

Western Oregon University

Digital Commons@WOU

Student Theses, Papers and Projects (History)

Department of History

2004

Jamaica: The True Culture

Rhyan Sonis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.wou.edu/his>



Part of the [Cultural History Commons](#), and the [Social History Commons](#)

**JAMAICA:
The true Culture**

**Rhyan Sonis
Hst 351
Monday-Wednesday
Winter term**

Culture of Jamaica

Jamaica; the land of the dreadlock wearin, no job havin, Ganja (marijuana) smoking, lazy prophesizin Rastafarian ex slaves who live in poverty and don't care one bit. Or is it?

There are many people through the world that still carry around with them this idea of Jamaican people as having these (unpleasant) characteristics I just mentioned and more. This mental picture people carry of a lazy prophet of Jah Rastafari is in large do to the lack of actual knowledge of the history, culture and mindset of the Jamaican people as a whole, and to the enormous amount of stereotyping done by the media in other countries either threw film production or the focus of any kind of news that leans towards building these ideas to support the stereotype (because other kinds of news and media portraying Jamaica differently would not be as interesting). Another reason people still have these stereotypes about Jamaicans is because they prefer them, I think they prefer these wild characters because they are much more intriguing than the hard working people who in a lot of ways are like their American/European counterparts. If one actually takes the time to examine the culture and people of the island you will find that although

they are as advertised a very expressive, colorful and beautiful culture they are far from an island full of pot smoking, apathetic, people.

The first of the major myths I would like to dispel is the one of the “island full of apathetic people”. If you go back into the History of Jamaica you will find that they were a people of struggle for almost all of their existence. The original people of Xaymaca (as it was called at the time) were the Taino Indians but as they quickly died off due to slaughter, diseases, over work, and suicide, the African substitutes for labor were shipped over (in horrible conditions) and their struggle began. There are many accounts (though very small at some times) of resistance on the slave’s part very early and kept going on until¹ “In 1655 a British expedition failed to conquer Santo Domingo but took Jamaica as a consolation prize. When the Spaniards fled the island they freed their African slaves who took to the hills and formed the nucleus of the Maroons”² these maroons (Spanish: “cimmaron” means wild) fought very hard and actually came to an agreement over large areas of land in the interior of the island. Jamaicans Struggled for 307 more years until they got their independence. They are a people rooted in struggle and they

¹ Zinn, Howard. A peoples History of the United States. New York: Harper Collins. 2001

² <http://www.discoverjamaica.com> ©Copyright The Gleaner Company Limited. 7 North Street. Kingston. Jamaica 1996-1998. All rights reserved

have proven that they are still not done; they have shown us more recently that they are not a people who do not take things lying down. In the late 80's and early 90's the people wanted to improve their standard of living so twice they changed the head of state looking to change the direction of the economy (but both times to no prevail).³ Jamaicans have long been (and still are) a society that is lacking in the area of Apathy.

Another common myth that distorts people's view of Jamaica is the idea that every body in Jamaica is Rastafarian (a grass roots religion that started in Jamaica), and since they are all Rastafarian there must be endless fields of marijuana because they all smoke pot. It is true that Rastafarians take part in the religious smoking of Ganja "who compare the ritual to the sacred communion of the Christians."⁴ Although having its origins in Jamaica and being a "black" religion Rastafarian has a pretty small gathering there, in fact "Jamaica is a majority Christian country. There are many Christian churches in Jamaica. So much so that Jamaica holds the dubious record in the Guinness Book of Records with the most churches per capita mile"⁵. One of the main reasons for this false attribute to the island of Jamaica is do to a very popular style

³ Get up Stand up ©Copyright TBS productions. New York

⁴ Chevannes, Barry. Rastafari and Other African-Caribbean Worldviews (p.17)

⁵ <http://www.jamaicans.com>. Copyright © 1995-2003. Jamaicans.com

of island music called Reggae, with its distinct (Rastafarian) language and distinct (Rastafarian) message was one of the main representatives of Jamaica to the rest of the world. So the thought that Jamaican people are all of the Rastafarian religion and they're for all potheads is a very far off concept.

I talked about some things that Jamaica is not. But there are things that Jamaica definitely is and should be attributed with. Parts of Jamaican culture is very idealized by people in other cultures, as there is in all cultures, but Jamaica as an island of about 2.5 million has something to boast about since much of the world longs after their very colorful and expressive but at the same time laid back "cool runnin" (peace be the journey) attitude, that is attributed to all of island living (no matter what islands you live in). Some people are intrigued by their language (patois), the way they take the English (some French and Spanish) spoken/written word and transform it into a language all their own, (e.g. USA: Oh my gosh, I just broke Mom's expensive plate. JA: Lawd mi Gad, mi bruk up Mama stoosh crackry.)⁶.

Jamaica has a very eclectic culture that takes everything from the strong history of a struggling people imbedded in their mindset and the soft singing guitar playing stars of reggae who sing of them, to the bright color wearing, patois speaking image of the island and mix it all into a

⁶ Jamaicans.com

beautiful culture known as Jamaican. This is how the Island style of
Jamaica is really lived out, not like the drugged out Rastafarian on TV.
This the true Caribbean way of life, this is Jamaica

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The America's. Get up Stand up ©Copyright TBS productions. New York

Chevannes, Barry. Rastafari and Other African-Caribbean Worldviews (p.17)

<http://www.discoverjamaica.com> ©Copyright The Gleaner Company Limited. 7 North Street. Kingston. Jamaica 1996-1998. All rights reserved

<http://www.jamaicans.com>. Copyright © 1995-2003.

Jamaicans.com

Zinn, Howard. A peoples History of the United States. New York: Harper Collins. 2001