus, the Creoles' initial rejection of the black masses caused them to lose a potentially critical ally within the Jamaican political arena.

Safa, Helene. "Popular Culture, National Identity and Race in the Caribbean." *Caribbean Sociology: Introductory Readings*. Ed. Christine Barrow & Rhoda Bedrock. Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2001: 946.

When applying Merton's concept of a reference group to this case, it becomes clear that the Creoles were the reference group for the Rastafari. The Rastafari experienced relative deprivation when they compared their lowly status to that of the Creoles, who had a similar status position to the Rastafari during slavery but managed to advance in the status hierarchy over time. Since Emancipation, the Creoles distanced themselves from rural, uneducated Afro-Jamaicans like the Rastafari who were perceived as "preferring their somewhat savage, impoverished existence to one that embraced the modern institutions and values of the society."¹⁴⁶ They also dissociated themselves from the urban proletariat that engaged in labor rebellions in 1938, and later, boycotts and striking.

The greater the social distance between the Creoles and the Rastafari became, the greater was the relative deprivation experienced by the Rastafari.

Prosperity can break the vicious circle between poverty and conservatism by making people aware of the possibility of a higher standard than it would previously have occurred to them to hope for. Conversely, a decline in prosperity, if not too violent, can restrict the sense of relative deprivation by inhibiting comparisons with more fortunate groups.¹⁴⁷

Moreover, it is important to mention that the Rastafari experienced fraternal rather than egoistic deprivation; fraternal deprivation is a term Runciman used to denote that the deprivation a group experiences stems from comparisons between two—once similar, but now different—status groups in society. It is clear that the Rastafari were experiencing fraternal deprivation for several reasons. According to Runciman, a group that experiences a high degree of agitation is one that suffers from fraternal deprivation

¹⁴⁶ Thomas, Deborah. A. *Modern Blackness: Nationalism, Globalization, and the Politics of Culture in Jamaica*. Duke University: Duke UP, 2004: 266

¹⁴⁷ W.G., Runciman. *Relative Deprivation and Social Justice*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969: 23-24.

because agitation is a symptom distinctively associated with fraternal rather than egoistic deprivation. Because the prevailing culture and institutions of post-colonial Jamaican society prevented the Rastafari from improving their socio-economic status in the post-Emancipation period, their agitation took the form of a movement that advocated a rejection of the dominant values of Jamaican society. Secondly, the Rastafari believed that all black people should return to Africa where they could live harmoniously under the protection of Haile Selassie I; they were not interested in achieving political, social and economic success on an individual basis. Thirdly, the Rastafari's deprivation is based in class competition that stems from their similar status with the Creoles during slavery and the subsequent inequality between the two groups after Emancipation. Because the Rastafari compared their experience with that of another group, they did not suffer from egoistic deprivation.

The black nationalistic elements of Rastafarian ideology—mainly the rejection of post-colonial culture and the refusal to participate in the economic, educational, and religious institutions of Jamaica—proved a major threat to the promotion of unity and stability in Jamaican society.¹⁴⁸ Moreover, the influence of the Rastafarians in countering a widely-held Creole narrative by one that was culturally and racially specific to their black experience in Jamaica, was seen as a threat to the integration of institutions and policies of the post-colonial government. By promoting a cultural heritage that was “the same” for all Jamaicans, Creoles attempted to provide a broad, generalized narrative of their racial experience that they hoped would supersede any racially oriented account that the Black majority could present.¹⁴⁹ Thus, the Rastafari's introduction of a narrative that

¹⁴⁸ Nettleford, Rex. *Mirror Mirror*. 59

¹⁴⁹ Thomas, 266

could adequately challenge a non-White national image of Jamaicans catalyzed a positive re-conception of Jamaican history and culture that had been intentionally discredited by British and Jamaican elites for centuries.

VI. Positive Attributes of the Rastafari Pariah Group

The most central characteristic that both the Rastafari and Arendt's and Weber's pariah group share is how their condition of worldwide alienation led to the development of a new theology as well as new cultural expressions and alternative political views. DeCosmo elucidates how reggae music acts as a "prophetic command to challenge the system and demand justice."¹⁵⁰ Citing the Wailers' song "Get Up Stand Up", she illustrates how lyrics like "stand up for your rights, don't give up the fight" are radical both culturally and politically.

As reggae music emerged as a channel through which poor blacks could express their frustrations and demand change in the social order, the Rastafari movement gained substantial support from local and international communities. DeCosmo elaborated on Arendt's theorizing of the differences between conscious pariahs and parvenus by positing that conscious pariahs manifest their pride through the art, poetry and music they created. As elaborated earlier, for Rastafari who are actively fighting the oppressive culture of Babylon, reggae could be an educational vehicle used to enlighten black people about their African roots, history, and culture. The Rastafari hoped that this knowledge would lead them to reject what they have previously learned within the Babylonian

¹⁵⁰ DeCosmo, 7

educational system in favor of a historical and cultural narrative that accurately reflected their experience in Jamaica and in Africa.

Reggae music is important in spreading the Rastafari movement against oppression, exploitation and racism. It is best expressed in the protest music of Bob Marley, who used metaphors to communicate a universal message to listeners. 'Jah' represents goodness and love, and Babylon is a destructive force. The theme of war is used to stress human rights problems. Metaphors of oppression and freedom, such as chains and birds, depict social problems and ways of liberation. Music is an effective form of communication in regions of illiteracy and poverty.¹⁵¹

Leonard Barrett, author of *The Rastafarians*, said the following after attending his first reggae concert in 1976:

History may yet prove my statement correct that, the spiritual ethos of Rastafarianism, which produced reggae, may be the most exciting thing to come out of Jamaica for many years to come.¹⁵²

While Rastafarian traditions and customs have spread rapidly since the 1960s, it is reggae which is the most prominent cultural artifact that continues to link not only the ideology of the Rastafari, but the nation of Jamaica, to the world.

The development of reggae music would be a prime example of how a pariah's condition can lead to positive advances for both the pariah group and the dominant society. Unlike the other pariah group theorists, Arendt believes that a pariah's condition forced them to develop more positive virtues, which included an intellectual and spiritual nature, awareness of grave injustices, lack of prejudice, and the ability to survive and persevere in oppressive circumstances. The cutting off of dreadlocks, mass arrests, and charges of drug peddling by police meant that in order to promote their doctrine, the Rastafari would need to adapt to current circumstances in a way that would not attract increased hostility.

¹⁵¹ King, Stephen, Jensen, J. Jensen. "Bob Marley's Redemption Song: The Rhetoric of Reggae and Rastafari." *Journal of Popular Culture*. Winter 1995 V29 n3: 20

¹⁵² Barrett, Leonard, 196

For example, the Rastafarian “argot”¹⁵³ is intentionally used to disguise important philosophical and theological discussions that Rastas have during reasoning sessions and in everyday life. This unique style of speaking is yet another status marker that derives from the Rastafari’s position within Jamaican society. The creation of a distinctly Rastafarian lingo and syntax is another way for the Rastafari to beat down Babylon; while many poor are considered uncultured and unsophisticated for not being able to speak proper English, the Rastas have repudiated this symbol of respectability and instead esteem and promote their own language and vocabulary. The Rastafari vocabulary incorporates many archaic terms found in the Bible as well as many made-up words used to intentionally express the philosophical underpinnings of their culture. For example, the word “dedicate” is positive in meaning yet its first syllable sounds similar to the word ‘dead’ which is negative; thus, the Rastafari use the word “livicate” to indicate that being dedicated is an important and positive quality for Rastas to have. Another common example is the word “understand.” Understanding is the ability to comprehend and to transcend knowledge in a positive way. Thus, for the Rastas “overstand” is a more logical choice to describe this newfound enlightenment.

Moreover, the Rastafari consider “wordsound [to be] power.”¹⁵⁴ The Rastafari believe that when Jah wanted to create Earth, he did so by *speaking the words* necessary for creating life. Thus by speaking, a Rasta recreates the universe as Jah did before him.¹⁵⁵ For the Rastafarians, the most powerful and significant letter of the alphabet is the word “I” or the number one. “I” is so sacred that to speak of oneself without including an additional “I” in reference to the Almighty Jah Rastafari is sinful. Therefore, the Rastas

¹⁵³ Edmonds, 62

¹⁵⁴ Nicholas, 39

¹⁵⁵ *ibid*

reference the presence and divinity of the Almighty every time they speak. The constant allusion to Jah is a reminder for Rastas that they are never without Jah and to follow Jah's laws or face the consequences. "I" is also used in combination with other words in order to glorify them; for instance, the word "power" will become "I-ower." In addition, the creation of "I words" is an attempt to reclaim the control and agency lost during slavery.¹⁵⁶ While clearly aware of the injustices inherent in Jamaican society, the Rastafari's ability to create new music and dialects demonstrate the positive privileges evident in Arendt's definition of pariah group. The following composition illustrates other virtuous aspects of the Rastafari doctrine.

There's a mighty reformation sweeping o'er the lands
God is gathering His people, by his mighty Hand
For the cloudy days descended and morning sun now shines
Yes! The reformation truth must stand.

Chorus:

It's the Ethiopian story
The mighty Church now takes it stand
Spreading righteousness forever
In its truth we all must stand.

Zion walls again are building as in the days of old
All the clashing of opinion and its strife will cease
For we all will be united as the saints are joined in one
And the will of God it all be done.

Surely Negus has come back to take his people home
He shall rule in righteousness as His word go forth
We shall stand in one opinion to defend this Holy Church
For the reformation truth must stand

* * *

Emperor Haile Selassie I who sits on David's throne
He's King of Kings and Lord of Lords
He comes to Claim his own.

Thou mighty King of Kings, thou Tree of Life
Thou Father of the free
Thou Elohim Jehovah Jah
We stand secure in thee.

¹⁵⁶ Breiner, Laurence. "The English Bible in Jamaican Rastafarianism." *Journal of Religious Thought*. Vol 42, 1985: 32

Stand up with might ye Rasses all in righteousness arrayed.
Put on your Robe and face the foe with courage and with right.

Archangel Gabriel gave the sound Ethiopia must be free
Arabia Desert Ranger said they all shall bow their knee
As Babylon lift up his eyes to spoil the Saints of God
Selassie stand up on his feet to give them their reward.

This song clearly expresses the Rastafari's optimistic, intensely spiritual, and non-violent ideology.

In addition to these positive characteristics, Lazare theorized that the pariah is also a bearer of a hidden tradition that is important to preserve and analyze for historical and anthropological reasons. For instance, the Rastafari's re-interpretation of the bible led them to practice "ital" living. Ital living is another distinct status marker of the Rastafari. Ital living is understood to be a pledge to only use organic products in their natural or living states. As Ras Hu-I, a Rastafari doctor, instructs:

Man should not eat mechanically: he should eat what grows from the soil. Agridishes. No dead flesh of any living things that creepeth on the earth. All living things that grown from the earth.¹⁵⁷

Therefore, consuming meat, fish, eggs or poultry makes your stomach a "cemetery"¹⁵⁸ as you are taking in dead flesh; alcohol and most manufactured products are strictly prohibited. The Rastafari believe that to practice ital living is to live as their ancestors in Africa once did and this means refusing any products or substances that were not in existence during the period when God first spoke to the Israelites. Because this practice is unique to the Rastafari, they act as a modern example of people who are attempting to preserve a lifestyle that is no longer popular in Western culture. Thus, they bring forth a tradition and interpretation that is important for scholars to study.

¹⁵⁷ Nicholas, 58

¹⁵⁸ Nicholas, 58

This chapter has demonstrated that the pariah status of the Rastafari includes several critical elements. The first is that the Rastafari have been physically and culturally oppressed by white, Western power, and consequently subjugated since the 1780s because of their African heritage. The dark-color of their skin has prohibited them from becoming socially mobile after Emancipation and forced their socio-economic status to be the lowest within Jamaican society. While the majority of Rastafari did not own property or hold jobs with high occupational status, they developed in-group mechanisms for status compensation, which included: the belief that they were chosen by God to suffer the actions of the white man, the creation of “reasoning” sessions to present their historically and culturally distinct knowledge-base to others, the growing of dreadlocks, the consumption of ganja, the use of word-power, the development of reggae, and the strict adherence to ital living. All of the following behaviors, ideas and actions contributed to the Rastafari’s unique status markings as a pariah group in Jamaica.

V. Conclusion

This thesis has analyzed the progression of the Rastafari from their emergence during the postcolonial era to the height of their movement during the late 1970s. While not explicitly known as the Rastafari, the formerly enslaved Afro-Jamaicans with the darkest-skin and the “least desirable” physical and cultural colonial traits from the point of view of colonial society were limited in their social mobility because of a race-based hierarchy that placed them at the bottom rung of the social ladder. Throughout the 1800s, this group occupied the lowest socio-economic status position within Jamaican society and maintained close ties to its African heritage. As the Jamaican Independence movement developed, this growing mass of poor, disenfranchised Afro-Jamaicans was inspired by the charismatic leadership of Marcus Garvey to return to Africa and take pride in its African heritage. The static social position of the dark-skinned Black Jamaicans coupled with the popularity of Garvey’s Back to Africa Movement led to the formal introduction of Rastafari doctrine and the development of one of the most influential pariah group movements in history.

Throughout this thesis, Max Weber’s, Hannah Arendt’s, and W.G. Runicman’s theories were used to demonstrate the pariah group status of the Rastafari in Jamaican society. Having surveyed the literature on the Rastafari in some detail, I have come to believe that this theoretical framework is better suited for explaining the social phenomenon that led to the Rastafari’s emergence than some other competing theoretical views.

While this author has chosen to examine Jamaican society through the lens of its colonial and plantation legacies, other social-scientists such as Lewis¹⁵⁹ and Gronseth¹⁶⁰ have argued that discontinuities based upon socio-economic growth supersede racial and cultural divisions because of the tremendous economic gap between the upper and lower classes in Jamaica. They cite post-Independence economic statistics from the 1960s, which reveal that Jamaica had the world's highest level of inequality, with the wealthiest five percent of the population receiving thirty percent of the national income and the poorest twenty percent receiving only two percent. In contrast, M.G. Smith believed that the stratification of cultural practices should be the primary focus of the sociological analysis of Jamaican society. Smith categorized Jamaica as having a "cultural plurality," which he defined as a "condition in which two or more different cultural traditions characterize the population of a given society."¹⁶¹ Smith argued that because different sections of the population were practicing and experiencing qualitatively distinct forms of their shared political, socio-economic and religious institutions, the social relations, activities, and values of these groups diverged. In addition, "cultural or behavioral color," defined as "the extent to which an individual's behavior conforms to the norms associated with one or the other of the hierarchically ranked cultural traditions of the societies, as these norms themselves are associated with color-differentiated groups"¹⁶² were also seen as significant determinants of membership in a particular

¹⁵⁹ Lewis, Gordon. *The Growth of the Modern West Indies*. London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1968: 25.

¹⁶⁰ Gronseth, Evangeline C. "Patterns of mobility in post-independence Jamaica." Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1978.

¹⁶¹ Smith, M.G. *The Plural Society in the British West Indies*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965: 38.

¹⁶² Smith, M.G. *The Plural Society in the British West Indies*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965: 40.

group. Thus, the operation of a multi-leveled racial system depended as much on linguistic and performative criteria as on phenotypic characteristics.

However, it is important to note that some scholars choose to approach the Rastafari's emergence as one that was rooted in psychosocial rather than socioeconomic circumstances. For example, sociologist Orlando Patterson has analyzed the Rastafari's emergence as rooted in a psychosocial pathology or a "sign of group neuroses" that began as a reaction to cultural alienation. Patterson argued that the Rastafari's denunciation of Jamaica and their desire to repatriate was "a coded way of saying they wish to be made full participants in the privileges of mainstream society."¹⁶³ Similarly, anthropologist Sheila Kitzinger mistakenly categorized the movement as a "last ditch effort to preserve some sense of identity in a society which has made them outcasts," and that "repressed psychological drives resulting from marginality provided the basis for faith and action for the Rastafari."¹⁶⁴ By neglecting to emphasize the importance the Rastafari put on social change and the reconstruction of African identity and African ancestry, these scholars paint a portrait of the Rastafari whose frustrations can be reduced to social psychology.

According to Rex Nettleford, the Rastafari can claim to be the "only indigenous Caribbean-Creole phenomenon of its kind apart from Garveyism which has not been transported from the wider Caribbean world."¹⁶⁵ The Rastafari movement has many different cultural facets to it—language, religion, artistic manifestations, and political organization—and this accounts for its worldwide impact among diasporic Africans as

¹⁶³ Patterson, Orlando. "Ras Tafari: Cult of Outcasts." *Social and Economic Studies*. Vol 37, No. 3, 1998: 72

¹⁶⁴ Kitzinger, Sheila. "Protest and Mysticism: The Rastafarian Cult in Jamaica." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. Vol 8, Fall 1969: 149.

¹⁶⁵ Nettleford, Rex. "Discourse on Rastafarian Reality." In *Chanting Down Babylon*, eds Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, et al. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1998: 321.

well as those without African heritage. Unfortunately, despite their huge social and cultural contribution to Jamaican society, the Rastafari lack the respect given to a minority group that has helped shape the national identity of the country.

This thesis has concentrated on the historical conditions and social situation that gave rise to the Rastafari religion and movement. However, the social conditions that gave rise to the Rastafari's pariah group status were altered after the 1970's when the Rastas influence reached its peak. Ironically, the incorporation of Rasta culture by whites and blacks, as well as political parties, and the commercialization of Rasta culture have given rise to new conflicts and the effective dissolution of the Rasta as a unified status group. This weakening of rigid status boundaries has occurred for several reasons.

Firstly, the Rastafari remain unrecognized as a legitimate religion in Jamaica; they are not given the same rights as other religious groups and are frequently victims of civil rights discrimination. Only three years ago the Constitutional Courts of Jamaica recognized Rastafari as a religion for the very first time in an out-of-court agreement.¹⁶⁶ This out-of-court agreement stated that under the Constitution of Jamaica, Rastafarian prisoners were entitled to have their church conduct acts of worship, but were not to use ganja while in the prison system. The court declared that they were now offering the Rastafari the same rights as all other prisoners; clearly, the courts did not recognize the religious importance of ganja for the Rastafari.

However, since Jamaica is the largest Caribbean exporter of ganja or marijuana to the United States, the Jamaican government's antipathy towards those who wear dreadlocks, listen to Bob Marley, and smoke ganja seems understandable. As traits that

¹⁶⁶ *International Religious Freedom Report: Jamaica*. U.S. Department of State. 13 April 2006. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2003/24498.htm>

used to be distinctive status markers of Rastafari are exhibited by both the rich and poor, black and white, and urban and rural, the disorganization of the Rastafari movement makes it difficult to prove one person is a legitimate Rasta and another is not.

Since the Rastafari have a well-developed spiritual component to their ideology, attempts by the government to categorize people through Church membership is not enough to prove that one is Rasta. The vast majority practice alone or in small worshipping groups and believe that having a formal or organized structure is unnecessary. Some Rastafari disagree with this assessment and have formed the Church of Haile Selassie. This Church is intended to redirect Rastafari who joined the Ethiopian Orthodox Church believing it was teaching Rasta doctrine; conversely, the EOC message preached Christianity. Thus, the Church of Haile Selassie was formed in 2002 so that Rastas could worship Jah correctly in this new church.¹⁶⁷

Another challenge that faces the modern-day Rastafari movement is the commercialization of reggae music and its effect on popular perceptions of Rasta culture. The commercialization of Rasta culture has erased some of the rigid status boundaries that made reggae a distinct status marker of Rastafari culture. Instead, the diffusion of the Rasta "pop culture" throughout the world has caused a disparity between how outsiders perceive and identify with the cultural products of the Rastafari and the historical significance and rationale that brought them into being. Moreover, the demands of political participation have led to a division between political and religious Rastafari that continues to hinder the effectiveness and cohesion of the movement.

¹⁶⁷ Nettleford, Rex. "Discourse on Rastafarian Reality." In *Chanting Down Babylon*, eds Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, et al. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1998: 322.

Despite the religious aspects of Rastafarianism, not everyone claiming to be a Rastafari follows the religious tenets set out by the founders of the movement. The universal success of reggae music has intensified the division between "religious" and "political" Rastafarians, many of whom were disgusted by the commercialization of their plight. The split began as a result of Haile Selassie's visit to Jamaica in 1966 when Selassie met with several Rastafarian leaders and a new tenet of repatriation emerged: Rastafarians should liberate themselves in Jamaica before repatriation to Africa. Jacobs' and other scholars argue that this new message launched a new wave of Rastafarianism, in which the movement's apolitical philosophy gave way to more immediate, more political demands.¹⁶⁸ The new political goal stated by Selassie spawned the division between "political" and "religious" Rastafarians.

Anthropologist Yoshito S. Nagashima distinguished "political" Rastafarians from their "religious" counterparts in terms of active political involvement in Jamaica. The Rastafarian group that compose the Rastafarian Movement Association (RMA) are considered "political" in that they argue for active involvement in Jamaican politics. Religious Rastafarians, on the other hand, maintain that the movement must refuse to "participate in Jamaican politics as they have often felt betrayed."¹⁶⁹ Moreover, the religious side, exemplified by the group known as Twelve Tribes, feels that their ability to repatriate would be trivialized because of their association with reggae music. In short, while political Rastafarians argue that active engagement in Jamaican politics would "provide them with the authority and power to improve their living conditions," religious

¹⁶⁸ Jacobs, Virginia Lee. *Roots of Rastafari*. San Diego: Avant, 1985: 87.

¹⁶⁹ Nagashima, Yoshiko. *Rastafarian Music in Contemporary Jamaica: A Study of Socioreligious Music of the Rastafarian Movement in Jamaica*. Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1984: 22.

Rastafarians believe in the "depolicitization of the Rastafarian movement."¹⁷⁰

Unfortunately, even members of the RMA have begun to fear that some members are imitating the lifestyle of the Rastafari without embracing their deep religious and ideological beliefs: "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."¹⁷¹

Although, many Rastafari remain apolitical because they believe that escaping Babylon, not changing Babylon, should be their primary goal, in 2001 Ras Astor Black launched the first Rastafarian political party. His campaign platform was to rid Jamaica of "economic and political terrorists"¹⁷² and abolish the current constitution and colonial monarchy. The goal was to create a government with greater allegiance to Africa and Jamaica. Even though his candidacy for the North West St. James Constituency fell short, it paved the way for the next Rastafarian political party. In 2002 members from the Church of Haile Selassie formed the Imperial Ethiopian World Federation Incorporated Political Party IEWFIPP.¹⁷³

A final stumbling block for the Rastafari is achieving their major goal of repatriation. Since its inception, the main goal of the Rastafari has always been repatriation to Ethiopia; however, repatriation remains an elusive, difficult and unattainable objective to this day. The population of Rastafarians repatriates who did

¹⁷⁰ Nagashima, 31

¹⁷¹ King, Stephen. "International Reggae, Democratic Socialism, and the Secularization of the Rastafarian Movement, 1972-1980." *Popular Music and Society*, Vol. 22, 1998.

¹⁷² Thompson, Noel. "Rastafarian political party officially launched." *Daily Gleaner*. October 4, 2001: 1.

¹⁷³ "The Future of Rastafari." *Jamaicans.com*. 14 April 2006.

http://www.jamaicans.com/culture/rasta/rasta_future.htm

move to Ethiopia has dwindled from over 2200 in 1990 to just 250 in 2000.¹⁷⁴

Speculations that the Rastafari have realized that repatriation is unrealistic are numerous and talk of assimilation is frequently arising. Political participation is just one of the manifestations that the Rastafari are beginning to assimilate; however, there remains considerably controversy as to whether this is an accurate sociological description.

Rastafarians face an uphill battle in politics, as the majority of their most likely support base, the Rastafarian community, does not vote. For the Rastafari, political activity constitutes accepting Babylon and the formation of the Rastafarian political party and the IEWFIPP has been harshly condemned by those claiming to be “true” Rastas. Presently, the umbrella Rasta organization in Jamaica is the Rastafari Centralization Organization (which goes under the acronym RCO). But according to Oswald Dawkins of Jamaica’s newspaper the *Daily Gleaner*, “if you ask Rastas outside of Jamaica if they ever heard of the RCO, and what it stands for, the answer more than likely will be “no.”¹⁷⁵

Dawkins has written many articles criticizing the Rastas apolitical stance. Dawkins believes that a movement that claims it was, and continues to be, influenced by the teachings of Marcus Garvey, should emphatically promote political participation because political participation is necessary for achieving repatriation as well as equal treatment under the law. While Dawkins credits the Rastafari for avoiding becoming embroiled in the politically motivated violence of the late 1970s and 1980s, the same “hands off”¹⁷⁶ attitude has also hurt the movement. Rastas have been locked out of

¹⁷⁴ Thompson, 2

¹⁷⁵ “Where is Rasta Heading?” Editorial. *Daily Gleaner*. 12 December 2005.

¹⁷⁶ *ibid*

having any influence in the institutions that move a nation forward. For example, the Rastafari have had no role in Jamaica's educational system. Until 1990, Rastafari children were not allowed to enter public schools or universities and even in the last five years, children with dreadlocks continue to be occasionally barred from schools.¹⁷⁷ While its understandable to be focused on repatriation, shouldn't the Rastafari also be concerned with the education their young receive while in Jamaica?

More importantly, the Rastafari's lack of political participation hurts them in the eyes of the public who still refer to incidents like Pinnacle as proof of the Rastas savagery and psychological instability. Statistics that posit the Rastafari living under the poverty line in Jamaica do not bode well in the eyes of other poor residents who claim that the Rastafari "refuse to take appropriate stances at appropriate times on appropriate issues." Moreover, for a group that swayed election results in the 60s and 70s is now ignored by major parties and candidates today.

Undoubtedly, the most difficult information to locate in this research was the status of the Rastafari in Jamaica today. Most scholarship completely avoids discussing their current status in Jamaica or what their future will hold. Surely this is not because books and articles about their emergence and development are no longer being written, but rather because their movement peaked in both popularity and cultural importance in the 1970s. Now it seems that the battle between the political Rastas and the religious Rastas continues intermittently, but as the nation of Jamaica struggles with poverty, violence and the AIDS epidemic; it appears that Babylon is still a living hell for many Rastafari and non-Rastafari alike.

¹⁷⁷ "The Future of Rastafari." *Jamaicans.com*. 14 April 2006.
http://www.jamaicans.com/culture/rasta/rasta_future.htm

The question as to whether the Rastafari could have done more for their nation is unanswerable. However, the dissemination of Rastafarian ideology produced an unforeseen backlash: the obfuscation of political ideology behind popular symbols and vain pop-culture idols. Although political enfranchisement has occurred, the true evidence of democratization, the freedom to pursue one's goals, has not yet manifested itself in Jamaica. Few Rastas have achieved their goal of repatriation; those that remain in Jamaica remain enslaved in the capitalist system of Jamaican Babylonia with little or no hope for advancement. In conclusion, while people around the world still listen avidly to the voice of Bob Marley, this cultural icon of the Rastafari movement remains far better recognized and appreciated than the movement that gave rise to it.

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