

# Rastafari and reggae music research papers examples

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Arising as the biggest ideology of African culture, Rastafari movement became a household name in the late 1930s in the republic of Jamaica. Though many people describe Rastafarianism as a form of religion, the advocates of this movement consider it as a way of life. They believe that Haile Selassie equates to Jesus Christ in the Bible. Rastas or Rastafari is the name given to the followers of this movement. Moreover, Rastafarianism refers to the way of life for many of its followers. However, the Rastafari family dislikes this term because they believe it is associated with Babylonian culture. This paper hopes to highlight how Rastafari came into existence and the impact that reggae music has had on this movement. For many years, Jamaica has been in a state of war with its own citizens. Revolutions and riots sparked by political intolerance has been the norm throughout the country. During the olden days, when slaves were in high demand in the Americas, some of them managed to escape and waged a powerful resistance. The aim of this resistance was to end many years of slavery. This kind of resistance has continued to show itself even in the modern Jamaica. Therefore, the fight to bring changes in Jamaican republic led formation of spiritual ideology known as Rastafarianism. On the other hand, Rastafarianism brought with it a powerful form of communication to pass their message to its followers. This mode of communication is reggae music (Bradley 23-32). Since the leadership in this isolated island oppressed its people, the two modes came up as a result. Moreover, Rastafarianism has greatly influenced the attitudes and beliefs of many people in this great island (Bradley 23-32). Rastafarianism is a religious outfit whose ideologies have a basis on social change. On the other hand, reggae music is a mode of

passing these ideologies on its followers. A movement must realize different goals if it wishes to change an existing system in place. The movement must also convince the population that their course is for the common good.

Marcus Harvey and Leonard Howell were the leaders who put forth the ideologies behind Rastafarianism. The movement should also ensure that it succeeds in putting people together and encouraging them to support the course of this movement (Bradley 43). Nevertheless, some external forces may wish to cause resistance at this stage because they like to see the situation as it is. However, it is also important to rally all people to offer support to this movement. It is only then that this change becomes possible.

Due to the contribution of many Jamaican artists, Rastafarianism has taken roots in all parts of the world. Most notable among is Bob Marley (Brunning).

Bob Marley became a great influence in spreading the ideologies of Rastafarianism through his lyrics. It is a common belief with many people that Bob Marley was a great influence in spreading Rastafarianism all across North America and most parts of Europe. Today, Rastafarian movement is lucky to be where it is thanks to influential lyrics of Bob Marley. Through his lyrics, the social and political views of the movement spread like bush fire.

During this time, the black community experienced different inequalities in all parts of the world. The negativity that they underwent was so immense that it bothered on slavery. This made Bob Marley to speak against these inequalities and injustices (Spiker 3). Rastafarianism became a platform to address several issues that affected blacks in Jamaica. More so, its concern to fight the freedom of the people who have gone through oppression and subjugation is an indication that the course of this movement is for the

common good. Since the inception of slavery, the oppressors denied the black community all the rights entitled to them. The pioneer leaders of Rastafarian movement that included Marcus Garvey stressed the need to do away with the slave mentality. They also emphasized the idea of repatriating to Africa to meet up with their brothers and sisters. Garvey, for instance, believed that by restructuring the life of a black person, he would have the confidence to believe in himself. Therefore, the perception instilled on him would make him achieve just anything because he knows that he is equal to the white person (Thompson). Many people have joined Rastafarian movement because of the beliefs that they hold. The movement started as a small and dispersed group of people but it has now increased its number the world over. Ethiopianism is the root cause of the belief by black people that they wield enough power to end oppression. The Rastafarians adopted the National anthem belonging to the Garvey movement as their mythic form of expression (Brunning). They believe that Ethiopia is their ancestors' land and that God loves to be there. The anthem urges its followers to fight gallantly to be victorious. This song shows the Jamaican's desire to get back to Africa and agitate for their freedom. While the vision of getting back in Africa was the crucial idea in the early stages of the movement, it is equally important if the Rastafarians were to start looking for freedom in Jamaica. It is believed that repatriation follows the liberation, this being a directive from the dominating lion of Judah, the lords of lords, the king of kings, the Emperor of Ethiopia. The Emperor subsequently toured Jamaica in 1966. Many Rastafarians saw him as a champion for getting their freedom back. Another belief that Rastafarians hold is that not all the ideas and values that

the West preaches are in conformity with the interests of the black community been let alone all the other races of the world. The teachings that the Catholic Church puts forth are lies according to Rastafarians. This is because the church was of the view that slavery was the best thing to help Africans become civilized people. In a way to champion the interests of the white people, the bible received some changes in some of the texts. This is the view according Rastafarians the world over (Bilby 7-9). However, the Rastafarians do not believe that many lies riddle the bible; they are only of the view that all the institutions that use the bible to teach their followers are full of deceit. Many youths in Jamaica tend to tune to many faiths of the west all the values they try to put across. Bob Marley once said that no one seems to teach the right way of life and this is the reason why the devil has found a lot of space to maneuver.

Rastafarianism appears to be the only religion that offers support to the black people. The movement came up because of colonial oppression and during this time, it was only dominant in the slums. The movement acted as the only voice of the hopeless who had no chance of making it in life. The ideologies expressed by Rastafarians also acted as principles for teaching the youth to have pride in their homeland as well as appreciate the African sense of identity and heritage. Since its origin, Rastafarianism has experienced many changes, from trying to become self-government to a voice of change in Jamaica then to Pinnacle commune and finally as Rastafarian Movement Association. It is through these changes that Rastafarians from all parts of the world have joined hands to agitate for a change (Anderson 17). Leonard Howell advanced the pinnacle commune

ideology. He argued that all Rastafarians should return to nature to live and experience a different life than the one found in Jamaica. In the early 1940s, Howell felt that a self-government controlled by black people was a better choice for everyone. Occupying a certain land and running it as a maroon nation, Howell became a leader of thousands of Rastas who had occupied that small state. However, the frequent ambush and subsequent destruction of this small state made many members top give up and return to Kingston. On the other hand, the Rastafarian movement association helped many Rastafarians found on the wrong side of the law. The movement's vision was to see a liberated Jamaica by bringing mother Africa. The movement had intelligent leaders who were socially aware and enlightened. Therefore, they were able to make a formidable force to reckon with. Many people believe that the movement aimed to organize Rastafarians as a powerful force to compete with the government (Bilby 4).

In the olden days, the direct cause of social injustices and oppression was slavery. In today's world, wealth and power form the main factors that cause oppression to many people. Resources are available for a few people who are reluctant in helping others. This means that a rich person would rather stay in a big mansion than lend a hand to a poor man. This has led to an increase in conflict and people are now using dishonest means to acquire wealth. The society has come to believe that competition between people is a good thing and that the aggressive nature of man is the direct cause for this (Bilby 4). Therefore, before we realize any effective change there is a need for people to change their mindset to counter the ideologies presented by Babylonians. Rastafarians are aware of this and they have chosen to

empower, uplift and enlighten the black community. Nevertheless, Oppression and other social injustices are in occurrence in different countries, besides Jamaica. The genocide that happened in Rwanda and the Apartheid in South Africa are some of the few cases. Rastafarianism gets its message across through Reggae music. The musician himself is the messenger according to Rastafarians. The message in Reggae music defies all seas and oceans. Its theme cuts across the political divide. This music evokes a message of prayer and this helps people to be conscious of the oppressed and the disadvantaged groups in society. It acts as a platform through which the people who receives unfair treatment can air their grievances. The theme in the music expresses unity for all people and calls on them to have patience for a change since it will happen soon. Reggae music also encourages people to be humble even in the face of tragedy. This is because there is no state is ever permanent. Therefore, they should hope that the situation would change for the better. Since reggae music has become a platform for airing people's grievances, it has become a crucial way of life for many Jamaicans. When anything goes wrong in Jamaica, Reggae music becomes the only powerful tool in criticizing it to bring the corrective action (Thompson). All manner of brutalities that includes police beatings, gangs as well as serving a jail term forms the crest of reggae music.

Even though many people think that Rastafarianism is all about artistic creation, it is more than this since it also expresses a deep-seated concern of many people. With the help of pioneer reggae artists, that includes Bob Marley, Peter Tosh and Burning spear, Rastafarianism message spread all

over the world. Therefore, it was not going to be possible for Rastafarianism to obtain the international acclaim were it not for reggae music. Bob Marley and others voiced the concern that a change was something that is inevitable and that everyone would see it happening. The earliest reggae artists opened the eyes of many Jamaicans towards the goals of Rastafarianism. Through their music, they highlighted the plight of many people in Jamaica. Therefore, their goal was to liberate all the poor people and end the suffering. The message expressed in the songs was clear, that the oppressors' heyday was now over and now they should be ready to pay the price. Since Bob Marley had risen to international acclaim, the Rastafarianism message was broadcast the world over. Bob Marley went to be a stepping-stone for other Jamaican artists who entered the reggae music world and advanced Rastafarianism ideologies (Bradley 23-32).

Rastafarians in all parts of the world advocates for change for its people. When people receive unfair treatment that causes them to live in dilapidated conditions, where the chance of survival is minimal, many groups come up to agitate for a change. Many a time, these movements are so violent in agitating for their rights. They believe that it is appropriate to die while fighting for your rights than living a life of fear. However, many Rastafarians champions for peace when advocating for their rights. Nevertheless, we can note that Reggae music has become famous the world over. This publicity caused the messages of Rastafarianism to receive attention the world over.

## **Works Cited**

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