JAH PEOPLE: THE CULTURAL HYBRIDITY OF WHITE RASTAFARIANS

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Abstract: For more than half a century, the African-based Rastafarian movement has existed and thrived. Since the early 1930s, Rastafari has developed, changed and gained enough supporters to be considered "one of the most popular Afro-Caribbean religions of the late twentieth century. According to a survey conducted in 1997, there are over one million practicing Rastafarians worldwide as well as over two million sympathizers. Rastafarians are concentrated in the Caribbean, though members of this diverse movement have settled in significant numbers all throughout the world. At present, there are large Rastafarian communities in New York, Miami, Washington DC, Philadelphia, Chicago, Huston, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Boston and New Haven as well as many large cities in Canada, Europe, South America and Africa. While Rastafari has maintained much of its original flavour, migration, globalization and a reinterpretation of philosophical dogma has created a space for white people to join this typically black movement.

Keywords: hybridity, Rastafarians, religions, migration, political movement.

INTRODUCTION

For more than half a century, the African-based, Rastafarian movement has existed and thrived. Since the early 1930s, Rastafari has developed, changed and gained enough supporters to be considered "one of the most popular Afro-Caribbean religions of the late twentieth century" (Murrell 1998, 1). According to a survey conducted in 1997, there are over one million practicing Rastafarians worldwide as well as over two million sympathizers. Though 1,000,000 followers is a huge number, many scholars argue that a more accurate figure is much larger but impossible to determine. The majority of US-based Rastafarian immigrants would most likely refuse participation in government studies, and in addition, many Rastafarians live in non-Caribbean countries without legalized, documented citizenship (Hepner 1998, 199-

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200). Rastafarians are concentrated in the Caribbean, though members of this diverse movement have settled in significant numbers all throughout the world. At present, there are large Rastafarian communities in New York, Miami, Washington DC, Philadelphia, Chicago, Huston, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Boston and New Haven as well as many large cities in Canada, Europe, South America and Africa (Dijk 1998, 178-180; Hepner 1998, 199-206; Simpson 1985, 291). Almost since its conception in the early 1930s, Rastafari has maintained six basic principals[1]: 1) Humanity of God and divinity of man; 2) God's divinity is reveled through man; 3) God is in every man; 4) Salvation is here on Earth; 5) The protection and celebration of all life is a duty; 6) Emancipation, liberation and a rejection of the evils of Babylon[2].

While Rastafari has maintained much of its original flavor, migration, globalization and a reinterpretation of philosophical dogma has created a space for white people to join this typically black movement.

Cultural hybridity, the idea that all cultures are composed of elements and influences of other cultures, can be clearly seen in white Rastas' defiance towards traditional racial roles. While we hold Rastafarian culture in one hand, and white culture in the other, we can clearly see two distinct cultures. But what happens when a white person interacts with a culture that is not their norm? How has Rastafarian thought evolved as to allow whites a role in their movement? What does a culture of white Rastafarians look and feel like? These questions will be explored in the proceeding pages, and it will be argued that the creation of a white, Rastafarian, hybridized culture was made possible through globalization, the deterritorialization of Rastafari, and an inherent fluidity found in Rastafari. Gradually changing views on race, aided by the turbulent political atmosphere of the 1960s and 1970s allowed for whites to become active members in this historically black movement. These questions will be dealt with through an exploration of the original intentions and ideas of Rastafari, as well as the conditions that created a suitable atmosphere for such a movement to succeed. In addition, the migration and subsequent deterritorialization of Rastafarians will be examined to serve as a model for hybridization.

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Lastly, attention will be given to Rastafari in action through the exploration of interviews with Rastas (both black and white) as well as other primary sources.

BACKGROUND

Desperate economic times, brutal colonization and vast racial inequality were the norms in Jamaica in the 1930s. These dire conditions created the need for a grass-roots, empowering, anti-colonialist movement that could reach throughout the Caribbean. Rastafari is that movement. The original Rastas battled their government for the redress of grievances dealing largely with land, rent and taxes (Simpson 1985, 286). Not only were black Jamaicans poor and oppressed, but their government was ruled by a white minority. This clash of power forced the need for a movement that was not only against the British colonial occupation of the island, but was also racially conscious. While some have argued that Rastafari was founded largely on the teachings of Marcus Garvey, the vibrant black nationalist, scholars seem to disagree, attributing much less to the pan-Africanist. While Garvey taught racial awareness and identify, he was also an advocate of separatism, something not found in Rastafarian culture. On the contrary, Rastafari is very communal, and while it does advocate racial identity and conscious, Rastafari does not teach racial superiority, a concept that made Garvey famous.

Rastafari is loosely based on several bodies of scripture, but as a religion, and as a cultural or political movement, Rastafari has little or no written rules or codes, and is assembled largely from oral traditions and teachings (Nettleford 1998, 318-319). The religious themes come largely from The Old Testament and New Testament as well as several lesser-known texts. These include The Holy Piby – also known as "The Black Man's Bible", compiled by Robert Athlyi Rogers of Anguilla from 1913-1916, which predicts the destruction of Babylon and the return to Zion – and the Kebra Nagast, also known as "The Glory of the Kings", and considered by Rastas to be the lost bible of Ethiopia (Roskind 2001, 36-37). The Old and New

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Testament, combined with The Holy Piby, The Kebra Nagast, and the writings and speeches of Emperor Haile Selassie I (also known as H.I.M.). Rastas believe that God, known as Jah, will one day emerge and remove his followers from a place of oppression, known as Babylon, and take them to a utopia, known as Zion. As this paper deals with Rastafari as a *cultural* and *political* movement, it will only tangentially discuss its religious basis and history.

Historically, Rastafari developed as a reaction to the British occupation of Jamaica (Hutton 1998, 37). Modern colonization served to dehumanize Jamaica's citizenry, and created a space for the development of an oppositional culture amongst the largely black and poor members. The manifestation of Rastafari from within the Jamaican populace was marked by a rejection of colonial and British values. The movement is often noted for its distinct dress and grooming practices, its use of marijuana, its strict diet, and reggae music. In order to establish Rastafari as a culture, a short explanation must be provided to place these cultural practices in context. The wearing of dreadlocks is often the first sign of a Rasta. According to Robert and Julia Roskind, two white Rastas who have lived and studied in Jamaica, dreadlocks are "a covenant with Jah and show a commitment to [the] faith, a commitment against the customs and social codes of Babylon". It is argued that in the Bible, there is no reference to Christ cutting or grooming his hair and so he is regarded as most likely being a "locksman" (Roskind, Roskind 2001, 38). As Rastas derive teachings from the Christian scriptures of Jesus, emulating such practices is essential. The typical Rasta also wears simple, often ragged clothes. This is primarily done as an articulation of Rastafari's promotion of simple living, but as Clinton Hutton and Nathaniel Samuel Murrell write, this is only part of the reason. "The symbolism of their ragged dress and other attire is that of identity with biblical prophets, traditional African dress, and the downtrodden of the world, whom they believe will inherit planet Earth at the time of reversals, when Jah judges this wicked world" (Hutton, Murrel 1998, 51).

Rastas also have a strict diet called 'Ital'. Ital means "springing from the earth, earthy, natural" and is usually classified as organic, vegetarian/vegan and often raw

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(Edmonds 1998, 354). Ital teaches herbal healing and an emphasis on holistic ecology. The use of marijuana, referred to as ganja, is also a cultural practice that has given Rastafari significant notoriety, especially in the United States where thousands of Rastas have been jailed for possession of the drug (Hepner 1998, 202-203). According to Randal Hepner's paper examining the Rastafarian movement in the "metropolitan" United States, "by the mid-1980s, more than two thousand Rastafarians were behind bars in New York's state correctional facilities (Hepner 1998, 203). Ganja is used by the Rastafarian community as a sacrament, and for some, as part of a medicinal routine (Hepner 1998, 205; Roskind, Roskind 2001, 39). Many Rastas contend that ganja use is integral to their culture and religion, while maintaining that other drugs are dirty and unnatural. Thus, despite its commercial image, Rastafari can be considered anti-drug, excluding marijuana, which is considered an earthly sacrament, not a drug (Hepner 1998, 205). The last defining characteristic of the Rasta culture is reggae music, a topic that will be explored further in subsequent discussions of reggae's function as a cultural disseminator.

Since the 1950's, the Rastafarian movement has been a hot topic in academia, and a 1996 survey of Rastafarian scholarship found over 150 "substantive publications (books and articles)", as well as hundreds of conference essays, unpublished works, dissertations, editorials and websites that dealt with Rastafari (Murrell 1998, 10). Upon conducting research for this study, one quickly identifies the seeming lack of analysis concerning cultural hybridity and white Rastas. One of the only examples to the contrary is Barbara Makeda Blake Hannah's book *Rastafari: The New Creation* (Hannah 2002) which contains raw interview transcripts on the topic, but little to no analysis. Despite such limitations, so-called raw data sets such as this provided the majority of my material for analysis, and while I was able to contact some movement members directly, a large portion of the materials were developed for other purposes and appropriated for this study. In this vein I was able to review firsthand accounts from Rastas (both black and white), read interviews and online discussion board postings, and corresponded with many authors

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and scholars via email. Through these interactions, I was able to find adequate resources dealing with Rastafari, its global dispersal, and its racial attitudes. Since there were no academic studies found that dealt with the topic specifically, a combination of more general texts were utilized to gather information and make conclusions. It should be noted that this study is not the first to point out large gaps in the field of Rastafarian research. In his essay, *Chanting Down Babylon in the Belly of the Beast: The Rastafarian Movement in the Metropolitan United States*, Hepner points out the lack of attention and formal study focusing on the migration of Rastas to the United States and the impact of Rastafarian communities in predominantly white communities.

A FEW NOTES ON METHOD

A proper study dealing with issues of race, which inherently deals with issues of privilege, should provide space for critical reflexive self-analysis. Thus as the author/researcher[3], it becomes relevant to state that as the researcher, I am a white, US-born, male, raised within a Judeo-Christian context, who has had a moderate level of interaction with the Rastafarian community. These interactions have come from residing in a community in northwest Washington, DC (2002-2010) with a large number of Jamaicans and Rastafarians, and living amongst (black) Rastas in Kingston and Negril, Jamaica (2004-2005). As a non-member of the Rastafarian community, this research attempts to maintain a high standard of centrism, and in doing so, does not include the works of *extremists*. The work of radically political Rastas (falling somewhere on a leftist spectrum) as well as dogmatic, fundamentalist, religious Rastas has been read, but not included in the research. This study is meant to focus on the experience of the average Rasta, not that of a radical. This proceeding discussion treats Rastafari as a political, social and cultural movement and to a lesser degree, a religion. It is very common for followers to refer to Rastafari as "a way of life, a philosophy, and an ethical code" (Simpson 1985, 288). This position follows prominent scholars who have

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argued that since the late 1960s, the religious nature of Rastafari has become less important in light of the political, social and cultural manifestations (Campbell 1987, 78).

It must be acknowledged that a nuanced and delicate understanding of racial (and identity) politics is necessary to adequately deal with this topic. Regretfully, the scale of this project did not allow me to delve into these areas. In this study, due to its specific dealings with race, it is important to clarify what is meant my "black" and "white" as individuals divergently construct racial identities. Since Rastafari serves to revaluate the notion of "blackness", the usage of "black" in this study is meant to refer to an individual with brown skin who identifies their ancestral heritage as African. In this study, African-Americans, Afro-Caribbeans, Africans and all other people of similar physical features and ancestral identification are considered black. "White" is categorized as Caucasian, not identifying Africa as one's ancestral homeland. This demarcation leaves out a large portion of the Earth's inhabitants, and this is recognized.

Much of the following findings deal with the experiences of Rastas (black and white) in countries outside the Caribbean. Therefore, it becomes important to research and interpret the effects of such migrations. This study operates under the assumption that the physical relocation of Rastas, from the Caribbean into typically white areas, aides the spread of Rastafari, and allows for the creation of hybridized, white, cultural pockets contained within large metropolises. It is argued in this study that the migration of Rastafarians into the Americas, Europe and Africa created Rastafarian communities that allowed whites to be introduced to the culture. This argument is based largely on the well-documented example of the English Rastafarian experience.

Upon discovering the lack of materials available that dealt with white Rastafarians, I developed a formal, adaptable letter of inquiry requesting assistance in my research. After compiling a listing of 18 names of scholars and other authorities, I adapted the letter to fit each recipient and sent them out. Of the 18 sent, replies were received from 12. Of those 12, eight were used in the final research. Many of the responses pointed me towards ob-

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scure resources or provided a recommendation for a source. These recommendations were helpful for locating books of use in this study. Additional assistance was provided by library staff at Howard University, a historically black college in Washington DC, which maintains an extensive array of Afro-Caribbean materials. While many of the materials located were of a traditional nature, some deserve individual notation. Robert and Julia Roskind's book, *Rasta Heart: A Journey Into One Love* (Roskind, Roskind 2001), is a personal account of two white Rastas living in Jamaica. This book provided a good sense of experience, and combined with related discussions and interviews found on Rastafarian message boards and websites[4], I was able to utilize a large number of personal, first hand sources. I also utilized an interview with a Rasta elder, provided to me by Michael Kuelker. The interview was conducted for Kuelker's 2004 book, *Book of Memory: A Rastafari Testimony*. In addition to this interview, I was able to access the lengthy interviews contained in Barbara Makeda Blake Hannah's book, *Rastafari: The New Creation* (Hannah 2002), as well as those contained in Chiara Alessandra Bistarelli's, *Immigration and Assimilation: The Rastafarian Experience* (Bistarelli 1996).

DESCRIPTION OF RESULTS

The results of this research can be broken down into four subsections: 1) The conditions that necessitated the formation of an empowering movement for colonized Jamaicans; 2) The spread and deterritorialization of Rastafari from 1930-1970; 3) The creation of a hybridized culture of white Rastafarians; and, 4) The overwhelmingly positive experience of whites in the Rastafarian movement.

The conditions that necessitated Rastafari

The early period of British colonization and occupation of Jamaica created the conditions that necessitated the formation of a radical, anti-colonialist, black empowerment movement. In their essay, *'Rastas' Psychology of Blackness,*

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Resistance and Somebodiness, Clinton Hutton and Nathaniel Samuel Murrell describe the psychological state of the average Jamaican living under colonialism. They write: "confronted with a regime of persistent violence, racist propaganda, psychological warfare, and the negation of anything African, many Blacks came to believe the racist stereotypes that Europeans assigned to Africans" (Hutton, Murrel 1998, 47). When this was brought to attention, the Rastafarian movement was quick to label such blacks as having "white hearts", meaning that though they were culturally and physically black, through a process of internalized racism they were possessed by "white hearts" that dictated the way they saw themselves (Hutton, Murrel 1998, 47). This manifestation of internalized racism created the need for a strong movement for black empowerment. In the face of such beliefs, many turned to the sometimes militant teachings of Marcus Garvey, while others looked towards the formation of a more holistic ideology for combating racism – this is where Rastafari was born in the hearts of Jamaicans.

Combined with the internalized racism, brutal occupation, and staggering economic inequity found on the island, the Rastafarians were able to harness the broad-based discontent of the people and begin to develop a movement. From the 1930s to the 1960s economic conditions improved slightly, and moved towards a more equitable distribution of income, but by the 1960s, whites were still earning more than thirteen times the salary of the average black worker (Waters 1989, 29). This vast economic inequity allowed Rastafari to spread throughout the poor communities of Jamaica and appeal to the already disheartened population.

The spread and deterritorialization of Rastafari: 1930-1970

The Jamaican Rastafarian movement has its ideological beginnings in the 1920s with Marcus Garvey's ideas of black empowerment, but it was not until the 1930s that the movement began to gain support and attention. The following brief history illustrates significant events that allowed Rastafari to gain support and attention from 1930

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to the 1970s. The events are taken largely from the work of Nathaniel Samuel Murrell and Frank Jan Van Dijk's essay, *Chanting Down Babylon Outernational: The Rise of Rastafari in Europe, the Caribbean, and the Pacific*.

In 1930, the strongly held religious beliefs of many Rastafarians were confirmed. Just as they had predicted in the scripture, their prophet, Halie Selassie I (HIM) was crowned king of Ethiopia. Found inside the book of Psalm, the line reads: "Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God" (Psalm 68:31 KJV). The importance of this fulfillment of prophecy cannot be overstated. Hutton and Murrell attempt to place it into the context. While discussing the formation of the Rastafarian psychology, they write: "To these Jamaicans, the coronation of Halie Selassie marks nothing less than the commencement of a new world (…) it is the beginning of the end of the colonial European-Christian world order, the ascendancy of the black race, and the freedom of humanity in the new order" (Hutton, Murrel 1998, 38). Through the attention paid to the coronation of HIM, the Rastafarians were able to draw massive amounts of attention to their plight and their movement. The emperor's coronation was broadcasted internationally and viewed all throughout Jamaica and Ethiopia (Murrell 1998, 6-7).

While the coronation of HIM gave Rastafari a sense of religious importance in the world, the Rastafarian reaction to the Italian invasion of Ethiopia (1935-1936) allowed the movement to gain support (Lewis 1998, 150). While Rastas and Garvyites were protesting all over Jamaica, Rastas and their supporters in the United States, Britain and parts of Africa were organizing. These support groups helped raise money which was then funneled to militant, Rasta resistance fighters and their supporters who took up arms against Benito Mussolini's fascist regime (Murrell 1998, 7). This new militancy and widespread opposition to fascism allowed Rastafari to gain international attention.

The 1950s brought three major boosts for Rastafari. Beginning in the 1950s, there was an upsurge in academic studies exploring Rastafari (Murrell 1998, 10). This eventually led to the founding of the University of the West Indies in 1960. In 1958, there were large scale efforts to

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unite the many Rasta factions in the Caribbean. Later that year, a large Rasta march in Kingston concluded with the Rastas announcing plans to take over the country (Murrell 1998, 8). Three months later, Rastafarian activists occupied the governor's house and used the attention to call for increased militancy in their struggle. Eight years later, in 1966, Halie Selassie traveled to Jamaica to meet his disciples, which by now constituted large numbers of Jamaicans. This event provided yet another media frenzy for the Rasta movement to capitalize on. In the months following Selassie's visit, a motion was filed with the Jamaican Senate that proposed making Selassie the King of Jamaica, in place of Queen Elizabeth II of Britain (Murrell 1998, 9).

In the 1970s, two events served to further the Rastafarian struggle. In 1972, the People's National Party (PNP) came to power in Jamaica, and Michael Manley, the party's Prime Minister, publicly lent himself and his party's support to the Rastafarian struggle (Murrell 1998, 9). The last, and arguably most import event that served to further Rastafari was the popularity of reggae music. In the 1970s reggae music reached its height of popularity around the world. Furthered by the huge success of artists like Bob Marley, reggae allowed millions of people to be exposed to Rastafarian ideas, stories and public figures. This phenomenon will be discussed later in its relation to the deterritorialization of Rastafari.

Creating a hybridized culture of white Rastas

The creation of a hybridized culture of white Rastafarians can be seen through the analysis of three global phenomena: 1) The commercial popularity of reggae music; 2) The decline of the organized Left and the merging of Rastafari; and, 3) The migration of Caribbean people.

When the 1960s came to a close, the message and spirit of Rastafari had spread all across the world through reggae music (Dijk 1998, 181). "By the end of the sixties, the influence of the Rastafarian movement on the development of the popular culture was evident by the fact that the most serious reggae artists adhered to some of the

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principals of the Rastafarian movement" (Campbell 1987, 154). Musicians like Bob Marley and Burning Spear forced people to hear the words of Rastafari by making their struggle and history the main themes in the music. Very quickly, reggae festivals began to spread, and gradually, the crowd got more and more white. This occurred largely in the United States, Europe and Canada, but the trend was similar in many nations (Campbell 1987, 133-44, 180-81). The popularity of the genre within the quickly declining, largely white hippy movement catalyzed Rastafari's merging with white radicals and student activists.

Following the decline of the anti-Viet Nam war and hippy/counterculture movements of the 1960s, a space was created that was soon filled with Rastafari. As reggae spread the words of Rastafari, the movement made huge leaps in the bridging of racial gaps (Hepner 1998, 204). At the same time that the United States-based social change movements declined, those in Europe shifted direction. By the early 1970s, reggae had become a main staple in radical concerts as well as other cultural events. In Britain, reggae made a large presence within the anti-racist and anti-Nazi movements. According to Horace Campbell, "these [Rasta] bands carried the culture of resistance to their concerts and were prominent in the cultural presentations of the Anti-Nazi League (…) in the UK [reggae culture] was part of the *embryo* of the diversified culture of non-racial Britain" (Campbell 1987, 200). These changes are integral to white involvement in Rastafari because much like the United States, Britain's radical movements were overwhelmingly white and young.

Throughout the 1950s and well into the 1960s, there were large waves of migration of Caribbean people. Many settled in the United States, Virgin Islands, Canada, Central and South America, Africa (namely Ghana, Senegal, Ethiopia and Zimbabwe), England, the Netherlands, Germany, France and New Zealand (Dijk 1998, 178; Hepner 1998, 201; Simpson 1985, 291). Though not all Jamaican immigrants are Rastas, during the late 1950s and early 1960s, the population of Jamaican immigrants in England swelled to over 200,000. Twenty years later, in 1990, a conservative US study estimated that over 186,400 Rastas were living in New York City alone! (Hepner 1998, 199).

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As stated earlier in this study, though there are no studies located that outline the effects of these migrations on the racial makeup of the movement, it can be deduced that the introduction of large numbers of Rastafarians into non-Rastafarian neighborhoods and cities allowed for the movement to be seen by a larger, whiter population.

John Tomlinson and Néstor García Canclini discuss the idea of deterritorialization extensively in the realm of globalization theory. In his book, *Globalization and Culture*, Tomlinson describes globalization's tendency to create complex webs of connectivity, which helps it to spread cultural items beyond their original, nationally-defined borders (Tomlinson 1999, 30). This deterritorialization created a need for reterritorialization. This reterritorialization is an attempt for the displaced culture to "re-establish a cultural 'home'" (Canclini 1995, 228-229; Tomlinson 1999, 148). In the case of Rastafari, its new home was the cities and metropolises of the world. Rastafari has been deterritorialized because it no longer is a cultural entity found in Jamaica; it is a global movement that is *based* in Jamaica.

The experience of white Rastas as positive

Throughout the interviews, testimonials and other materials located which were authored by white individuals, respondents report with surprising regularity a positive experience amongst the Rastafarian movement. Without repeating all the many praises given by white Rastas, it is difficult to relate the overwhelming message of acceptance felt by whites inside the Rastafarian movement. Such themes were noted in a variety of cases including interviews conducted by Barbara Makeda Blake Hannah, testimonies contained within Robert and Julia Roskind's book, Chiara Alessandra Bistarelli's study, *Immigration and Assimilation: The Rastafarian Experience*, Joseph Owens's book *Dread: The Rastafarians of Jamaica*, Prince Elijah William's *Book of Memory: A Rastafari Testimony* and a variety of postings located on Rastafarian online message boards, mailing lists and other online repositories. In addition, similar sentiments were expressed in emailed responses sent from US-based white Rastas Gregory Ste-

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phens, Matthew DeLory and white Rasta scholar Michael Kuelker. Lastly, a US-based, white Rasta musician named Joseph Fennel was interviewed and shared similar words of understanding and acceptance. Throughout the narratives offered by these individuals, the messages remain the same – you do not have to be black to be a Rasta if you feel the spirit inside of you. The consensus among black Rastas and Rasta scholars is that Rastafari is felt and known in the heart not in the skin. White Rastas report similar experiences, and though some have had their faith questioned, most report that the acceptance and tolerance felt has been overwhelming. When asked about the importance of race, a 29-year old black Rasta man responded, "Marry and love whoever if they are green, red, black, or white. It is all the one and the same. Really because color is a hindrance to understanding the beauty and depth of other people" (Bistarelli 1996, 56).

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Since the days of Marcus Garvey's "Back to Africa" movement, Rastafari has grown, changed and spread. 50 years ago, the notion of white Rastafarians may have seemed far-fetched, but now it is commonplace. The emergence of whites in the movement, resulting in the creation of a hybrid culture of white Rastas, forces students of Rastafari to beg the question, 'has Rastafari's views on race changed, or have they been reexamined and reinterpreted?' I would argue the latter. Disregarding the occasionally controversial words of Marcus Garvey, one would be hard pressed to find evidence that Rastafari ever advocated racism or racial superiority. This argument is highly contentious, yet one can examine the founding principals of the movement as well as its more current manifestations in order to prove this point. Prince Elijah Williams, a Rasta elder and scholar, seems to agree with this conclusion and writes:

> The kingman of I Father never make up fi only black people. The Kingman of Rastafari didn't make up of only black people, it make up of every different nation in the world. Everyone…Because as I say the sun shine for everyone[5] (Williams 2003, 1).

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Williams' words seem to mimic those of many Rasta elders and scholars. Race is not important, it is what is in the heart that really counts (Nicholas 1996, 30).

Once again there are numerous passages found that solidify this claim. Even the words of Halie Selassie himself seem to argue that race is not important. In a speech given by Selassie in 1964, and popularized in Bob Marley's song "War", Selassie says:

> Until the philosophy which hold one race superior and another inferior is finally and permanently discredited and abandoned; until the basic human rights are equally granted to all without regard to race; until that day, the dream of lasting peace, world citizenship and the rule of international morality will remain a fleeting illusion (Campbell 142).

This excerpt from Selassie's speech shows that not only was Rasta not advocating racism in the 1960s, its main spokesman and prophet, spoke out against discrimination. While Marcus Garvey's words can be interpreted to advocate racial superiority, and while his influence in Rastafari's beginnings are significant, one cannot effectively argue that Rastafari has ever promoted or supported a platform of racism, racial superiority or hatred towards white people (Simpson 1985, 287). Maybe white involvement in the movement was not an issue that was explored until Rastafari spread to white areas? It was at this point that members of the movement began to look towards their teachings and reinterpret their typically black movement as one that embraces and welcomes members of all races.

In some instances within Rasta texts, the term "white" is used to mean oppressor. In this sense, the white race is historically "in league with Satan", but, "nevertheless, it is thought to be possible for a white man to break the chains of his condemnation and follow a holy way of life, if his commitment and perseverance are strong enough" (Nicholas 1996, 30). While white is sometimes used to categorize oppressors, it is usually qualified with the claim that whites can break from this cycle and join in the Rasta struggle for liberation and empowerment (Murrell 1998, 6). An interesting use of the word "white" can be found when describing the agents of Babylon. As an example, a

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white plantation owner, a black cop and a Latino land owner would all be considered "white" because they are acting as oppressors, as agents of Babylon. Despite their race, politicians, police, clergymen, teachers, landholders and business and professional people were all included as agents of oppression (Cashmore 2979, 91; Simpson 1985, 287).

This reinterpretation of Rastafari by individuals may be made easier by the lack of official religious doctrine that exists to outline the beliefs and practices of the movement. The system of beliefs is defined largely by a "body of myths and rituals, which vary somewhat among different groups and individuals" (Bistarelli 1996, 6). Since the Rastas have no single book (religious or otherwise) as a basis for their movement, but rather take parts from many books, their culture is largely maintained through oral tradition (Nettleford 1998, 318-319). Because of the lack of official rules and religious mandates, followers are tasked to discern the words of God and apply it to their own life as they see fit (Roskind, Roskind 2001, 33). This loose structuring allows for whites to join and interact with the movement by reducing dogmatic restrictions.

The final area explored herein concerns the motivations of whites to join the historically-black movement. After reviewing the interviews, testimonies and analysis of white Rastas, 12 distinct themes emerge explaining why white individuals, and specifically white liberals and radicals, join the movement: 1) The appeal of an ideology that promotes empowerment and liberation (Hannah 2002, 128; Hepner 1998, 212); 2) The appeal of an ideology that promotes solidarity with oppressed peoples (Hannah 2002, 127); 3) The appeal of an ideology that opposes racism (Campbell 1987, 63; Nettleford 1998, 319); 4) The appeal of an ideology that opposes capitalism (Campbell 1987, 64,70; Hepner 1998, 210); 5) The appeal of an ideology that opposes colonialism; 6) The appeal of an ideology that opposes imperialism (Hepner 1998, 210); 7) The appeal of an ideology that promotes naturalism, simplicity and the rejection of materialism (Frankston 2003); 8) The appeal of an ideology that helps to answer complex spiritual questions and helps one reach enlightenment (Cash-

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more 1979, 93); 9) The appeal of an ideology that promotes unity, romanticism and the notion of One Love (Campbell 1987, 142; Hannah 2002 12-13; Henke 2003); 10) The appeal of an ideology that opposes the State (Campbell 1987, 85, 133; Simpson 1985, 288); 11) The appeal of an ideology that teaches "people's history", and a reinterpretation of the Bible (Chevannes 1998, 57; Frankston 2003; Hannah 2002, 90); 12) The appeal of an ideology that works for the creation of utopia (Hepner 1998, 210-212). These motivations were derived from the words of white Rastas, and to a lesser degree, from studies concerning the movement as a whole. The motivations outlined above seem to reason that the majority of whites who join the Rasta movement are already left leaning, appearing on some sort of continuum from liberal to progressive to revolutionary leftists. This complements the idea that to a degree, Rastafari gathered members from the dwindling hippy, student and radical movements of the 1960s.

CONCLUSION

Rastafari, the struggle for liberation, empowerment and against Babylon, is constantly changing. The Rastafari of 1930 is not the Rastafari of the present. This study aims to show that Rastafari has never *promoted* racism, but instead allows participants to interpret the words of Jah for themselves. This openness allows whites to join the movement, and has created not only a deterritorialized Rastafari, but a hybrid culture of white Rastafarians. This hybrid culture was furthered by the popularity of reggae music in the 1960s and 1970s, the decline of the organized left following the end of the Viet Nam War and the mass migration of Caribbean people. This study attempts to highlight the experiences of whites in this hybrid culture as well as their motivations for becoming involved. Apart from the experiences of whites in the movement, this study attempts to show how Rastafari has spread and become popularized in its 40-year span, and in doing so, establish a timeline for the deterritorialization of the movement. The chronological emphasis was also meant to further understanding of the conditions that necessitated the

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creation of a black-led movement in Jamaica, and why that movement was appealing to a mass audience. While this study is far from complete, it has contributed to the filling of a void outlined by Hepner who stated, "The increasingly multiethnic and international character of Rastafari suggests the need for an interpretive [study] rooted in the analysis of Rastafari beliefs, practices, symbols and norms" (Hepner 1998, 213). When compared to the work already in existence, this study asks new questions and provides a window towards new answers and directions.

Rastafari, approaching its centennial anniversary, is thus a relatively new religious, social and political framework. Its oppositional development alongside that of African slavery, British colonialism, Italian fascism, and Jamaican class stratification formed specific boundaries for its development. While the racial politics of the movement are based around a collection of amorphous texts, like other social movements, the actualized experience of participants is a more accurate gauge of politics then stoic scripture. Thus, the Rastafari movement can be judged to be as racially exclusionary or inclusive as its participants, which to Rastafari's advancement, tend to populate the community from politically progressive and socially radical spheres of society. The white Rastafarian thus exists as an interesting site for an examination of hybridized cultures, and in a more general sense, the *glocal*. The globally lived, locally experienced reality of segmented subcultures allows these sites to be internationally dispersed yet extremely local at the same time. Rastafarian subcultures in the American Midwest would likely share a great deal of similarity with equally isolated Rasta communities in Europe, as both are derived from expatriated adherents and deteritorialized, learned culture. Thus while local collectivities of Rastas in larger communities such as those in Jamaica, England and some US cities may be inundated with black, Jamaican-born individuals, these persons are not required for an authentic, yet white-dominated Rastafari. The movement's ability to carry on within this unique physicality is a testament to its hybridized nature, as well as its porous nature which allows for internal resistance to surface, and external interest to penetrate.

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NOTES

[1] Though this simplistic breakdown of Rastafari was found in Murrell's introduction to Chanting Down Babylon, it was originally developed by Joseph Owens in 1973 and revised by Michael N. Jagessar in 1991.

[2] Babylon is a concise representation for the forces of political, economic, social, cultural and spiritual oppression. Rastas reject Babylon and work to remove themselves from its grasp.

[3] I have also conducted research 'on the ground' in Jamaica during the 2004-2005, Fall/Winter scholastic term. During this time I authored two papers, the second of which is a 73 page ethnographic study. The papers are both available online and can be found at: Loadenthal, Michael, *The Long Wait for Freedom: Examining Conceptions of Party Politics and Political Violence Within Rastafari*. Kingston, Jamaica: School for International Training/University of the West Indies, October 1, 2004 (http://www.academia.edu/1466714/_2004_The_ Long_ Wait_for_Freedom_Examining_Conceptions_of_Party_Politics_and_Political_Violence_within_Rastafari); Loadenthal, Michael, *"Fire Pon Babylon, Fire Pon Rome": The Construction of Oppression, Utopia and Social Change Within Rastafari*. Kingston and Negril, Jamaica: School for International Training/University of the West Indies, December 8, 2004 (http://www.academia.edu/1466709/_2004_Fire_pon_Babylon_Fire_pon_Rome_The_Construction_of_Oppression_Utopia_and_Social_Change_Within_Rastafari).

[4] This data was collected in Fall/Winter 2003.

[5] William's words are presented in an attempt to preserve their original meaning and intention. It is common practice in Rastafari to use modified English words. As an example, the word "kingman" is the Rasta equivalent to the English word Kingdom. As Michael Kuelker explained to me in personal correspondences, "notice that the second syllable of the latter word sounds like 'dumb,' hence the change". Often times words or parts of words that have negative connotations are changed. This is fairly common in referring to man's relationship with Jah.

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