

Rastafari: Race and Resistance on a Global Scale

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Thursdays 3-

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Think of Rastafari and you will probably conjure images of smiling dreadlocked musicians, draped in red, gold and green colors, spliff hanging out of mouth, greeting you with an “irie” or “one love” against a languid palm-tree backdrop. You’ll probably think of men. You’ll probably think of an over-active sexuality. If you don’t immediately conjure that image, then you’ll probably know a lot more about Rastafari than the average person. But even that knowledge will most likely be cursory, in good part because Rastafari have tended to avoid the public spotlight, oftentimes for very good reasons. However, many Rastafari now assert that it is time for a greater understanding (Rastafari would say over-standing) amongst the world’s publics. The questions are endless. For instance, is Rastafari a lifestyle, a faith, a movement? (Rastafari call it a “livity”). Is it just a Jamaican, or Caribbean thing? (The Rastafari colors are from the Ethiopian flag; many Rastafari call themselves I-thiopians). Can white people be “Rasta”? (Still somewhat of a contentious issue in some quarters; however, the Rastafari creed proclaims “death to all oppressors, black and white”). In fact, what does the word Rastafari itself mean? (Rastafari is the crown prince title of Haile Selassie I, the famous Ethiopian emperor. In the Amharic language, *ras* is a military title, while *tafari* means, “to inspire awe”).

The premises of this course are that:

- a) Rastafari has been fundamental to pan-African struggles of the 20th century;
- b) Rastafari contains, by virtue of its many contending (and contentious) histories, practices and philosophies, a microcosm of Black and anti-colonial struggle on a global scale;
- c) Rastafari even contains a microcosm of the general struggle for global justice, and for humanity to bring “heaven on earth”.

The purposes of this course are to:

- a) explore Rastafari beyond its stereotype, i.e. to engage with its many cultural, social, economic and spiritual aspects in their global contexts;
- b) appreciate, where appropriate, the diversity of opinions and understandings held amongst Rastafari;
- c) understand the political nature of Rastafari, especially the contentions and challenges that accompany anti-racist and anti-colonial struggles on a global scale.

The key aim of the course pertains to a biblical proverb that is popular amongst Rastafari: “iron sharpens iron”. Rastafari use this proverb to describe their love of collective “reasoning” and working rigorously through every aspect of an issue. Rather than rushing to judgment, Rastafari prize a careful and critical faculty. We, too, will work through the material of this course with a generous skepticism. Above all, the aim of our study of Rastafari is a heightened self-knowledge: to gain a more lucid and enlarged

understanding of the various political contexts in which we ourselves immediately live our lives. After all, regardless of whatever heritages we claim - Black/African and/or others - we are all implicated, albeit variously, in this subject matter.

Each class will feature the following elements (variously combined, depending on the topic):

- a) Lecturing, primarily to contextualize the materials and ensuing discussions within Rastafari history and culture as well as within broader histories of Black and anti-colonial resistance on a global scale;
- b) A working through of the materials in order to glean how they might speak to each other so as to tell a wider story;
- c) Group exercises that, utilizing your diary entries, enable a critical evaluation of the materials and the topic;
- d) Reflective exercises that allow us to consider what the topic means to us in our own (diverse) lives.

We will workshop each assignment in class. This process will help all students to gain the best mark that they are capable of achieving. The course requirements are as follows:

Reflective Diary (due the night before class, each week) - 60%

You will write a weekly diary entry, which should be posted the night before class. You will post each entry on the "Reflective Diaries" link in the "Course Content".

Each entry should be approx. 500 words, certainly no more than 750. Your entry will comprise the following:

- 1) You will draw out and unpack what you deem to be the key conceptual issue/challenge emerging from the materials;
- 2) You will reflect on whether you had thought of these issues/challenges before consulting the week's materials: if not, what difference does it make to you to think of them now?; if yes, then in what ways – if at all – have the week's materials changed your thinking?
- 3) You should incorporate 2 relevant pictures/images, which you can source off the internet; and it should provide 1 link to a relevant source of information, art, opinion or news.

No diary entry is due until week 2. We shall workshop the diary entry in our first class in week 1, discuss expectations, and model an A-grade entry.

Song presentation (due in class, week 13) - 30%

In week 10, I will randomly assign you into groups of three. As a group, you will decide upon one song listed below and make a multi-media presentation about it (PPT, Presi, or equivalent).

Your presentation will:

- 1) Be no longer than 15 minutes;
- 2) Critically evaluate and explain how the song invokes certain issues and topics that we have engaged with in the course;
- 3) In doing so, your presentation will introduce appropriate imagery, video clips, and other online sources that might be relevant and resonant.

We will workshop the presentation in week 10 and model what makes an A-grade presentation might be comprised of.

Classic Roots/Reggae songs:

- Bunny Wailer – Blackheart Man
- Peter Tosh – Equal Rights
- Dennis Brown & Aswad – The Promised Land
- Abyssinians – Satta Massagana
- Bob Marley – Babylon System

I have selected these songs as they variously invoke elements of the course topics. If your group really wants to work on a classic roots/reggae song not listed here, get in touch with me immediately so I can measure its appropriateness.

Final Reflection (due 10th May) - 10%

You will write a 1000 word final reflection on your diary entries that you have made during the course. The entry is due 10th May.

You will discuss the following:

- 1) What, for you, is the key political theme running across your entries?
- 2) What are the three most important conceptual issues/challenges associated with this theme?
- 3) How are these three conceptual issues/challenges connected, i.e. how do they speak to each other?
- 4) To what extent and in what ways has this key political theme and these conceptual issues/challenges changed the way in which you think about anti-racist struggle, anti-colonial struggle and/or global justice in general?

Syllabus

A note on materials. Each week will feature 2 or 3 main resources (usually listed first) which provide extended engagements with the topic matter. These will sometimes be followed by a set of quite short documents – usually primary sources. So, don't think that there is a massive amount of preparation to do each week: it looks more than it is, and it's entirely doable! (The song/chant speaks to the broad topic of the week.)

1. Introduction

Guide Questions:

What stereotypes exist of Rastafari? What aspirations does Rastafari hold?

Materials:

- Masimba Musodza, "The Man who turned into a Rastafarian", in *The Man Who Turned into a Rastafarian: Short Stories* (2011)

- “Blues for RasTafari” in *One Love* (Screen Edge, 2008).
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oqfHKzyqEZ8&t=1402s>

2. Ethiopianism

Guide Questions:

Why would Black peoples of the Diaspora (especially the USA and Caribbean) consider themselves to be Ethiopian? What effect did the Italian fascist invasion of sovereign Ethiopia (1935) have on this identification?

Materials:

- Nadia Nurhussein, “Ethiopia in the Verse of the Late Harlem Renaissance”, in C. Sherrard-Johnson (ed.), *A Companion to the Harlem Renaissance* (Blackwell, 2015)
- Charles Reavis Price, “‘Cleave to the Black’: Expressions of Ethiopianism in Jamaica”, *New West Indian Guide*, 77:1/2 (2003)
- Letters of Abolitionist Anthony Benezet, “Philadelphia, Twelfth Month, 14th, 1773.”
- Unknown, “Ancient Order of Ethiopian Princes Declaration” (Chicago, 1920-1921) - in Robert Hill (ed.), *The Rastafari Bible* (Unpublished)
- Psalms 68:31 <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+68%3A31&version=KJV>
- Psalm 87 <https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Psalms-Chapter-87/>
- Haile Selassie I, “Speech to the League of Nations”, June 1936
<https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/selassie.htm>

Song/Chant:

- Ras Michael and the Sons of Negus, “Ethiopian/Rastafari National Anthem”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZKPIAFNckD8>

3. Black God

Guide Questions:

Why would Black peoples of the Diaspora feel it necessary to give their god a color? What does a Black god do that a white god cannot?

Materials:

- Celucien Joseph, “The Rhetoric of Prayer: Dutty Boukman, the Discourse of ‘Freedom from Below’ and the Politics of God”, *Journal of Race, Ethnicity and Religion* 2 (9), 2011
[http://raceandreligion.com/JRER/Volume_2_\(2011\)_files/Joseph%202%209.pdf](http://raceandreligion.com/JRER/Volume_2_(2011)_files/Joseph%202%209.pdf)
- Clinton Hutton, “Leonard Howell Announcing God: The Conditions that Gave Birth to Rastafari in Jamaica”, in Hutton, Barnett, Dunkley & Niaah (eds.), *Leonard Percival Howell and the Genesis of Rastafari* (University of the West Indies Press, 2015)
- Andualem Dagmawi, “Some Ideas of Deification as Reflected throughout the Ethiopic Divine Liturgy”, *Collectanea Christiana Orientalia* 6 (2009)
- Marcus Garvey, “The Image of God”, in *Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey Vol.1* (Majority Press, 1986)
- Image from an Ethiopian Orthodox Church bible, stolen during Lord Napier’s expedition to Magdala, 1868

Song/Chant:

- Traditional Nyahbinghi Chant, “I,I,I’ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=682-7cenYI4>

4. The Bible: Oppressive or Redemptive?

Guide Questions:

Is the Bible a white man’s book, a colonial tool, or the story of Black Israel, or…?

Materials:

- Barbara Makeda Blake Hannah, “The Bible – Holy Writ or Propaganda?”, in *Rastafari: The New Creation* (Jamaica Media Productions, 2012)
- Interview with Prophet Gad – founder of the “Twelve Tribes of Israel”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7uxfliB4p1M>
- Archbishop Abuna Yesehaq, on the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Jamaica, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WXiPIIReCBI>
- Prince Emmanuel Edward, "The Black Christ Salvation With Joy and Peace Internationally"
- Mutabaruka, on *Religious Hardtalk*, 2010

Song/Chant:

- Traditional Nyahbinghi Chant, “The Conquering Lion” (sung by Bob Marley) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rL2xsXCrC-w>

5. WordSoundPower: Aspects of Rastafari Culture

Guide Questions:

What aspects of communication are important to Rastafari and why? What is the power behind word, sound and symbol? And how does this power confront Babylon?

Materials:

- Yasus Afari, *Overstanding Rastafari* (Senya-Cum, 2007) ch.9
- Velma Pollard, "The Social History of Dread Talk", *Caribbean Quarterly* 28 (4), 1982
- Kenneth Bilby, "Kumina, the Howellite Church and the Emergence of Rastafarian Traditional Music in Jamaica", *Jamaica Journal* (1986)
- Eye and I Filmworks, *Rastafari Voices* (1978)

Song/Chant:

- Nyahbinghi Traditional Chant, “Rastaman Chant” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yRpDW4Ivpq0>

6. Rastafari and Gender

Guide Questions:

What challenges does gender equality present to Rastafari? What resources do Rastafari women wield to claim and affirm their equality?

Materials:

- Kei Miller, “Tolston Closing”, in *The Fear of Stones* (Macmillan Caribbean, 2006)

- “Omega Rising: Women in Rastafari” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-VRBMRebh_Y
- Imani M. Tafari-Ama, “Rastawoman as Rebel: Case Studies in Jamaica” in Murrell, Spencer & McFarlane (eds.) *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader* (Temple University Press, 1998)
- Yasus Afari, *Overstanding Rastafari* (Senya-Cum, 2007), ch.19
- Hailing Empress Menen on Coronation Day (Nov 2nd) in Shashemene: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oj1CzjqzjeY>

Song/Chant:

- Queen Ifrica, “Lioness on the Rise” (2009) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=38ucJKBk9m8>

7. Pan-Africanism: The Diaspora and the Continent

Guide Questions:

What importance does the continent hold for the African Diaspora? And, vice versa, what importance does the Diaspora hold for the African continent? Why must the Rastafari confrontation with Babylon necessarily take the form of Pan-Africanism?

Materials:

- Kurt Orderson, *The Prodigal Son* (2008) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ORHd_KIBxxY
- Palm Pictures, *Africa Unite: A Celebration of Bob Marley's 60th Birthday* (2007) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lzwW3sVBNUo>
- “War”, Bob Marley at the Hammersmith Odeon, London 1976 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vPZydAotVOY> (up to 4.43)
- Halie Selassie I, Speech to the United Nations (1963) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MDscnpF4Rsl>
- “Africa for the Africans and Pan-Islam”, confidential military memorandum from Britain's colonial archive, 1921

Song/chant:

- Traditional Nyahbinghi Chant, “Black Liberation Day” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fJxNBOLyC0o>

8. Spring Break

9. Reparations / Repatriations

Guide Questions:

What are the different arguments surrounding the desire for – and shape of - reparations? What is the nature of the link between reparation and repatriation?

Materials:

- Emmanuel E. Obuah, "The Politics of Reparations: The Academic Epistemic Communities and the Implications of Reparation Debate on African-American and Africa's Quest for Reparations", *Open Journal of Political Science* 6 (1), 2016
- Rastafari Movement UK, “Reparations March”, 2014 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vjqxkC9Gr04>
- Ras Shango Baku, "On Reparation and Repatriation", *Centenary Committee* (1993)

- Letter to Queen Elizabeth II from Rastafari Brethren of Jamaica, 1961 <http://www.rastafari-in-motion.org/african-mission.html>
- Prime Minister Gaston Browne (Antigua & Barbuda) Issues an Apology to the Rastafarian Community (2018) <http://www.afrikanheritage.com/prime-minister-gaston-browne-issues-an-apology-to-the-rastafarian-community/>

Song/Chant:

Traditional Rastafari Chant, “400 Years” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WWiNlgPEGc8>

10. Shashemene: The Promised Land

Guide Questions:

What struggles have repatriates to Shashemene experienced and sought to overcome? What is the political and social relationship between Rastafari repatriates and other Ethiopian residents?

Materials:

- Rastafari Regal Livity, “The Promised Land” (2016)
- Giulia Bonacci, *Exodus! Heirs and Pioneers, Rastafari Return to Ethiopia* (University of West Indies Press, 2015), chapters 7, 8
- Erin Macleod, “Christianity and the King, Matrimony and Marijuana: The Unresolved Ethiopian Relationship with Rastafari.” *In Ethiopian Images of Self and Other*. Ed. Felix Girke. (Wittenberg: Schriften des Zentrums für Interdisziplinäre Regionalstudien, 2014)
- Ijahnya Christian, “No Migration, Repatriation: Spiritual Visionings and Political Limitations of Rastafari Repatriation to Ethiopia”, in O. Rutazibwa & R. Shilliam (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Postcolonial Politics* (London: Routledge, 2018)

Song/Chant:

Cymande, *Shashemene* (1974) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RPUEEe4oqRU>

11. Special Lecture by Members of Iniversal Development of Rastafari (IDOR) - a DMV based Rastafari Organization

12. Indigenous Rastafari

Guide Questions:

How have non-African indigenous peoples integrated Rastafari into their cultures and histories? How have indigenous peoples mobilized Rastafari for their own anti-colonial struggles?

Materials:

- Front of the Box Productions, “Rasta in Aotearoa” (Auckland, 2004)
- Hitendra Patel, “Children of Zion”, (Auckland, 2002) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DzYrl37oo20>
- Film Australia, “Sugar Slaves” (1995) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I4_zbkffAY4
- Robbie Shilliam, *The Black Pacific: Anticolonial Struggles and Oceanic Connections* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), chapter 6

- Depiction of the Caribbean and Pacific connection by Tigilau Ness, for a 1979 tour of Black British musicians and artists to Aotearoa New Zealand entitled “Keskidee Aroha”. (Keskidee is a small Guiana bird known for its resilience; Aroha is the indigenous Māori word for love).

Song/chant:

Ruia and Ranea Aperahama, “Kotahi Aroha” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gfmeA-KdBaU>

13. Reggae Musak: The Commodification of Rastafari

Guide Questions:

Has the global success of reggae music been a boon or a bane to Rastafari?

Materials:

- Maroon News, "Cultural appropriation: The commodification of Rastafari culture", May 2016 <https://www.maroon-news.co.uk/single-post/2016/05/24/Cultural-appropriation-The-commodification-of-Rastafari-culture>
- Anthony Bogues, “Get Up, Stand Up: The Redemptive Poetics of Bob Marley”, in *Black Heretics, Black Prophets: Radical Political Intellectuals* (Routledge, 2003)
- UNESCO, “Inscription of Reggae music on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity”, Nov 2018 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E442_o0AOyE
- Jalani Niaah and Sonjah Stanley Niaah, "Bob Marley, Rastafari, and the Jamaican Tourism Product", in Daye, Chambers & Roberts (eds.), *New Perspectives in Caribbean Tourism* (Routledge, 2008)

Song/Chant:

- Bunny Wailer, “Blackheart Man”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u6z5qTXrsAM>

14. Song/Chant Presentations and Concluding Thoughts