STUDY OF RASTAFARIAN CULTURE IN COLUMBUS, OHIO: NOTES FROM AN AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN’S JOURNEY

DISSERTATION
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Philosophy in the
Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By
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* * * * *

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2008

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This study is an investigation of Rastafari culture primarily in Columbus, Ohio. It is a personal journey of places I have traveled and observed Rastafari culture including Jamaica, Ghana, and Brazil. This study speaks to the impact of Rastafari in those locations and questions how the appropriation and commodification of Rastafari culture affects the movements’ authenticity. This research uses a reflexive autoethnographic approach to write the stories of the twelve people who were interviewed in the study.

The first chapter, in this study, describes the events in my life that lead to the development of this research. It explains the purpose and significance of the study, as well as, defines the research questions. The first chapter also discusses the qualitative experimental writing techniques I chose to use in the research.

Chapter two historicizes the African Diaspora making connections between Jamaican, Ethiopian, and Columbus’s histories. It gives a brief overview of Rastafari history and culture in Jamaica and addresses the events and people who shaped Black Nationalistic thought regarding Ethiopianism in the United States. The chapter concludes by discussing Rastafari as part of the diverse artistic, musical, and cultural landscape of Columbus.

The third chapter conceptualizes Rastafari through the theoretical lenses of critical theory and social movement theory. It presents the challenges inherent in
prescribing theoretical constructs to a movement that has been defined and interpreted differently by scholars as well as by those who prescribe to the movements’ philosophy.

The qualitative ethnographic methodology employed in this study is discussed in chapter four. The location of the research is established, the method of data collection analysis, and limitations of the study are discussed. The participant’s narratives are presented in this chapter.

In the fifth chapter, I conclude the study by establishing pedagogical implications, revisiting my research questions, and raising questions for further research.
Dedicated to my mother, Clara Louise Johnson, my sister Janice Delores Johnson and Maureen Rowe
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To my friends, relatives, colleagues and mentors in Jamaica who embraced me with warmth and affection and welcomed into their lives, I say many thanks.

Most Importantly, I thank the Most High Jah for Blessings, Guidance, and Protection.

**Bless the Lord oh my soul and forget not all His Benefits.** Psalms 103 verse 2.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

In 1977 when I bought my first reggae album from a used record shop on Vine Street in Cincinnati, Ohio, I never imagined that thirty years later I would be writing my dissertation on Rastafarian culture in Columbus, Ohio. The earliest reggae album I remember buying was by I JahMan and the name of the title track was *I Got to Carry Jah Heavy Load*. Today I can listen and watch I Jahman on You Tube’s website performing his classic song *I Got to Carry Jah Heavy Load* live from Portugal in June of 2007 or from any other fan anywhere in the world who has posted the song on You Tube. I found the lyrics to the song via internet access at sing365.com website and include them in this paper:

I've got to carry Jah heavy load
Because I walk in His gladness
On His merry merry road
I've got to carry Jah heavy load
I've got to back up myself
Against false evidence
I've got to carry Jah heavy load
I've got to pick up where them say
Jah Jah left off and gone
I have to carry Jah heavy heavy load

in my meditation when I reason with Him
Clearly in my visions of dreams
He reason with me
I feel Jah Jah heartically
Oh I know what I do believe
I believe in Jah-Jah truth and rights
During research for my dissertation, I came across an article by Hasse Huss (2000) in the *Black Music Research Journal* regarding the early graphic production of reggae record album cover sleeves during the 1970s. The article, “Zinc-Fench Thing: When Will Reggae Album Covers Be Allowed Out of the Ghetto?”, addresses how reggae album cover sleeves might portray the harsh conditions of the Jamaican poor accurately, but the choice of such a visual representation may be the outcome of the acts of not-so-subtle “othering” and orientalizing (p. 192). As I read Huss’s article, I reflect on my own perceptions of what I might have been feeling thirty years ago when I purchased I Jahman’s album. I cannot describe what the album cover sleeve looks like. I don’t remember. After thirty years, I don’t even know where the album is. Perhaps my niece Jamilah has it or it was thrown out when my father decided to throw out the reggae albums that had been sitting in his basement for so many years. What my perceptions of the album’s cover were at the time neither can I remember. However, I do remember that I liked I Jahman’s music. I still do today. Here I include an excerpt from Huss’s article:

The common image of reggae artists as dreadlocked revolutionaries against a ghetto zinc-fence backdrop appears to be typical more of an
outsider’s romantic view than the preferred vision of Jamaicans themselves. Attempts at accessing the international market, “cosmopolitan” consideration of style and sexuality, are as common in reggae as elsewhere in popular music but largely have been deemed “inauthentic” by those who would prefer their Jamaican artists to remain if not “noble savages’ then at least “pure” and bold revolutionaries ever ready to burn down the Babylon of Western dreams. (2000, p.181)

Its 1:27 am Sunday morning March 9, 2008. My third dawta’s (daughter) birthday is Monday. She will be seventeen years old and I need to set the clock forward one hour soon. The blizzard of 2008 blows through Columbus and leaves twenty inches of snow between Friday morning and Saturday evening. Jamaican reggae music Lovers’ Rock artist Gregory Isaacs is scheduled to perform at Alrosa Villa tonight / this morning in Columbus on Morse and Sinclair Road. If I hadn’t had this paper to write and the weather was appropriate I would perhaps have gone to the show. I am surprised the sponsor didn’t cancel the show but the website said “the show goes on regardless of the snow” (Roots Records.com). Hopefully I will talk to the sponsor later in the week to hear about it. He has been an informative participant in this study so far.

I continue to contemplate Huss’s article:

While the ghetto imagery and primitive design of some reggae album covers have become the very emblems of “authenticity” in the West, the cosmopolitan aspirations expressed in a different school album cover design have been considered inauthentic. Thus, although a “zinc-fence” backdrop certainly portrays the harsh conditions of the Jamaican poor accurately, the
choice of such a visual representation may in reality be the outcome of the acts of not-so-subtle “othering” and orientalizing. (2000, p. 192)

Although I may not be able to describe my visual perceptions of my first reggae album, I do know that the purchase of that album has lead to a thirty-year participant observer relationship between myself, RastafarI, and Jamaican music and culture. I ask myself “Is there a possibility that thirty years ago I too romanticized or othernized Jamaican Rastafari music, roots and culture?” I also ask, “how much of my eighteen years experience of living in Jamaica, marrying a Jamaican Rasta man, and having his children could be a result of my own acts of not-so-subtle othering?” Reflecting on my childhood background of being raised by an Afrocentric father, I believe my actions have been the results of a natural progression.

Research Questions

I am reminded of another article I collected for my study: “Rich Rastas and Communist Rockers: A Comparative Study of the Origin, Diffusion and Defusion of Revolutionary Musical Codes” by Thomas Cushman (1991) in the *Journal of Popular Culture*. I credit this article for articulating my research questions. Cushman writes: Yet, while we have a great deal of historical and theoretical interpretation of how cultural appropriation has occurred, we have much less knowledge of the consequences of this process for the “integrity” or “authenticity” of the original code and its ability to continue to serve as a source of social solidarity for the group which articulated it.” (p. 28)

Cushman continues, “the argument that audiences appropriate revolutionary codes primarily as aesthetic codes rather than political commodities clearly implies that
audiences are less able to subvert cultural texts than recent strains of post-modern theory
posit.” (p. 51)

11:40 pm, Tuesday, June 3, 2008. It’s been over a year since I submitted my
dissertation proposal and passed my candidacy exam and I’m still struggling to find the
right words to articulate my research questions; now without leaning to heavily on
Cushman. Nevertheless, I presently pose the following questions:

1. How are the aesthetic codes and political values associated with indigenous Jamaican
reggae rhythms and Rastafarian culture contextualized in Columbus, Ohio?

2. What are the consequences of cultural appropriation in Columbus, Ohio, for the
“integrity” or “authenticity” of original Rastafarian codes and ability to serve as a source
of social solidarity and social justice for the group, which articulated it?

3. What can a study of Rastafarian Culture in Columbus, Ohio, teach art educators about
social justice and aesthetic codes?

I reflect on George Lipsitz’s (1999) postmodern argument in his book Dangerous
Crossroads Popular Music, Postmodernism and the Poetics of Place. Lipsitz
acknowledges, “it is important to document the harm done by uncomprehending
appropriations of cultural creations, and to face squarely the consequences of mistakes in
reception, representation, and reproduction of cultural images, sounds, and ideas.” But,
he maintains that “the biggest mistake of all would be to underestimate how creative
people are and how much they find out about the world that the people in power never
intended for them to know in the first place” (p. 169). Furthermore Lipsitz states:

Many of these commodities have drawn the investment and engagement
of consumers because their moral and political messages have gained even
more power when applied to a new situation….Even when listeners and
readers have been ignorant of the exact original and local meanings of
reggae or magic realism, they have often displayed advanced understanding
about how they could use resonances of an ‘unfamiliar’ culture to
‘defamiliarize’ their own culture and the ‘refamiliarize’ themselves and
others with it on the basis of the new knowledge and critical perspectives
made possible by cultural contrast. (p. 161)

I tend to agree more so with Lipsitz’s stance than with Cushman’s. Again, I quote
Cushman:

Might we not presume that such revolutionary codes as rock and roll and
reggae would have achieved far more reaching political ends as they have
diffused across time and space and become more and more available as
forms of empowerment for increasing numbers of disenfranchised groups in
increasing number of societies? In fact, quite the opposite has occurred:
instead of transforming society according to their meanings such codes have
come merely to entertain society according to their aesthetic appeal. (p. 52)

Cushman fails to realize that reggae and Rastafarian culture have provided pivotal
changes in the lives of many individuals and groups of people. For example, I recently
met a Rastafarian woman in Columbus who travels regularly to Trinidad to participate in
community farming and building efforts in that island. One research participant (Cedric
Brooks) pointed out to me that the very nature of Rastafarian and reggae music is a political
act in itself because it signifies a rejection of “Babylon’s” way of life. The adoption of
African-centered names and community and home schooling by Rastafarians can also be
considered forms of empowerment for these individuals. Many Rastafarians are vegetarians and opt for an ital (natural) way of life. Writing about Rastafarian in the Pacific, Frank Jan Van Dijk (1998) in his article “Chanting Down Babylon Outernational,” comments on how youths in the Pacific view Rasta as having “a vibrant new political message; a successor to Black Power, emphasizing peace, love, and brotherhood; and a call for the unity of subjugated people around the world to fight oppression” (p. 194). I recall that when Zimbabwe gained its independence in April of 1980, Bob Marley was invited to perform at the independence ceremonies. I was living in Jamaica at the time and I remember that Rasta used to say that the soldiers who fought for independence listened to Bob Marley’s song for inspiration. I feel that perhaps researchers and scholars need to pay more attention to how individuals and groups of people define change for themselves.

**Qualitative Research and Experimental Writing**

Much of the writing I use in this dissertation stems from an autoethnographic approach. In the tradition of Bochner and Ellis (2002), I write in an autoethnographic style. For me there is no other way to approach my dissertation project: A Study of Rastafarian Culture in Columbus, Ohio.

I use italics to represent my personal reflections about the events, people and observations that I encountered during the course of my research. The italics can be read as vignettes that stem from my fieldnotes and as the private thoughts in the recesses of my mind that occurred during the process of my writing.

> *I am looking forward to conscious Jamaican reggae artist Luciano’s concert in Columbus on April 25th. I recall one of my colleagues commenting to me a year or so*
ago when she saw Jamaican reggae artists Marcia Griffiths and Beres Hammond perform live in Columbus. She said, “Ivy, it was like church up in there.” I expect Luciano’s concert to be “like church up in there” too. Luciano is known as a messenger of Jah. His music is uplifting, spiritual, and righteous.

My reasons for approaching my study using experimental writing techniques vary. Primarily I find it difficult to separate myself, my experiences, and my biases from my topic of research. Deborah Reed-Danahay (1997), in the introduction of *Auto/Ethnography Rewriting the Self and the Social*, makes the following observations:

The most cogent aspect to the study of autoethnography is that of the cultural displacement or situation of exile characteristic of the themes expressed by autoethnographers. This phenomenon of displacement – so linked to issues of rapid sociocultural change, of globalization and transculturation, as well as to the extremes of violence occurring in many parts of the world – breaks down dualisms of identity and insider/outsider status. Whether the autoethnographer is the anthropologist studying his or her own kind, the native telling his or her life story, or the native anthropologist, this figure is not completely “at home” The ability to transcend everyday conceptions of selfhood and social life is related to the ability to write or do autoethnography. This is a postmodern condition. It involves rewriting of the self and the social. (p. 4)

Like the figure in Reed-Danahay’s text, I find myself in a similar situation. I am immersed in a Rastafarian way of life. Though I reside in the “belly of the beast” (The
United States of America), I see Ethiopia / Africa as my homeland. Yet I realize that the practicalities of life in Africa may prevent me from ever living permanently there.

In the introduction of *Anthropology and Literature*, Edward Bruner (1993) states “those who claim what is literary is not political or that humanistic interpretive anthropology does not deal with political issues are dead wrong, as any act of representation of the Other is inherently political” (p. 6). Bruner continues by considering possible points of departure of experimental qualitative writing techniques from standard forms of social research writing:

In the text as in the field, we can engage our informants as persons and write about how anthropological information is acquired at the same time that we present that information. No longer does the anthropologist and the informant have to inhabit the separate worlds of science and religion. In the text as in life, there is no need to be consistent or to speak with one voice. Today, it is possible to be evocative, to express feelings, ours and theirs, and to capture the drama of social life. That ethnography contains narratives or stories means that it is constructed, not that it is fictional in the sense of being false or not real, or that it avoids accountability. As contemporary ethnography is more true to life than old-fashioned realist ethnography, it is easier for the writer to accept political responsibility for the account. (p. 6)

Bruner’s comments force me to re-again consider my decision to write my dissertation using alternative forms of qualitative writing methods. By what criteria will my work be judged? How will I address issues of validity? Once more, I turn to the work of Bochner and Ellis (2000). In the article “Autoethnography, Personal narrative,
Reflexivity Researcher as Subject,” Bochner and Ellis, in a conversation with a graduate student who is using autoethnography in her dissertation, state, “no matter how you tell the story, the writing has to be engaging and evocative” (p. 757). Patricia T. Clough (2000) suggests, “staying close to theory allows experimental writing to be a vehicle for thinking new sociological subjects, new parameters of the social.” I pray that in my dissertation I am successfully merging personal, theoretical, literary, and academic frameworks.

Its 1:15 am Tuesday morning. I feel pressed to include more in this paper regarding validity in experimental qualitative writing. I look through my paperwork and find the article “Validity in Qualitative Research Revisited” by Jeasik Cho and Allen Trent (2006). Their article discusses in detail approaches to validity. Cho and Trent include member checks as a technique for establishing credibility. I have been thinking lately that I should invite my participants to my home for snacks and drinks, to look at my research and give me feedback. I wonder how my participants would perceive my actions. I am going to arrange a member check get-together soon.

Statement of the problem

As a result of tourism, globalization, and other factors, the appropriation of RastafarI indigenous cultural symbols is a common occurrence. Issues of copyright, intellectual property, and codes of conduct in the Rastafarian movement are of concern to researchers and especially of concern to Jamaican indigenous members of the movement. The Ethio-Africa Diaspora Union Millennium Council issued a media statement on August 17, 2007, addressing RastafarI intellectual property and economic empowerment. I include their statement here:
Over the past years, successive governments, anthropologists, music producers, film-makers, artists, tourism operators, businessmen, academic researchers and many other individuals and organizations, have dealt informally with various individuals and groups amongst the Rastafari peoples, for cultural and financial gain, with none such accruing to the members of the faith as a collective.

Rastafari symbols, artifacts, music, art and religious marks have been appropriated by many, with no acknowledgement or benefit for the Rastafari. This has resulted in losses to the Rastafari, as well as to much confusion, and has influenced the decision by the Rastafari leadership to take active steps to manage and control all aspects of their legacy and heritage.

The Millennium Council has no intention of obstructing appropriate or constructive engagement by any party. All proposals on governance, commerce, heritage and other related activities that will empower the Rastafari movement, will be provided with active encouragement and co-operation, as always.

However, it should be made clear to all members of the public, and in particular those that utilise or intend to utilise the Rastafari culture in the future, that the Millennium Council’s purpose is to act as a collective and pro-active defender of the cultural sovereignty and intellectual property of the Rastafari, for the benefit of all Rastafari globally.

NON-RASTAFARI INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANISATIONS THAT CONTINUE TO EXPLOIT RASTAFARI CULTURE, SYMBOLS,
ARTIFACTS, MUSIC, ART AND RELIGIOUS MARKS AND FAIL TO RECOGNISE THE AUTHORITY OF THE RASTAFARI COMMUNITY TO PROTECT AND PRESERVE SAME AND TO BENEFIT FINANCIALLY FROM SAME, WILL BE REGARDED AS HOSTILE TO THE RASTAFARI COMMUNITY AND WILL BE TREATED ACCORDINGLY.

While the council makes no statement as to how they will deal with offending non-Rastafari individuals and organizations that exploit the culture, the council clearly perceives the appropriation of Rastafari culture as a problem. My study documents the perspectives of individual Rastafari and people in the reggae music industry regarding this issue.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to observe Rastafarian cultural codes in Columbus, Ohio, with the aim of understanding and interpreting how such codes serve the people who use them and affect indigenous Rastafari codes of behavior and ideology. Additionally, this study will provide an historical context for the movement of Rastafari from Jamaica to Columbus, Ohio. It will also speak to my perspectives of Rastafari cultural codes from the observances I made during a study abroad trip to Ghana, West Africa in June and July of 2006, and to Brazil in June 2008.

Significance

Rastafarian gatherings are sites of symbolic expressions. Rastafarians gather on special days to commemorate the birthday of Haile Selassie on July 23rd, and his coronation as emperor of Ethiopia on November 2nd. Rastafarians also gather at reggae
concerts, Ethiopian Christmas on January 7th and Ethiopian New Year on September 11th. Late legendary reggae musician Bob Marley’s birthday is celebrated every February 6th in Jamaica and in other cities across the globe. In 2008 in Jamaica, February is officially declared reggae month. For me, such gatherings are a myriad of events that I have attended as an observer and participant in Jamaica, Ghana, and Columbus for the past twenty-seven years.

Deborah Smith-Shank (2003) maintains, teachers can use holidays and celebrations as pedagogy for assisting students’ understanding of ways in which cultures are created, maintained, and transformed (p. 63). Frank Jan Van Dijk (1998) observes that dreadlocks and Rastafarian colors are familiar symbols even among white youth in Europe, and in the Pacific, young people of color identify their own histories from a Rastafarian perspective (p. 179). William Spencer (1998) describes reggae music as a vehicle of social change that “can transcend cultures and work powerfully to alter attitudes toward injustice and prejudice” (p. 280). Verona Reckford (1998) states “not all reggae fans accept the Rastafarian philosophy and doctrine, but many had identified with Rasta’s symbolic beating down of Babylon with militant chants and Nyabinghi dancing and drumming, which are at once both entertaining and assuring” (p. 249).

Rastafarian has spread from the hills, valleys, and slums of Jamaica in the early 1900s to present day popular culture. Reggae music, which began in crowded Kingston Jamaican ghettos, was first recorded by Jamaican men in suits with well-groomed hair. During the 1970s, the globalization of reggae music brought images of dreadlocked Rastafarian musicians via colorful album cover sleeves. Today contemporary reggae signifies Rastafarian roots and culture, dreadlocks, ganja smoking and rebel music. John P.
Homiak (2005) in his online article “Ethiopia Arisen: Discovering Rastafari” from the Museum of Natural History’s Anthro Notes Publication for Educators states:

Few are aware that Rastafari is far deeper and older than Bob Marley and Reggae music. And even in Jamaica—where Rastafari emerged—the vast majority of Jamaicans themselves have little to no idea about the role that Jamaican Elders have played in spreading Rastafari culture over the past 25 years. Nor are they likely to understand the complex interplay that exists between the popular culture and orthodox expressions of Rastafari as these have been disseminated globally. (p. 14)

It is the spaces between popular culture and indigenous Rastafari ideology that my dissertation probes. After searching I Jahman Levi’s album cover sleeves on the internet for several days I have concluded that I would not recognize the cover even if it were staring me in the face. I do know that my purchase of reggae albums in the 1970s had more so to do with the lyrics and the rhythm than with the graphic design of the cover.

Wednesday June 4th, 2008, 2:46 am postscript.

I recently purchased a copy of I Jah Man’s CD, Haile Hymn, from Roots Records Reggae Shop on High Street in Columbus. The CD cover is vaguely familiar. But the songs embedded with messages of Rastafari I still remember.

Wednesday, August 6, 2008, 1:47 am.

An expressive language has developed among Rastafari that reflects the culture. For example, “unity” becomes “inity.” “In I” takes the place of “us.” “Seen” means “I see.” To “reason” means to “discuss.” “Livicated” replaces “dedicated.” Many
RastafarI are vegetarians and the term for pure organic foods is “ital.” RastafarI shun the use of isms and schisms in their language. Hence, my use of the term RastafarI, with a capital I at the end, reflects the culture.
CHAPTER 2

HISTORICIZING THE AFRICAN DIASPORA: ETHIOPIAN, JAMAICAN, AND COLUMBUS CONNECTIONS

Introduction

Relations between Jamaicans, Ethiopians and African Americans have been documented by Fikru Negash Gebrekidan (2005), Mark Christian (2004), Joseph Harris, (1994), William Scott (1978), and William Shack (1974). In this chapter, I discuss the progression of Rastafarian culture to Columbus, Ohio, via historical ties. I begin by presenting a brief overview of Rastafarian history in Jamaica. Next, I address the events and people in the Ethiopia, Jamaica, and Ohio who shaped Black Nationalist thought regarding Ethiopianism in the United States. Jamaican Marcus Garvey’s historic visit to Columbus, Ohio, in 1923 and the impact of the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in Ohio are included in this section. Melaku Bayen, an Ethiopian who founded the Ethiopian World Federation (EWF) and studied at Muskingum College and The Ohio State University is noted as a key figure in bringing to light the plight of Ethiopians to the United States during the Italian invasion of Ethiopia between 1935 and 1936. Because reggae music is one of the primary bearers of Rastafarian culture, I conclude this chapter by discussing the intersections between reggae music and Rastafarian as part of the diverse artistic and cultural landscape of contemporary Columbus.
RastafarI in Jamaica: A brief overview

The Rastafarian movement in Jamaica has been documented in Rex Nettleford’s *Identity, Race and Protest in Jamaica* (1970), Leonard Barrett’s *The Rastafarians: Sounds of Cultural Dissonance* (1969), and Joseph Owens’s (1976) *The Rastafarians of Jamaica* (1976). The Rastafarian movement emerged in Jamaica during the 1930s. Marcus Garvey, a Jamaican descendant of the maroons, was an early prophet of the Rastafarian movement (White, 1998). The maroons were Africans who resisted and fought against slavery in Jamaica, hid, created communities, and lived as free people in the mountains. Maroon communities still exist in Jamaica. During the early 1900s, Garvey established himself as a leader of Black Nationalism. Black Nationalism emphasizes black pride and economic, political and cultural independence from whites.

Prior to the coronation of His Imperial Majesty Emperor Haile Selassie in Ethiopia, Garvey prophesized that black people should look to Africa where a black king would be crowned. This king, Garvey prophesized, would be the redeemer.

Historically, Rastafari symbolizes a black African consciousness and social reform that speaks to the needs of oppressed and poor people in Jamaica. Many Rastafarians believe in repatriation to Africa and travel by Rastafarians to and from Africa is common. In Jamaica, today, Rastafarians are more widely accepted, and have made many contributions to Jamaican society, as lawyers, educators, doctors, visual and performing artists, radio, and TV personalities.

Haile Selassie

Haile Selassie was emperor of Ethiopia from 1930-1974. The most fundamental belief of Rastafari is that Haile Selassie is the one and only true living God. His image is
one of the most significant visual elements to Rastafari. Haile Selassie is a devout member of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. He is prophesized to descend from Biblical lineage from Queen Sheba and King Solomon. In 1930, Tafari Mokonnen, Ras Tafari, prince regent of Ethiopia, was crowned emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie I, King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah. This event was well publicized in Jamaica and the followers of Garvey cited Biblical references that supported their belief that Haile Selassie was God. Two Biblical references in Rastafari reasoning include Revelations chapter 19, verse 16 which states: “And he hath on his vesture and his thigh a name written, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords,” and Psalms chapter 68 verse 31 reads: “Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God.”

In Jamaica, followers of His Imperial Majesty, Emperor Haile Selassie, called themselves Ras Tafari. Ras Tafari was Haile Selassie’s name before he was crowned emperor. The first Rastafari commune, Pinnacle, was established in Kingston, Jamaica, in 1940 by Leonard Howell. Howell traveled around Jamaica selling photographs of Haile Selassie, spreading the message of Rastafari that a black king had been crowned in Ethiopia proclaiming him God. Howell’s activities landed him in jail because Rastafari was seen as a threat to the colonist system in Jamaica. Rastafarians spoke out hard against poverty, advocated a back to Africa movement and denounced Babylon’s oppression against black people in Jamaica. Babylon constitutes a symbolic expression of values and oppressive institutions that exercise control over the masses of the African diaspora (Edmonds, 2003). Rastafari communes suffered police raids and harassment and men that participated in Rastafari activities were imprisoned.
Some Rastafarians use the Bible as a holy book and regard it as a documented history of black people while others reject the Bible as a means of “babylon” to keep black people mentally and spiritually enslaved. Joseph Owen (1976) states for the Rastafarians “the ancient prophets and scribes who wrote the various books of the Bible were all black men. The Israelites about whom they wrote were Black people” (p. 31). For Rastafarians in Jamaica, *The Kebra Nagast*, or the *Book of the Glory of Kings of Ethiopia*, is considered a holy book containing the concise history of the origin of the Solomonic line of kings in Ethiopia (Hausman, 1977).

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church was established in Jamaica in 1969. Many early followers of Rastafari were attracted to the church because Haile Selassie was a devout member of the church. However, many Rastafarians have rejected the church because of its Christian principles. For some Rastafarians, the views of the Bible are not compatible with those of the wider Jamaican Christian society. Rastafari is not a homogenous movement. In Jamaica, multiple houses or mansions of Rastafari exist including the Twelve Tribes of Israel, Nyabinghi, The Ethiopian Orthodox Church, The Ethiopian World Federation, and The Bobo Shanti. There are certain aspects of Rastafari that remain intact albeit the diversity of the movement. These include the divinity of Haile Selassie and a stance against oppression.

**Ethiopianism**

Long before reggae music gained popularity in Columbus traces of Jamaican and Ethiopian interests had emerged in the Ohio region. In this section, I attempt to construct the movement of people and the significant events that were influential in carrying the banner of Ethiopianism to Ohio. I begin by discussing the impact of the Battle of Adwa,
Ethiopia in 1896 to African Americans. The influence of Jamaican Marcus Garvey’s, United Negro Improvement Association, (UNIA) is noted as a significant movement that bridges ties between West Indians and African Americans in Ohio. Ethiopian World Federation (EWF) founder, Melaku Bayen, who lived in Ohio in the mid 1930s, will also be noted in this section. I conclude the section by discussing Rastafari as a contemporary expression of Ethiopianism in Columbus.

The Battle of Adwa 1896

The battle of Adwa was retold to me by many Rastafarians on numerous occasions when I traveled to Jamaica in 1982. Prior to living in Jamaica, I do not recall learning about such a battle. In 1896, Italy sent an army of more than fourteen thousand men to Adwa, Ethiopia in an attempt of colonial intervention. Ethiopian emperor Menilek II army defeated Italy in what became a historic battle. Gebrekidan (2005) states “Adwan mythology rendered East Africa an important place in modern black thought, and Ethiopianism consequently became the direct harbinger of twentieth-century nationalist expressions, among them Garveyism, pan-Africanism, and Rastafarianism (p. 39). Shack (1974) states

The cumulative effect of these historical-political events was to heighten the mysterious impression Ethiopia conveyed to Afro-Americans as well as to the outside world. And it also conjured up the symbol of Ethiopia as the Zion in Africa in the minds of vast numbers of Afro-American, as well as Africans living under colonial rule. (Shack, p. 144)

The battle of Adwa is one of the most significant events to bring attention to Ethiopianism in the thoughts of Africans in the Diaspora in the late 1890s. Ethiopia
represented a pan-African cause, anti-colonial defiance, and proof that skin color or hair texture bore significance on intellect or character (Gebrekidan, p. 15).

African Americans in the early 1900s continued to attach sentiment to Ethiopianism. *The Ohio State Monitor* was a leading Black Baptist newspaper in Columbus during the early 1900s. In Volume 2 issue 19 of the *Ohio State Monitor* reprinted in the Ohio Historical Society’s African American Experience, 1850-1920, online website, is a poem called The Ethiopian written by Mrs. J.E. White in 1919. The poem emphasizes the conditions of Diasporic Africans in America who the author describes as “the wise and the noble, bound under the iron chain, we are fighting for our freedom, and little by little we gain.

**Marcus Garvey**

In 1920, the *Ohio State Monitor* published three articles from April 10th to September 1920 describing the activities of Garvey supporters in Columbus. The April 10th *Ohio State Monitor* headlines read: “Colored People of Columbus, O., to Organize Branch of the U.N.I.A and A.C.L.” The meeting held on April 12 at the A.M.E. Zion Church, 485 East Long Street On April 17th, Columbus Division of the U.N.I.A and A.C.L. Organized on Monday evening, the 12th, and Elected Principal Officers. The September 25th headline read “Garvey’s Men Invade Ohio’s Capital.” In 1923, Marcus Garvey visited Columbus Ohio in what is referred to by Mark Christian (2004) as the lost parade in his article “Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) With Special Reference to the “lost” Parade in Columbus, Ohio September 25.” A crowd of over 2,300 people gathered at the Memorial Hall to hear Garvey speak (Christian, p. 9). Christian maintains that Ohio was the seventh highest out of a total of
38 states recorded in 1926 with thirty-nine branches involving UNIA activity. Each of the major cities in Ohio, Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Columbus had a strong UNIA presence. Smaller towns in Ohio could also claim strong support, especially Hamilton, Middletown, Youngstown and Dayton (p. 5). Christian documents that the area most populated with African Americans in Columbus back in 1923 was the East Long Street and Champion Avenue district located on the near east side of Columbus. And the Mount Vernon Avenue area near Champion Avenue and East Long Street was almost totally comprised of African Americans and other African descended groups, such as the migrant Jamaicans. This area of Columbus could well be deemed a “mini Harlem” back in the 1920s and up to the 1950s, until the city’s construction of an Interstate wrecked the community infrastructure in the 1960s-1970s (Christian, p. 6).

I recently visited that area in search of the Jamaican Sweet Pot Restaurant. When I arrived at my destination hoping to catch one of my research participants, I was greeted by two Black men chopping up chicken on a make shift cutting board behind a small wooden shack. I went inside and ordered a meal of ackee and saltfish, callaloo, yams and dumplings. The meal was delicious, reasonably priced, plentiful and prepared by Jamaicans. The inside of the building was decorated with red, gold and green posters advertising past and current Caribbean and African events, a Jamaican flag and easily identifiable Rastafarian and Jamaican visual culture. The person I hoped to meet was nowhere to be seen.

**Melaku Bayen and The Ethiopian World Federation**

Part of Ethiopia’s connections to the United States is based on international relations initiated during the reign of Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie between 1930 and
1974. As part of the emperor’s plan to forge relations between Ethiopia and the United States, he sent young Ethiopian scholars to America to be educated. One such scholar was Maleku Bayen. Bayen received a bachelor’s degree in chemistry from Muskingum College in Ohio in 1928. He spent a year at The Ohio State University in Columbus as a graduate student and later transferred to Howard University, as a medical student in Washington, D.C. Bayen became an advocate of the pan-African cause and during the height of the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, he founded the Ethiopian World Federation (EWF) in 1936. “The EWF held as its objective the unity of all blacks and black organizations under the Ethiopian banner” (Gebrekidan, p. 104). A branch of the EWF still exists in Columbus today. In the summer of 2007, I attended a Juneteenth celebration in Columbus, where I received a pamphlet describing an upcoming EWF event in honor of Haile Selassie’s earthday from a dreadlocks brother.

Juneteenth, or June 19th, 1865, is considered the date when the last slaves in America were freed. Although the rumors of freedom were widespread before this, actual emancipation did not come until General Gordon Granger rode into Galveston, Texas, and issued General Order No. 3, on June 19th, almost two and a half years after President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation. Juneteenth is celebrated in over 200 cities in the United States annually (Columbus Juneteenth Website).

On the given date, I packed my two youngest daughters and Institutional Review Board (IRB) consent papers and headed to the event. When we arrived at the venue we were disappointed to find no signs of any pan-African activities. I was informed, a few
The Italian Invasion of Ethiopia  

In 1935, Italy invaded Ethiopia again in another attempt to colonize the country. Commenting on the rise of Rastafari as a response against Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, Lewis (1993) argues that when Leonard Howell begun to preach about the ideas of Rasta, it was an anti-colonial idea, which took shape when Haile Selassie was part of the struggle of the Ethiopian people against fascism. The Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 “sparked a number of protests, demonstrations, physical clashes, boycotts, fund-raising activities, and recruitment and volunteer efforts in the African diaspora” (Harris, p.35,).

Harris further states that the war “created an emotional reaction that strengthened the bonds of pan-Africanism among descendents of Africans around the world” (p. 24, Harris). African Americans participated in the Ethiopian cause during the war.

Hattie Koffie was another individual who lived in Columbus during the 1930s who worked to establish the Ethiopian cause. Koffie was an immigrant from Harlem who was part of a congregation of African Americans who migrated to Ethiopia in 1930. She was a piano player who became well known in Addis Ababa as a jazz musician. Koffie repatriated from Ethiopia in September, 1934, when Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia appeared imminent, settled for a time in Columbus, Ohio, but continued to envision a flourishing community of African Americans in Ethiopia (Harris, p.17). While in Columbus Koffie continued to advocate the Ethiopian and wrote letters to President Roosevelt regarding the war.
Reggae Music

Sound systems and reggae music are Rastafarian cultural codes that have integrated into the contemporary Columbus landscape. Live reggae music or sound systems can be heard on any given night in the city. Reggae music is one of the primary bearers of Rastafarian culture. Many reggae musicians are Rastafarians. The lyrics of much of reggae music reflect Rastafarian ideology. The evolution of reggae music began after the genres of mento, ska and rocksteady in Jamaica. Mento is derived from a combination of African Jonkanoo music, Cuban rumba, and Latin American tango and samba beats built around European melodies (Salewicz & Boot, 2001, p. 22). The popularity, of mento began to decline in the 1950s and was replaced by ska and rocksteady. Ska is a blending of American R & B, popular jazz and Jamaican roots music and is still well liked in Jamaica today. During rocksteady and ska’s popularity, sound systems played an important role in the distribution of music in Jamaica. Sound systems are huge transportable outside discos characterized by DJs who spin records while commenting over the lyrics and beats.

The coining of the word “reggae” has been accredited to several sources. Brodber and Greene (1981) attribute the term “reggae” to Johnny Golding stating reggae meant “fit for a King” (p. 15). Salewicz and Boot assert that ‘Do the Reggay’ by the Maytals released in 1968 was the first reggae record released in Jamaica. Salewicz and Boot maintain there was a group called the Reggae Boys and Jamaican musicians Byron Lee and the Dragonaires released two reggae tunes during the mid 1960s (pp. 46-47). They also credit Stranger Cole and Lester Sterling as contenders for the first reggae records recorded in Jamaica during the late 1960s. The origins of the term “reggae” are obscure.
Nyabinghi drumming is a traditional style of Rastafarian music that is characterized in reggae rhythms. Nyabinghi drumming emerged with the growth of RastafarI during the 1930s in Kingston, Jamaica. Nyabinghi music is played with three drums, the bass, fundeh and repeater. Scholars (Edmonds, 2003; White, 1998; Salewicz & Boot, 2001 and Reckord, 1980) acknowledge that Nyabinghi drumming is derived from African Burru and Kumina influences. Burru is a form of African drumming that survived slavery and was made popular in Jamaica by Oswald Count Ossie Williams, a master drummer and well-known Rastafarian musician who trained and mentored many aspiring Rasta musicians (Reckford, 1998). Count Ossie founded a drumming troupe, Mystic Revelation of Rastafari, which performed throughout Jamaica and abroad. By the early 1970s, the philosophical ideology of RastafarI had become a dominant influence in reggae music due to the proliferation of RastafarI singer and players of instruments.

Bob Marley

Reggae music was made popular internationally by the group Bob Marley and the Wailers including Peter Tosh and Bunny Livingston Wailer. Robert Nesta Marley (Bob Marley) was born in St. Ann, Jamaica, on February 6, 1945. His mother, Cedella Booker, was a black Jamaican woman, his white father, Norval Marley, a naval captain. Bob Marley brought RastafarI and reggae music to the world. His lyrics repeatedly speak of the harsh conditions in Jamaica, call upon listeners to grow their dreadlocks, esteem the teachings of Haile Selassie as righteous and divine and address issues of poverty, cultural identity and racism. Bob Marley also sang love songs. Bob Marley performed in Columbus, Ohio on May 24, 1978 at Veteran Memorial Hall as part of his Kaya Tour. On May 11, 1981, Bob Marley died of cancer in Miami, Florida. He was awarded the
third highest Jamaican civil honor, the Order of Merit. In 1994, Marley was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Bob Marley Day is celebrated every February on his birth date in Jamaica and internationally. Students at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio have organized Bob Marley Day celebrations since 1983. I attended a Bob Marley birthday bash in Kingston, Jamaica, in 1991. The 1991 birthday event was celebrated with an art exhibit where pieces of my artwork were exhibited along with other artists whose work depicted Rastafarian themes. In February of 2008, Roots Records in Columbus sponsored a Bob Marley birthday bash with guest reggae musicians the Meditations that I attended. The Meditations are originally from Jamaica and presently reside in Atlanta, Georgia.

Reggae music industry sources in Columbus indicate that sixty percent of reggae music supporters in Columbus are continental Africans (Carl Newman, Roots Records, personal communication, 2007). Reggae musicians from South Africa (Lucky Dube), England (Steel Pulse), and Jamaica (Half Pint, Mutaburuka, Tony Rebel, Capleton, Beres Hammond, Morgan’s Heritage, Buju Banton, Luciano, Anthony B, Elephant Man, and Sizzla) are just a few of the reggae musicians who have performed in Columbus since the late 1970s through 2008. Local reggae bands include The Ark Band, originally from St. Lucia, SeefarI from Wilberforce, Ohio, and the Flex Crew.

Immigration

Demographics of Columbus’s present day West Indian, African American, and African populations are difficult to discern. Statistics regarding Jamaican and African migration to Ohio is limited due to census population generalizations of ethnicity. However, Mary Mederios Kent (2007) does provide useful information in the Population
Contemporary Columbus

Reggae music, dreadlocks, Jamaican cuisine, Ethiopian Orthodox Church services and African-centered cultural events are visible elements of Columbus’s diversity. I recently attended a poetry slam at Harvest Café off Cleveland Avenue across the street from Miss Enas Caribbean restaurant. Many individuals from the small group of African American Columbus poets and their supporters sported dreadlocked hair. I enjoyed an irie (good) evening of poetry. I was especially amused when the owner of the café went to the microphone and started reciting Bob Marley’s Redemption Song. When the DJ started spinning Jamaican reggae musician Beenie Man’s song “Who am I?”, on his in-
house sound system the small close knit circle of African American poets enthusiastically sang word for word the lyrics.

May 23, 2008 1:27 am. I am always surprised by the reaction I get from people when I tell them I am doing a study of Rastafarian culture in Columbus. They usually respond by asking, “there’s Rastafarian culture in Columbus?” Often times the question is posed by an African American with dreadlocks. My response is like, “duh, how you think you get those dreadlocks in your hair without the presence of Jamaican / Rastafarian culture in Columbus?”

Monday May 26th 2008 1:27 am. I saw a brother with dreadlocks so thick the other day on West Broad Street over by Carmel Hospital I was tempted to stop the car get out and ask him were he was from. I hadn’t seen locks like that since living in Jamaica.

Thursday June 5th, 2008 4:15 am. I visited the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) in Columbus maybe two years before my research started. I was baptized in Jamaica as a member of the Orthodox Church in 1982. I was attracted to the visual and ritual culture of the church. The burning of frankincense and myrrh, the women’s white Ethiopian shammus (shawls), drumming, and the long two hour service standing and bending in prayer appealed to my senses.

Four branches of the EOC reside in Columbus. Eight branches of the church reside in Jamaica. Orthodox services in Jamaica are conducted primarily in English with small sections of the liturgy conducted in Geez and Amharic by Jamaican orthodox Priests where the members are primarily Jamaicans with and a large number of
Rastafarians. Services in Columbus are conducted in Geez and Amharic for mostly Ethiopian members.

Conclusion

George Easton, a professor at Oberlin College in Ohio, conducted the first study of Rastafarian culture in Kingston, Jamaica, in 1953. In his Personal Reflections of Rastafari in West Kingston in the Early 1950s, George E. Simpson writes:

I could not have imagined in 1953 that the Rastafari movement would give birth to reggae, embraced by people throughout the world, and would develop a culture that would spread to North America, Europe, and even Africa; nor could I have envisioned that Rastas would travel abroad to represent their culture at places such as the Smithsonian Institution, Howard University, John Hopkins University, York University in Toronto, as well as in South Africa and other international conferences of social scientists and other scholars. (p. 226)

Rastafarian culture extends into the Columbus landscape through various African American, African, and West Indian networks, as well as through reggae music sources and supporters in the city. Relations between African, African American and West Indian people in Columbus are expressed in the activities of The Ethiopian World Federation, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Ethiopian (The Blue Nile) and Caribbean restaurants, The Columbus Caribbean Association, reggae music, as well as informal networks of cultural people and events. The people and activities speak directly to, and in some cases indirectly to, the presence of Rastafarian in Columbus.
CHAPTER 3

THEORIZING RASTAFARI

Introduction

In this chapter, I conceptualize RastafarI through the theoretical lenses of social movement theory (Crossly, 2002; Freeman, 1983; Darnovsky, Epstein, & Flacks, 1995; Eyerman & Jamison, 1998, 1991; Kebede, Shriver, & Knottnerus, 2000), and critical theory, (Kellner, 1990; Tyson, 1999; Campbell, 1987). Although I had initial reservations against theorizing RastafarI with Western canons of thought, my sentiments eventually gave way as my research progressed. I found, like Adrian McFarlane (1998), that “while I have attempted to guard against comparing Rasta ways of thinking to that of the early Western philosophers, the parallels are striking in many places” (p. 119). However, unlike McFarlane, who argues that that RastafarI beliefs and actions are sufficiently grounded that the Rasta worldview resists co-option, hybridization, or trivialization, I argue differently. RastafarI is not a static movement but “a symbolic process that both presupposes past symbolisms and creatively reinterprets them” (Handler & Linn kin, 1984, p. 287). In other words, as RastafarI progresses it evolves and changes adapting according to time and place. The movement, which symbolizes the struggles of oppressed black men and women in Jamaica, might still conjure up those images in some
locations and help to activate change in others. However, at sites especially outside of Jamaica, the movement’s ability to resist hybridization is more apt to be met with varying degrees of interpretive forces.

Any attempt to prescribe overarching theoretical constructs to RastafarI presents various challenges. Defining RastafarI and appropriating western theoretical paradigms on RastafarI are such challenges. RastafarI has been defined as a millenarian movement, a sect, a cult, a way of life, and a philosophy (Yawney, 1995, p. 63). Mutabaruka (2006) describes RastafarI as a Black Power Movement with a theological nucleus moving in an evolutionary process. Ras Leonard Larmond (2005) in his Philosophy of Ras Tafari states, “in reality Ras Tafari represent those Africans who views the history of our people differently from the points of our modern Euro-Americans colonizers and dictators of imperialist mis-education” (p.15). With its strong philosophical underpinnings and language, perhaps many scholars have found, like me, that ascribing theory to RastafarI is a daunting task. McFarlane states that “although Rastas have expressed their thoughts in many different ways in varied literary and artistic forms, few Rastafarians have written an epistemology or philosophy of the movement and its beliefs” (p. 118).

Joseph Adjaye (1997) states the “theoretical perspectives and intellectual paradigms established by certain Western traditions are not equally applicable to the dominant popular cultural expressions of our black societies” (p. 5). Adrian McFarlane (1998) makes a similar claim. However, he states:

To suggest that Western paradigms are too complex and sophisticated for the interpretation and analysis of Rastafarian thought would be patronizing and
insulting to Rastas. This view would also imply that Rastas ‘enjoy’ a degrading uniformity of socioeconomic placement, beliefs, awareness or consciousness in the world, specifically designed for a so-called inferior people. (p. 119)

I quote McFarlane at lengths to demonstrate the complexities of applying western cannons of thought to Rastafari:

One could argue that Rastas do not need the paradigms and methodologies of Western intellectual history to explain their claims and fundamental ideas. Further, technical philosophical discussion imposes a Western structure on Rasta talk and truth claims, removing the discourse from the community of the poor to the ghettos of the privileged. Rastas simply use the I am I expression to synthesize what scholars regard as empirical and metaphysical issues, which Rastas then contemplate in practical ways, thereby giving validation to what they say and do in the name of Jah. (p. 119)

West Indian Jamaican scholar, Barry Chevannes, (2006), notes that Rastafarians have always posed critical philosophical questions. In his article “Rastafari and the Critical Tradition” Chevannes states “out of the infinity of traces deposited by the white man’s rape of Africa and the Caribbean, the Dreadlocks Rastafari compiled an inventory of meaning aimed at the critical question confronting all philosophy: gnothi seauton – know thyself. (p. 292)

Social Movement Theory

Defining social movement theory is as complex as defining Rastafari. Crossley (2002) suggest that social movements are comprised of informal networks with shared beliefs and solidarity that act as sources of creativity, collectivity, protest and social
change (p. 7). Freeman (1983) claims that “consciousness that one is a part of a group with whom one share awareness of a particular concern” is of utmost importance in defining a social movement. Darnovsky, Epstein, and Flacks (1995) define social movements as “collective efforts by socially and politically subordinated people to challenge the conditions and assumptions of their lives” (p. vii).

In this section, I draw primarily upon Eyerman and Jamison (1998, 1991) to articulate social movement theory. For Eyerman and Jamison, cognitive praxis is central to the study of social movements. They maintain “the cognitive approach views social movements primarily as knowledge producers, as social forces opening spaces for the production of new forms of knowledge” (1998, p. 21). Eyerman and Jamison (1998) contend that social movements are key agents of cultural transformation.

Collective identity is the inclination of a social movement to form a group image that shapes the consciousness of individuals. Kebede, Shriver, and Knottnerus, (2000) argue that “since the movement’s inception the Rastafarian collective identity has revolved around a number of core themes associated with language, music, rituals, and appearance” (p. 315). Kebede, Shriver, and Knottnerus, (2000) state:

The Rastafarians stay within the confines of the movement. Their dress, hairstyle, language, and rituals all serve to differentiate them from the rest of society. But more importantly, they are instruments of defiance that help participants strengthen their commitment to the political/religious principles of the movement. Indeed, the deconstruction of the old order and the construction of the new order are the very heart of Rastafarian collective identity. (p. 327).
Eyerman and Jamison attribute music and art as truth-bearing knowledge producing forces inherent to social movements (p. 163). I quote the authors at length here to demonstrate the relationship between social movements and the production of knowledge:

Our conceptualization of social movements as cognitive praxis also seeks to grasp the symbolic, or expressive, significance of social movements. But we see that significance not merely as a challenge to established power, but also and more so as a socially constructive force, as a fundamental determinant of human knowledge. The cognitive praxis of social movements is not just social drama; it is, we might say, the social action from where new knowledge originates. It is from, among other places, the cognitive praxis of social movements that science and ideology – as well as everyday knowledge – develop new perspectives.

(1991, p. 48-49)

RastafarI consist of many of the characteristics inherent to social movements as described by social movement theorists. The music and artistic elements of RastafarI are significant in producing new knowledge about world history, spirituality, and oppression for the individuals and groups engaged in the movement’s music and way of life. In *Music and Social Movements Mobilizing Traditions in the Twentieth Century*, Eyerman and Jamison (1998) further develop the concept of cognitive praxis. They claim that it is the cultural effects of social movements that live on through songs, art, and literature in the absence of the particular political platforms and struggles that brought them into being.
Mutabaruka notes the image of Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie as a common denominator wherever Rastafari is found. In his article, “Rasta From Experience” Mutabaruka states, “most people outside of Jamaica, who rise to Rastafari listen to the music. The philosophy of Rastafari is evolving, you will never hear Rastafari philosophy articulated in the music right now. Because the music right now is not a newspaper of Rastafari anymore” (p. 37). From my research in Columbus, I agree that most people who come to Rasta outside of Jamaica listen to the music. However, as Columbus is noted as one of the most vibrant stops on the live reggae music concert circuit, the city tends to attract conscious reggae artists who continue to carry the banner of Rastafari. Recently, Rastafari reggae artist Luciano appeared in Columbus to a record crowd. Like Capleton, who will be here soon, I think these reggae artists would be offended if they were categorized as not spreading the Rastafari message.

2:50 am Sunday May 26th

Hopefully I will be able to ask Capleton this question when I interview him in two weeks. He travels to Columbus often to do shows. I blew the interview when he was here nine months ago. I hope I get it right this time. Saturday, May 31, 1:26 am. I spoke with Capleton’s manger today. I’m getting mixed signals re the interview and the possibilities why are too many. Follow my gut?

Today is my oldest dawta (daughter) Tesfa’s 26th earthday (birthday).

Critical Theory

Eyerman and Jamison’s (1998) notion of cognitive praxis is derived from critical theory (p. 22). Critical theory is grounded in historical circumstances which led to the formation of German social philosophical thought and The Frankfurt Institute for Social
Research in 1923, known as the Frankfurt School. The Frankfurt School became the center of intellectual activity for early critical theorists. The Frankfurt School of critical theory went through several phases, originally borrowing aspects from classical Marxist theory. The political aspects of Marxism proved disappointing to critical theorists because of the failure of the working class in to revolt. Important figures in early critical theory include Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, and Jürgen Habermans. Douglas Kellner (1990) in *Critical Theory and the Crisis of Social Theory* states “according to Adorno and Horkheimer the culture industries were engaged in sophisticated forms of ideological indoctrination, using ‘entertainment’ to sugarcoat oppression while eroding cultural standards in order to quell any forms of expression which might contest the given order” (p. 27).

Lois Tyson (1999) discusses the role of Marxist critics in analyzing cultural productions from a contemporary perspective:

Our goal, as Marxist critics, is to identify the ideology at work in cultural productions – literature, film, painting, music, television programs, commercial advertisements, education, popular philosophy, religion, forms of entertainment, and so on – and to analyze how that ideology supports or undermines the socioeconomic system (the power structure) in which that cultural production plays a significant role. Marxists believe that all social phenomena, from child-rearing practices to environmental concerns, are cultural productions in the narrower sense of the word: for example, art, music, film, theatre, literature, and television. For these critics, culture, in this narrower sense, is the primary bearer of ideology because it reaches so many people in what seems to be an innocent
form: entertainment. When we are being entertained, our guard is down, so to speak, and we are especially vulnerable to ideological programming. (p. 57)

One intention of this research is to describe how the aesthetic codes and political values associated with indigenous Jamaican reggae rhythms and Rastafarian culture are contextualized in Columbus, Ohio. Considering reggae music is popularly associated with Rastafarian culture, I must take into account the intersections between reggae, entertainment, and Rastafarian ideology.

Marxism and Rastafarian

During the early 1970s, late Guyanese Pan-Africanist Marxist scholar Walter Rodney had a close bond with members of the Rastafarian community in Jamaica. Rodney was a black power activist and lecturer at Jamaica’s University of the West Indies. Campbell states Rodney “used the tools of historical materialism to analyze the emergence of the Rasta” (1987, p. 7). Although Rodney saw in the Rastafarian movement some negative influences, he envisioned the Rastafarian movement as a “…part of the dynamic regeneration of the working people in their search for complete freedom from imperialist domination” (Campbell, p. 7, 1987). The government of Jamaica ultimately banned Rodney from the island because it perceived him as a threat to national security. Campbell suggests that after Rodney’s removal from Jamaica the materialist analysis of the Rastafarian movement was “submerged by the anthropologists and sociologists who were intent on influencing the movement towards ‘millenarianism’” (p. 132).

In Jamaica Rastafarian philosophy, images, slogans, and music were used in the 1970 elections by politicians to sway the masses. The impact of Rastafarian thought on the
political process in Jamaica is noted by scholars Anita Waters (1985) and William Lewis (1993). Waters states “the ‘Rastas’ challenge to the social order paved the way for a political philosophy that aimed to loosen the bonds of a rigid racial hierarchy and a severely unequal economic structure, and hence made an undeniable contribution to the priorities of government in the 1970s” (p. 311). Lewis (1993) shares the same opinion as Waters. However, Lewis broadens the scope of the Rastafarian movement to include a wider audience. Lewis suggest that “wherever the hold of bourgeois culture is tenuous and people reason through other ways to understand the inequality of riches and stratification, there the images of Rastafari are bound to emerge as one possible response, especially for a black man or woman” (p. 134). Lewis goes on to say that “I believe that Rastas who defy our bourgeois sense of law and order remind us that the symbols of Rastafari celebrate the spontaneity of a community whose social roots were in the Jamaican peasantry” (p.144). On the surface Rastafarian aims may not appear to reflect a political agenda. However, a closer scrutiny of the movement’s basic tenet that Haile Sellassie is God is in itself a political stance.

Critical Theory and Popular Culture

The study of popular culture has its origins in critical theory. In Great Britain, critical theory is practiced as a form of cultural studies whereas Marxism is “interpreted from the perspective of the Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci. (p. 18) Gramsci’s notion of hegemony, the cultural dominance of civil society over the individual even in the absence of the threat of overt force by the state, was adopted by British cultural studies (Surber, J.). Surber further states:
In fact, it was Gramsci more than any other thinker, who first asserted that within
the materialistic tradition the idea that cultural criticism was an essential and
indispensable element of any broader political and economic struggle and the
materialistic critique must pay special attention to the operation of hegemony at
the level at which popular culture affects everyday life. (p. 87)

Storey (2003) explains cultural hegemony in terms of agency and structure. He
states “it is not enough to celebrate agency; nor is it enough to detail the structures(s) of
power; we must always keep in mind the dialectical play between agency and structure,
between production and consumption (p. 5). Grossberg (1992) advocates a reading of
popular culture that includes how people invest meaning into the affective domains of
popular culture. He argues there is a complex relationship between daily life and the
popular that involves the inseparable articulation of ideology, pleasure, materiality, and
economics (p. 83). Grossberg maintains that the affective dimension of popular culture
can be a site of empowerment or disempowerment that “offers the resources which may
or may not be mobilized into forms of popular struggle, resistance and opposition” (p.
86).

A good case in point in regards to Rastafarian culture and reggae music is the use
of late legendary reggae musician Bob Marley’s songs to inspire freedom fighters in
Zimbabwe as opposed to the Wednesday April 4, 2007 American Idol’s commercial that
used Marley’s song to promote Ford cars. According to Gilroy (1997) “Marley’s historic
performance at the Zimbabwe independence ceremony in 1980 symbolizes the
reconnection with African origins that permeates diaspora yearning” (p. 337). Ten years
later in 2007 Marley’s songs have been appropriated to symbolize peace and love, sell cars, and advertise Jamaica as a destination where tourists can come to feel all right.

John Fiske (1989) in *Reading the Popular*, states, “popular culture is made by subordinated peoples in their own interests out of resources that also, contradictorily, serve the economic interests of the dominant” (p. 2). In *Understanding Popular Culture*, Fiske (1989) outlines three models for the study of popular culture (p. 20). The first model, Fiske argues is less productive and fails to situate popular culture without considering it in a model of power. The second model for the study of popular culture Fiske states, “emphasizes the forces of domination so strongly it makes it appear impossible for a genuine popular culture to exist at all” (p. 20). The third emerging model, which Fiske advocates suggest an equilibrium of forces that affect popular culture. Fiske states that the third model:

Sees popular culture as a site of struggle, but, while accepting the power of the forces of dominance, it focuses rather upon the popular tactics by which these forces are coped with, are evaded or are resisted. Instead of tracing exclusively the processes of incorporation, it investigates rather that popular vitality and creativity that makes incorporation such a constant necessity. Instead of concentrating on the omnipresent, insidious practices of the dominant ideology, it attempts to understand the everyday resistances and evasions that make that ideology work so hard and insistently to maintain itself and its values. This approach sees popular culture as a potentially, and often actually, progressive (though not radical), and it is essentially optimistic, for it finds in the vigor and
vitality of the people evidence both of the possibility of social change and of the
motivation to drive. (p. 20-21)

Rastafarian culture and reggae music provide prime examples of the play between
agency, production, and consumption. While some participants of Rastafarian culture
may not fully understand, the ideological influences of the movement there are others
who do. And while pleasure may play an important role in the listening of reggae music
its lyrics in many cases still reflect the cries of Rastafarians musicians who continue to
chant down “Babylon” with music. While Marley’s songs may be used to sell tourists
destinations and Ford cars, some listeners may still be attracted to his lyrics’ anti-
establishment cries.

Conclusion

Despite my initial reluctance to apply western theories to RastafarI, social
movement theory and critical theory, provide applicable lenses for the study of the
movement’s origins and progression. While many of the constructs attributed to social
movement theory can be applied to RastafarI, unlike some social movements that phase
out over time, RastafarI continues to thrive and evolve in diverse locations of the world
seventy years after its conception in Jamaica. And albeit the original aims of Rastafari
focused exclusively on the emancipation of Black men and women from oppression,
which Rastafarians identify as Babylon, the movement’s ideology has always been
similar to critical theory’s hope for a better future. Contemporary Rastafarian thought
like first generation critical theory includes the “utopian hope that things might not only
be different but also radically better, to the extent that the future would in some degree
transcend the past” (How, A. 2003, p. 175). For Rastafarians a better future is articulated

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in the language of peace, love, blessings, and equal rights and justice that is often reflected in Rasta greetings, salutations and reggae music. Rastafarians also engage in practical works including efforts to assist the poor, needy, elderly, and children. Surber (1998) argues, “critical theory must be explicitly and deliberately engaged in both theoretical and practical activities the goal of which is the **emancipation** of human beings from the conditions that threaten or deny their fundamental autonomy and freedom” (133).

For the people of Jamaica, the earliest images of Rastafari spoke to the struggles of oppressed black people in that country. Perhaps it was the sight of a black dreadlocked man in sackcloth, or groups of dreadlocked men gathering to drum, smoke herb, and reason. Perhaps it was musicians jamming, women in long frocks their hair covered or police brutality towards Rastafari. For the elder Rastafari the movement signifies a back to Africa, Ethiopian movement with Pan-Afrikan aims and a God in the person of former Ethiopian Emperor His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie Jah Rastafari with living black prophets in the persons of Marcus Garvey, Prophet Gad, Leonard Howell, Prince Emmanuel, and many others who have shaped the movement. From its beginnings in Jamaica during the 1930s to its present day position Rastafari has emerged all over the world. As Rastafari spreads throughout Creation, the meanings attached to the movement evolve with it. Rastafari might appear at a grounding (gathering) among brethren in one place, a circle of sisters elsewhere, a Nyabingi in Jamaica, or at a reggae gathering on a beach in Ghana. In other places, Rastafari might appear at a reggae concert in Ohio, as a catalyst for political change in Zimbabwe, or an image of Bob Marley smoking a big spliff (marijuana joint) at a university or college poster sale. For
the younger generation and geographically distanced participant of Rastafarian culture, reggae music and Rastafarian symbolic aesthetics appear to signify a Diasporic connection to African roots and heartfelt (genuine, sincere) felt roots and cultural expressions of peace and love.
CHAPTER 4

RASTAFARI AND REGGAE MUSIC: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH

Introduction

I finally got a chance to interview sister Queen yesterday (Monday, July 7, 08). It took almost a year and a half of telephone calls and casual meetings at reggae shows for that interview to manifest. It was worth the effort and the sister was able to give me some contacts about upcoming events in the RastafarI community in Columbus.

Methodology

The methodology for this dissertation is based on ethnographic approaches used in qualitative research. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) describe qualitative research as a situated activity where researchers study things in their natural settings in an attempt to interpret phenomena and the meaning people bring to them. Davies (1999) defines ethnography as a “research process based on fieldwork using a variety of (mainly qualitative) research techniques but including engagement in the lives of those being studies over a period of time.” (pp. 4-5)

On November 2nd, 2006 I introduced myself to members of the RastafarI community in Columbus at the 87th earthday (birthday) celebration of His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie. My objective was twofold. I was there to personally and collectively acknowledge Haile Selassie’s divinity as well as to get a handle on how
Rastafarian in Columbus might perceive my research proposal. What follows below is an account of my first intentional field experience in my study of Rastafarian culture in Columbus with the Rastafarians who organized and participated in the eighty-seventh coronation celebration of His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I.

In-between classes on Tuesday November 2, 2006 I drove to the Filipina center on Innis avenue off of Cleveland Avenue about three o’clock in the afternoon. I would not have found the place had it not been for the red, green and gold balloons attached to a mailbox on the road to the entrance. I pulled my car up in the lot noticing that there was only one other car, which I parked beside. I very light skinned woman dressed in white with her head covered was unpacking items from her car. I wondered to myself about her ethnicity. She looked very much Caucasian. She smiled at me and I smiled back. I sat in my car for a few minutes and went inside the venue. Immediately inside the door was a counter behind which was a kitchen where three Rastafarian sisters were organizing platters of food. I remembered I had not eaten since seven-thirty in the morning. Suddenly I was very hungry. The women were dressed in white with their heads covered. Their garments were trimmed in red, green and gold and they wore Ethiopian shammars (shawls). They looked so beautiful. I felt embarrassed because I was in one of my everyday blue jean skirts, my regular looking school clothes, with my head wrap on as usual. I had meant to throw on my shamma before I got out the car but had forgotten.

The sisters greeted me and I introduced myself. I felt reluctant to state my purpose there but there seemed to be an uneasy silence to my presence so as humbly as I could I told them my intentions. I made a special point to inform them that I had lived in
Jamaica for a long period of time. I felt torn between my role as a “researcher” and my somewhat quasi membership as a Rastafarian in Columbus. I went and sat down. I thought that I recognized a brother that I had seen at the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Columbus more than a year ago at my one and only visit to the church since I had arrived in Columbus.

The venue was decorated with red gold and green balloons and Jamaican and Ethiopian flags. The tables were covered with white cloths. A DJ with his locks flowing almost to the floor spun old reggae tunes. I felt like I had been transplanted back to Jamaica. One of the sisters came and sat with me. She was very light skinned also and I wondered to myself about her ethnicity. I told her about my intended research. She seemed pleased that someone wanted to study Rastafarian culture in Columbus. I explained to her that my brother-in-law Haile had given me the names of some Rastafarians in Columbus. Haile had been active in the Rastafarian community in Columbus during the 1990s. She recognized some of the names and told me that those people would be arriving soon. I asked the sister about the food and told her that I would have to leave soon to go to another class. A few minutes went by and some Rastafarians brothers came inside. The sister left the table to greet the brothers. Soon after, she introduced me to some of the bredren (brothers) as Haile’s sister-in-law and told them of my purpose.

One particular brother was from Cincinnati and seemed to know my brother-in-law well. The brother was preparing to start the activities so we chatted for a few minutes and I left him to take care of his business. I gathered some pamphlets about Rastafarian culture on a nearby table and I went near to the kitchen and inquired about
the food. I was embarrassed to inquiry about the food again considering that they had not started officially eating. I was given a most generous portion of ital (vegetarian) food, ate hastily, and again was embarrassed that I had to rush to get back on campus for class. In Jamaican vernacular, I had to “YNAM and gway” (eat and leave).

Hours later after class I went to my oldest daughter Tesfa’s apartment. She had agreed with me earlier that she would accompany me back to the Filipina center. As she pulled on her jeans, t-shirt and vest I thought to myself “Why doesn’t she put on a skirt or something since she knows we are going to a Rastafarian function?” I decided to keep silent. Later in the evening, I returned to the Filipina center with my oldest daughter in tow. She wasn’t the only female there with jeans on. We had missed most of the festivities but were invited to eat and enjoyed a most hearty ital meal. There were drums in the center of the room and a few novice drummers tapped out some rhythms. I was disappointed that I didn’t get the chance to hear some really good Rasta drumming. I guess there were about fifteen men and fifteen women in attendance when we arrived. Small groups of people trickled in and out of the venue. As the evening passed, the brothers went and sat on one side of the room. Eventually a Rastafarian sister suggested that us “dawtas” (daughters / Rastafarian females) arrange our chairs in a circle and introduce ourselves. So we did. We exchanged phone numbers and email addresses. During the introductions, my daughter, Tesfa, mentioned that she recently started employment with Franklin County Children’s Services as a caseworker. The same Rastafarian woman who had suggested that we make our sister circle remarked “Oh, so you’re a baby snatcher.” I cringed at the thought remembering how Tesfa had openly cried on several occasions when retelling job related incidents. Surprisingly there was a
Rastafarian woman present who worked in another division of children’s services. All in all our introductions were lively. I recognized a dreadlocked sister but could not remember where I had seen her. She too recognized me. She introduced herself and stated that she was not a Rastafarian but a Christian. I thought about the paradoxes between Rastafari and Christianity and my own status as a member of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. After some time I remembered where I had seen the sister and blurted out she was the cashier at Walmart whose line I had checked out of a few weeks ago. We laughed and she said that she no longer worked at Walmart.

Eventually Tesfa and I decided to leave. When one of the Rasta brothers saw that we were preparing to leave he approached us and let us know that there was going to be a formal ceremony to end the activities. So, we politely stayed as the brother went to the front of the room. There he proceeded to read a selection of Psalms, which we the “congregation” were given copies of to read too. On the drive home Tesfa asked me a gender related question about my research. She inquired, “How was I going to gain access to what Rastafarian men talked about when they gathered in men- only groups?” I replied that I would have to honor the strict patriarchal codes of the movement and perhaps ask brothers questions individually regarding their private conversations when I begin my interviews.

I have been granted status by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct my research on the Rastafarian community in Columbus, Ohio. The IRB paperwork was a lot of red tape and I am wondering how many Rastafarian people are going to sign the necessary paperwork to have their private information made public. Perhaps to many Rastafarians the IRB represents “Babylon” (social, political, and economic oppression).
I have not reached the point in my research where I have asked participants to sign consent forms. It will be interesting to note how local Rastafarians respond to my formal taped interview requests that require participant signatures on the IRB consent forms.

I have given the above to illustrate my first encounter as an academic researcher, an ethnographer perhaps, with Rastafarians in Columbus. I arrived at the Filipina center unsure of how my intentions would be perceived by the Rastafarians I met. I left the Filipina center feeling good about my progress. I had collected the names and phone numbers of several brothers and sisters who agreed to assist me with my project.

Participants and location of research

Almost two years have passed since the coronation celebration at the Filipino center. Since then I have been to thirteen local reggae concerts, a reggae session in Brazil, and conducted interviews with members of the RastafarI and reggae community in Columbus and Wilberforce, Ohio, as well as interviews with experts on reggae and RastafarI in Brazil, Jamaica, California, and New York. While I had little problem getting people to sign Institutional Review Board (IRB) consent papers, I did find that it sometimes took anywhere from a few days or weeks to over a year to arrange for meeting times, telephone calls, and schedules to conduct interviews. I interviewed a total of twelve people. At each interview, I arrived with a gift for the person I was meeting. Those gifts ranged from bottled water, juices, fruit, Bob Marley scarves, a red, gold and green knit scarf, a reggae magazine, incense, and snacks. For the two participants I interviewed over the phone, I later sent one a Bob Marley scarf and calendar, and for the other, a leather journal.
Tuesday, July 22, 2008, 9:50 am.  I just remembered I have not sent Roger Steffens or Basil Walters, gifts to thank them for their assistance.

Participants were chosen based on one or two reasons. Some participants were chosen based on their affiliation with the Rastafarian community in Columbus and convenience for being interviewed. Other participants were chosen based on their expertise that would inform my research. In some instances, an interview would lead to other viable contacts. One thing led to another. Interviews took place at local coffee shops, in participants’ homes, place of business and over the telephone. The interview in Brazil took place at a Chinese restaurant in Brasilia amidst a table of lively hungry Ohio State University Art Education study abroad students and professors.

The profiles of the participants in this study are as diverse as the Rastafarian movement is itself. Seven of the twelve participants are Rastafarians. Eight have dreadlocks. Two who have dreadlocks do not claim to be Rastafarians. Ten of the participants have visited, lived in or presently reside in Jamaica. Seven are involved directly in the reggae industry including four musicians, a journalist, a promoter, and a reggae archivist. All participants are reggae enthusiasts. Seven live in Columbus or have close ties in the city. One participant lives in Wilberforce, Ohio. One participant each lives in Brazil, Jamaica, California, and New York. Four have traveled to Africa.

Participant ethnicities range from three African Americans, two Jamaicans, a Brazilian, a St. Lucian, and five Caucasian Americans. Two women participated in the study and ten men.
Method of data collection and analysis

I used field notes and open-ended taped interviews as the primary methods of data collection in this study. Other sources of data include books, scholarly articles, newspapers and archival records.

I taped the interviews on a cassette player and I transcribed them. Prior to writing up the research, I listened to the interviews again and re-read each transcript. I analyzed the data using a narrative analytic approach. As I wrote the narratives, I re-read each transcribed interview again checking for themes, patterns, ideas, consistencies, and inconsistencies gathered from the participant interviews (DeWalt, K., & DeWalt, B. 2002). At times I found the amount of material I had overwhelming, over a hundred pages of handwritten transcribed interviews and field notes. After much deliberation I decided to present the narratives in reverse chronological order in hopes that my decision would make it easier for the reader and myself to connect the narratives. Using a process of mainly deduction, I wrote what I, hope is an informative description of my fieldwork. As the themes, patterns, ideas, consistencies and inconsistencies emerged out of the writing process, I questioned how my own biases affected the decisions I made throughout that process.

Limitations of the study

The main limitations of this study include my gender and noise factors at venues where interviews and participant observations took place. The noise in coffee shops and restaurants, where some interviews were conducted, was often times distracting. I also realize that this study could continue indefinitely. Ethnography is a research process grounded in anthropology requiring extended periods of time in the field. I now realize
this study will indefinitely. The connections between RastafarI in Columbus extend to communities in Cincinnati and Cleveland.

Though I never conducted interviews at live reggae events, it was hard to take field notes at such events without avoiding odd stares from others. Case in point:

*Morgan Heritage is a family of siblings from Jamaica who are reggae musicians.*

*They performed in Columbus, Friday July 4th, 2008 at the Alrosa Villa club. I went to the concert with my art education colleagues Verona Barnes, a Jamaican and Eleonora Redaelli from Italy. We arrived at Alrosa by 9:30 pm. Sister Queen, a beautiful African American RastafarI woman who sells Rasta hats, flags, jewelry, key chains and other Rasta craft, had previously agreed to allow me to take pictures of her booth. It took about thirty minutes for Verona, Eleonora and I to adjust the new digital camera I had purchased a day earlier to night setting. We sat on benches on the patio outside and took pictures of ourselves, laughed and had fun. After I felt some level of comfort with the camera, I took pictures of Queen’s booth. Queen and I finalized our plans to conduct an interview at her home on Monday. Verona, Eleonora, and I hung outside until the show got started around 11:30 or so and than went inside.*

*Inside we met my sister Anita, and her male friend who both live in Dayton. My nephew Malcolm who was visiting from Pittsburg also stopped by to see the concert. This was his first reggae show. He teased me and said if this is research then he wants to come aboard. As the crowd started to pour into the club my sister, Anita, pointed out two elderly black women making their way through the venue. I took out my pen and paper and jotted down some notes. My sister poked fun at me and questioned my efforts to take notes in the midst of a packed noisy reggae show. I wanted to document my observations*
before I forgot them. In back of me sat a middle age white man in a wheel chair and I recalled that I had also seen a white man in a wheelchair at the Ziggy Marley show earlier that year downtown at Promo West.

Morgan’s Heritage opened up the show with their popular song “You don’t haffi dread to be Rasta.” The crowd loved it. The show was off to a good start. About forty-five minutes later the lead singer for Morgan’s Heritage stopped singing and began talking about the difference between dancehall and reggae music. Dancehall is a genre of music that began in Jamaica in the 1970s and became popular during the 80s through 90s. It is characterized by explicit sexual lyrics. Conscious roots reggae, on the other hand, is characterized by lyrics that speak to issues of oppression, unity, and social conditions.

The show went on. Beside me, a black woman dressed in a white mini jean skirt with a pink thong quite visibly riding high above her skirt danced sensually. Her dance style made it clear that she didn’t give a hoot about the difference between dancehall and conscious reggae music codes of conduct. I moved my way down to the dance floor to avoid being near to her. The concert ended hours later.

As Verona, Eleonora and I made our way outside, we stopped at the small Jamaican food vendor truck where I purchased two bottled Jamaican ginger beer soft drinks. Verona’s heavy Jamaican accent attracted a few people standing by and they asked her where she was from. “Spanish Town, Jamaica,” she replied. A short black man said he was also from Spanish Town and introduced himself. I got irritated when the man began to talk about being from a Jamaica Labor Party (JLP) laborite political stronghold community in Spanish town. “Stupid fucker” I thought to myself “Don’t
nobody want to hear that shit in Columbus Ohio.” I could not understand why he felt it significant to introduce “dirty” Jamaican politics into our conversation outside a reggae concert in Columbus, Ohio. Unfortunately, in Jamaica, political elections are often accompanied with violence by supporters of the two rival political parties, the Peoples National Party (PNP) and the JLP. Fortunately, Verona steered the conversation in another direction. I was ready to go and walked to my car leaving Verona and Eleonora behind. They soon followed. By the time I reached home after dropping off my friends it was almost 4:00 in the morning. I checked on my children sleeping, smoked half a spliff and drank Brazilian cachaca (alcohol made from sugar cane) before drifting off to sleep by 5 am in the morning.

Marijuana

Marijuana or ganja as it is commonly called in Jamaica is used among some RastafarI. Contrary to popular belief, not all RastafarI smoke marijuana (herb, spliff, ganja). Marijuana use by RastafarI and native herbalists in Jamaican folk medicine in teas and smoking mixtures as been documented as having strong ties to African as well as Indian presence in Jamaica (Leonard Barrett, 1997; Savinshinsky, 1998; and Bilby, 1985). From 1845 to 1921, over 36,000 East Indians, mainly of the Hindu faith, were brought to Jamaica. Following the abolition of slavery in the 1830s, the Jamaican Government turned to Indian laborers. An estimated seventy thousand Indians remain in Jamaica today. (Jamaica Cultural Alliance Website). Among many RastafarI herb smoking is a holy sacrament. Some RastafarI use Biblical passages; Genesis 1:12, 3:18; Exodus 10:12; Proverbs 15:17; and Psalm 104:14 to justify their use of herb. “It is said
that the weed was first grown on the grave of King Solomon, the wisest man on earth” (Barnett, p. 128).

The legal ramifications of writing about marijuana use in my study are overwhelming. I would not intentionally incriminate any one of my participants. My own use of herb dates back to my teenage years in Dayton, Ohio long before I knew anything about reggae music or RastafarI. In Jamaica where herb is illegal but plentiful and cheap, I continued to use it. When I returned to Ohio in 2001, I reduced my use of herb considerably due to cost and convenience.

At all but one of the reggae concerts I attended while conducting this study, the smell of marijuana smoke filled the air. As I was usually the designated driver or alone to and from reggae venues and interviews I vowed never to mix drinking or smoking and driving. At two of the interviews I conducted herb was smoked in my presence. On those occasions I was not offered any herb to smoke. Among RastafarI, women and men do not generally smoke from the same spliff (joint / marijuana cigarette) or pipe. On another interview occasion, I was given some herb for my personal use, carried it home and enjoyed a good “draw” later that night. In my home, I do not smoke in front of my children. I only burn herb in the wee hours of the morning while writing or when my kids are at school.

Gender

As a woman, researching a patriarchal movement I sometimes felt that if I were a man it would have been easier for me to gain access to some of the more private spaces where RastafarI men gather. While my participants include more males than females I assume it is only because the males I interviewed were more public figures whose
business minded approach made them appear more willing to participate and easier for me contact.

I will address codes of conduct, biases and researcher participant relationships issues in this chapter as they arose in the process of the study. I found as the study progressed that my own strengths, weaknesses and vulnerabilities were exposed not only to myself but to others as well.

**Participant Narratives**

Hatch and Wisniewski (1995) maintain that narratives offer alternatives for connecting the lives and stories of individuals to the understanding of larger social phenomena exhibited in the purposeful engagement of human activities, events, and actions. Narratives, autobiography, and life histories are forms of writing included in reflexive ethnographic accounts. Plummer (2001) writes that narratives “help establish collective memories and imagined communities; they tell of the concerns of their time and place. They bridge cultural history with personal biography” (p. 289). Cortazzi (2001) states “narrative also has an individual or collective role in the formation and maintenance of identity. Through life stories individuals make sense of themselves, they tell what they are or what they wish to be, as they tell so they become, they are their stories” (p. 388).

**Haile Israel**

Yesterday, Sunday July 14, 2008, I interviewed my brother-in-law Iyah Haile Israel. His is the final interview for this study. Haile married my sister Ashaki in 2000. They had been together for 20 years and due to personal reasons have been separated for the past three years. In the year 2000, their family moved from Dayton, Ohio to Hawaii
where Haile founded a Reggae Church. “The mission of the Reggae Church is to both entertain and inform listeners of the message in the music; “Jah Music” as we referred to it in the 70s.” Prior to moving to Hawaii, Haile and Ashaki traveled to Columbus regularly to participate in RastafarI activities in the city especially at the Ethiopian Orthodox Church after which they would gather to reason at the homes of RastafarI.

Haile is a musician, guitarist, and singer with Ras Michael & the Sons of Negus reggae group. Haile is a personal priest to Ras Michael. Haile describes himself as chief minister and “I Priest” of the Order. Haile has been involved in the RastafarI movement for over twenty-five years. He has traveled extensively throughout America, the Caribbean and Africa playing reggae music and spreading the word of RastafarI.

Haile was one of the first people I called when I began my dissertation. He was very supportive and gave me the phone numbers of brothers and sisters in Columbus to contact. When I began my fieldwork among RastafarI in Columbus, I noticed how RastafarI in Columbus always spoke very highly of Haile. Haile is in Columbus now to help organize the activities for his imperial majesty Haile Selassie I, 116th earthday (birthday) celebration on Saturday, July 19, at Nelson Park.

I interviewed Haile at brother, Ras Elihu’s home in Columbus. I shared the first three chapters of my research with them. They both seemed quite impressed with the first two chapters especially how I was able to connect the Ethiopian, Jamaican, Columbus histories together. However, when we reached the third chapter regarding theory Haile expressed his dissatisfaction of the literature comparing RastafarI with western cannons of thought. Haile seemed to agree like Adjaye (1997) that western intellectual paradigms are not applicable to dominant popular cultural expressions of
black societies. Haile described RastafarI as an indigenous esoteric Jamaican cultural and oral tradition that cannot be explained in western terms.

Haile shared with me a DVD titled *Man of the Millennium* written and produced by Tikher Teferra. The DVD features the life and history of Haile Selassie through the eyes of Tikher Teferra who says at the beginning of the film that he was taught more about Bill Gates in school than he was about the history of Ethiopia and Haile Selassie. Haile also had a picture of an Ethiopian priest with short graying black dreadlocks who he claimed is Haile Selassie, contrary to the popular belief that Selassie died in 1974. I agreed that the picture resembled Haile Selassie. I asked Haile how would we know if that the picture really is Haile Selassie? He responded by quoting Hebrews chapter one, verses one through three:

> Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things seen not.

> For by it the elders obtained a good report. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which were seen were not made of things which do appear.

Haile feels that Rasta youth today have more obstacles to face than in the past. He says that Rasta youth in America grow up playing violent video games, listening to hip-hop, gangster rap, and dancehall music. He described these young Rastas as hardcore urban Rastas trying their best to live it up trodding RastafarI while living in a high tech society. He reminded me that the early Rastas in Jamaica lived a natural (ital) life, planting food in the hills. He repeated throughout the interview “RastafarI is a nature thing, originally a thing of nature.” He says that generally people in Jamaica spend more
time outside as compared to Americans. Climate and geographical location affect how people practice a Rasta lifestyle.

I asked Haile why blacks in America have not fully embraced Rastafarian culture. He replied that the FBI and CIA have a multibillion-dollar plot to stop black folks from knowing their true identity. Haile used the Black Panthers and Malcolm X as examples of how the FBI systematically destroys black social movement leaders who attempt to unite black people. Haile says this especially pertains to blacks in America linking with blacks in the Caribbean, the wider Diaspora and particularly with Rastafarian.

Haile and I talked about the future of Rastafarian and reggae music. Haile replied that the future of Rastafarian is to get out of Babylon. He explained that one of the major pillars of Rastafarian is repatriation and that we need to fulfill prophesy by leaving Babylon. Haile had traveled to Shashemene, the land grant in Ethiopia that Haile Selassie gave to Diasporic blacks in 1955. He lamented that fact that the Rastafarian brothers and sisters who had repatriated to the Shashemene have many challenges to overcome. Haile observed that indigenous Ethiopians were using Shashemene’s land as their own to graze cattle because they were aware that blacks in the west were not repatriating. As a result, the land grant that His Imperial Majesty gave to blacks in the west was getting smaller. Haile maintains that there is nothing more for the Rastafarian movement to do except get out of Babylon and return to Africa.

Haile shared so much with me during our interview. He said that I should publish my dissertation and that the work I am doing is greater than what I think it is now. His words have been encouraging since the beginning of my study. He said that he does not
know why my sister, Ashaki won’t forgive him. I avoid delving too much into the sensitive areas of their relationship.

Sister Queen

I met sister Queen at the November 2nd, 2006, coronation celebration for His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie in Columbus. I had seen her previously selling her Rasta wares at reggae concerts in the city prior to conducting my research. She continues to sell her wares at regional reggae and RastafarI events in Ohio (See Figures 4.1 - 4.4). I conducted an interview with Queen at her home in Columbus on Monday July 7th, 2008.

I admire this RastafarI sister who keeps her locks covered, always wears the most beautiful custom-made long dresses or skirts with Rasta colors. Queen grew up in Cleveland in a Muslim community before professing RastafarI. She learned how to sew at an early age and has been selling art, craft and clothes all of her adult life. She says that everything she has done in her life is towards the struggle for freedom from oppression.

Queen like many other participants in my study, came to RastafarI through reggae music. She says that she went to a reggae concert in Cincinnati in 1980 where Ras Michael & The Sons of Negus were performing. Queen says that the concert was spiritual and that everybody had on white garments with red, green and gold trim. “It was like you was in church.” She met Ras Michael backstage and he greeted her with the words “Jah RastafarI.” The experience was “such a spiritual thing.” Queen states that ever since that day Rasta has been in her heart. But it was not until after she fulfilled a commitment she made to Allah to raise her children in the Muslim faith that she began to
fully participate in a RastafarI way of life. Now Queen feels that reggae is nothing like it used to be but her allegiance to RastafarI is strong.

Queen says that if people would just listen to His Imperial Majesty’s words they would understand that we are just peaceful people and all we want to do is just live in peace. Repeatedly Queen described her journey in RastafarI as “such a spiritual thing.”

**Nelson Inocencio Silva**

Nelson is a black dreadlocks Brazilian brother and assistant professor in the department of Visual Art at the University of Brasilia. I met Nelson during an Ohio State University art education study abroad trip to Brazil hosted by the Universidade Federal de Goiânia in June of 2008. Our study group had lunch with Nelson after sitting in at the university’s final day of a visual culture symposium. For those of us sitting near Nelson we bombarded him with our questions concerning black folks and race issues in Brazil. He answered our questions at length in English with his charmingly beautiful accent. I questioned him about RastafarI and reggae music in Brazil. He was very knowledgeable about the topic. He said that the aesthetics of Rasta and reggae were very powerful. However, he also felt that reggae and Rasta had lost their meaning. “Wow, I thought this would be a great person to interview.” Knowing that we would meet Nelson at another date in Brasilia, I asked him if he would allow me to interview him at that time. He agreed.

In Brasilia Nelson conducted a tour of the current exhibit, 25 years of the Black Movement in Brasil by Januario Garcia, at the Instituto Brasileiro De Administracao Para O Desenvolvimento (IBRAD) for our study abroad trip. The exhibit is comprised of large photographic prints of Black people in Brazil who have made contributions to the
struggle of Blacks in that country. The exhibit also featured large posters that served as historical documentation of events that supported the black movement in Brazil. In one photograph, I noticed a woman wearing a bob Marley t-shirt. In another photograph, a dreadlocks man stood out. Two dreadlock men were featured in another photo. In some photos, people wore red, green and gold tams. In another picture important black Brazilian feminist, Lucia Xavier sported dreadlocks. A dreadlock brother named Jose Lino was featured in a photograph. Featured in another photo was Brazilian poet Arnaldo Xavier sporting his dreadlocks. I could hardly wait to ask Nelson about the correlations between Rastafari and social movement and change in Brazil.

Dreadlocks are a process of wearing hair natural and uncombed. A person who wants dreadlocks simply stops combing their hair. It can take months for the individual locks to form. Dreadlocks can form into tiny individual twist or coils. Some locks form into thicker, kinky ropes that may or may not mat together. Dreadlocks are worn by people of different cultures. Mastalia and Pagono (1999) observe that traditionally, Bahatowie priests in Ethiopia, the Kikuyu of Kenya, Maori of New Zealand, ascetic Hindu Indians, the Baye Fall of Senegal, and priests of native African religions wear dreadlocks. Most importantly, dreadlocks are worn by followers of the Rastafari movement in Jamaica as a sign of defiance to Jamaican society (Barrett, 1988). Some Rastafari quote the Bible chapter Leviticus 21: verse 5, as a source of inspiration for wearing dreadlocks: “They shall not make baldness upon their head, neither shall they shave off the corner of their beard, nor make any cuttings in their flesh.” Not all Rastafari wear dreadlocks and not all people who wear dreadlocks profess Rastafari.
After the tour, our group had lunch with Nelson at a Chinese restaurant where I conducted an interview. Though I am usually a bit nervous conducting interviews, I was especially nervous at this one. This interview would be conducted in the company of my peers and the two art education professors, Drs. Daniel and Ballengee-Morris, who were directing the study abroad tour. Dr. Daniel motioned for me to sit down first before anyone else. I must have appeared indecisive and she hastened me to make a decision. I decided to sit down on the right side of the head of the table leaving a chair for Nelson to sit at the head chair. I hope I don’t make a fool of myself I thought as I fiddled around with the cassette tape that all of a sudden did not work, even though I had checked it over and over again before we left the city of Goiânia for Brasilia that morning. Dr. Daniel made small talk while I sweated. I am grateful for her helpfulness to make sure the interview was successful. After a few minutes, which seemed like eternity to me, I got the cassette to work.

I began the interview by asking Nelson about his background. He replied that he grew up reading Malcolm X and Eldridge Cleaver and that he is the result of collective discussions regarding the struggle of black people. He does not profess to be a Rasta man. I asked him about how Rastafari and reggae came to Brazil. Nelson said that the movement came to Brazil from the media in the form of reggae music at the end of the 70s. He recalls Bob Marley’s “No woman no cry,” The Wailers and Inner Circle reggae groups, as early reggae influences in Brazil. He stated that reggae was a voice for struggle to understand our reality and to understand what happened to black people all over the world. He said that reggae was an important instrument and tool for struggle. Nelson said that eventually “the culture industry took out the content of reggae and used
the shape, yes the shape. The rhythm its nice to dance…forget the lyrics, it’s not important. So we suffer.” However, Nelson did point out there are some spaces in Brazil where the main idea of the Rasta Movement exist. He replied that those communities exist mainly in Bahia, Rio and Salvador. He said that in those communities they have hard work because Rastas were stereotyped as dope dealers, and the representations of black people in Brazil are complicated and embedded in historical circumstances of slavery and oppression.

I asked Nelson about the pictures of dreadlocks people in the exhibit and if he felt there was a correlation between dreadlocks, social movement and change. He said that in Brazil “we identify with not only Rasta but also with Jamaican culture.” He continued by saying that he had heard about Marcus Garvey and Pan-Africanism and when he traveled to Jamaica he visited the Marcus Garvey Museum and Bob Marley’s house. He said, “for my culture as activists we do things in support of the struggle.”

I questioned Nelson regarding the comment he made at our fist lunch in Goiânia when he said that Rasta and reggae were powerful aesthetics. He said:

Rastas have created their own aesthetic. Dreadlocks are a powerful aesthetic.

You must be brave to wear dreadlocks. To straighten your hair mainly for black women is an important idea to connect your aesthetic with European aesthetic, is very, very, strong here. To use curly hair is difficult to use dreadlocks hair is more difficult.

**Reggae in Goiânia, Brazil**

While in Brazil I was invited to a reggae session with Professor Alex Ratt whom I met at the University de Federal in Goiânia. Alex is conducting research regarding
reggae in Goiânia. At nine-thirty on the evening of Saturday, June 15, 2007, Alex, three
students from the university, a female professor, and me made our way by car to the
southern outskirts of the city to attend a reggae session. Alex told me that this is where a
large percentage of black people live in Goiânia and that reggae provides a space to go
see and mix with black people. We arrived early and only a few patrons were in the
venue. We ordered Brazilian nova schin beer and made small talk in a mixture of
English and Portuguese. Alex introduced me to the DJ who greeted me warmly.
Throughout the night, I was introduced to Brazilian men and women who greeted me the
same way. The patrons consisted of a mixed crowd of white, light and dark skinned
Brazilians. Indeed, it was the largest percentage of black people I had seen in Brazil
since arriving a week earlier. I did not see anyone there who resembled Rasta or had
dreadlocks. The age of the crowd appeared to range in their early twenties and mid
thirties. I felt somewhat out of place in the crowd, wearing my long skirt and head wrap,
as a middle-aged and probably only African American woman in the crowd wearing my
long skirt and head wrap.

The ladies were decked to the T in short dresses, jeans and high heel shoes. At
least one third of the crowd wore white t-shirts with a robotic looking black African
figure on the front with the words “Noite Do Robozinho” above it, red, gold and green
stripes on the sleeves and a letters that read “100% Reggae” on a background of red gold
and green stripes. I asked Alex if I could buy one of the t-shirts. He said I would get one
later in the evening.

By 11:30 the venue was packed. The DJ played some good Jamaican reggae
tunes mixed with Portuguese reggae. He spoke over the reggae tunes in Portuguese and

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the crowd reacted enthusiastically by shouting, clapping, and dancing a fast paced samba that I had trouble keeping up with. Every one had a good time. There was a lot of beer drinking. One fellow got too drunk and rowdy. He was escorted to the front of the venue until he cooled down. I did not detect any marijuana smoke odors. But the air was thick with cigarette smoke. By 2:30 in the morning my throat hurt really badly from the cigarette smoke. I stepped outside for a moment. I went back inside and fell asleep in a chair. Thirty minutes later my Brazilian companions woke me up so that we could leave. As we said good night to patrons outside the club the DJ I met earlier in the evening approached us and greeted me warmly again, gave me the t-shirt he was wearing, and bade us “bom noite.” I arrived back at the hotel at close to 4:00 in the morning.

Roger Steffens

My contact with Roger Steffens was made possible with the assistance of the owner of Roots Records shop, Carl Newman. Roots Records sponsors the finest Jamaican reggae concerts in Columbus. Roger Steffens is co-founder of the Beat Magazine, editor of its annual Bob Marley Collectors’ Edition, and chairman of the Reggae Grammy Committee. Stevens started listening to reggae music in 1973, and saved everything that has crossed his path on the subject ever since. He has a collection of reggae paraphernalia that fills six rooms of his home in Los Angeles. (The World of Reggae featuring Bob Marley treasures from Roger Steffens’ Reggae Archives, 2001). I made contact with Roger first by telephone. I discussed my research with him and later we made contact through email. Through our email discussions, Roger made a lengthy response to my research questions. I include here the bulk of his email written in the same format it was sent to me:
Your questions cut to the quick about the consequences of cultural appropriation, but those borders have been evanescent for centuries already. Like it or not, the lion escaped the leash when Bob, especially became the international face of the philosophy of Rastafari. Reggae is the soundtrack or the Movement of Jah People. Its roots are well known; you can hear them in 1958 on “Oh Carolina,” considered by many musicologists as the first real Jamaican record. The Folkes Brothers are backed on Prince Buster’s release by the deepest of the Binghi pioneers, Count Ossie and Mystic Revelation of Rastafari. reggae before reggae. What Bob and his companions did was to put a polish on those roots, give them a luster that would attract the eyes and ears of a previously indifferent foreign audience; he accomplished it in spades.

Rap was perfected in the ‘60s in Jamaica, brought to the U.S. by Jamaican immigrants like Kool Herc in the South Bronx, taken to the heart of Americans, and then sent back to the Yard to be adapted by Jamaican toasters, sounding sometimes like Native new Yorkers themselves. Same way in South Africa, where you can hear rappers from Soweto who sounds as if they were raised on the banks of the Hudson. What is appropriation, and what is inspiration? And how can you own something as a ephemeral as a Sound? One of the biggest toasters on the international reggae scene in recent years is a German named Gentleman, who stirs it up in Western Kingston, as easily as he does for tens of thousands of rapt skankers at European festivals. Who’s zoomin’ who?
It is the wonderous message of Rasta-inspired reggae (“King’s Music”) that is the
lynchpin of it’s success throughout the globe. Roots-conscious DJs with
yalmulkes crowning their dreadlocks, play the latest 7-inches from Yard in a
Rasta kibbutz in the middle of the Negev Desert; physically mountainous
Samoans, Tongans and Hawaiians play together in Honolulu in a reggae band
called Ookla-the-Moc, adding the holy rhythm to songs of local protest and native
land rights, just as do their Maori cousins in New Zealand, where rules the
airwaves. Many call themselves Rasta, though some eschew belief in the divinity
of Haile Selassie. Rasta is a private system of belief, a one-in-One relationship to
the Devine. There’s not a single “rule” on which all “self-proclaimed” Rasta
agree to believe in. Thus, ironically, it can serve as a tremendous catalyst for
Unification (or I-nification, as dem seh). United in respect for the natural rhythms
of the earth, its needs, and the eternal verities of Love, Truth and Justice, it can
help pave the way to the solutions of some of our planet’s most vexing
challenges. And therefore it is feared, misunderstood, and dangerous to those
who think the present status of our sorely wounded orb is intolerable.

Rasta have been forced to adapt quite a bit to the outside world, one that it’s
originators had opted out of and despised. Modern communications, and now
instant worldwide realities, made that a necessity. Today, the internet ties Twelve
Tribes communities in New Zealand with those in Brixton and uptown Kingston
instantly. The words of the prophets are written on the walls of Broadband now,
unreal and permanent at once. We can never go back – so it must be in the words
of Jacob Miller, “Forward ever, backward never!” We all need each other if we are to survive. Oneness!

Andrew Buck

The first time I saw Buck was on the stage of Hilliard Davidson high school’s auditorium. My daughter Netsanet dragged me yet again to another performance at her school. This one, an Invisible Children concert in aid of children in Africa. The orchestra performed, students danced, and guest speakers spoke including Buck who discussed his travels in Uganda as a former Peace Corps volunteer. He wore a long white gown and cap and displayed African drums and other African artifacts on stage.

Later that year I saw Buck again. This time, in Dr. Stout’s experimental writing in qualitative research class, in the Art Education Department at The Ohio State University. I always enjoy Dr. Stout’s classes. She is an excellent mentor for students exploring alternative methods for writing up research. I walked into Dr. Stout’s class on the first day of winter quarter 2008 and saw a white guy wearing a tam whose face looked familiar. When students introduced themselves at the beginning of the class Buck’s story sounded familiar and I asked him if he were the fellow at Hilliard Davidson. “Yes” he replied. Buck was completing his Masters degree in the Educational Policy and Learning Department and was one of the few students in our class outside of Art Education.

During the break Buck removed his tam to reveal almost shoulder length dreadlocks. I asked him if I could talk to him regarding my research and he said he would love to hear my stories about Jamaica and he was interested in going to Jamaica to hear what RastafarI teach their children about God. Buck cut off his locks about three
weeks after the class began but still professes RastafarI. During the quarter of the course I emailed Buck regarding my research in which he replied in a detailed response that he was a Rasta man. Soon after our course was completed in ten weeks I met Buck at Brenner’s Café on High Street to conduct an interview. He told me about his “mystical” encounters with a RastafarI man he met in Uganda.

For purposes of this dissertation I have included Buck’s email response to me written as it was formatted in the email:

I consider myself Rasta, because it is undeniable in my heart. I consider myself One with God and all of Creation. The prophets of this movement have had great influence in my awareness of “who I am” and “where I belong”

Consider the following passages from the Ethiopian King, Ras Tafari:

1. The temple of the Most High begins with the human body which houses our life, essence of our existence. Africans are in bondage today because they approach spirituality through religion provided by foreign invaders and conquerors. We must stop confusing religion and spirituality. Religion is a set of rules, regulations, and rituals created by humans, which were supposed to help people to grow spiritually. Due to human in perfection religion has become corrupt, political, divisive, and a tool for power struggle.

Spirituality is not theology or ideology. It is simply a way of life, pure and original as was given by the most High of Creation.
Spirituality is a network linking us to the Most High, the universe and each other.

(I exalt that a political leader has claimed such a righteous Truth. Of course, the truest teachings of Jesus were an attempt to lead People to such realizations…Oneness of all things…Oneness is the highest philosophy that rings true within my very heart and soul and mind. The utmost Respect is the Unconditional Love and God Almighty. We are One, interdependent upon each other, and of course, this philosophy of life, this way of being, discredits the authority of political/social leaders since the beginning of humanity…and I commit my life to fighting against oppression, hegemony, abuse of power, and intolerance. The power is within. God animates, even the inanimate objects, the soil. None of this surprises you, I know).

2. That until the philosophy which holds one race superior and another Inferior is finally and permanently discredited and abandoned: That until there are no longer first-class and second class citizens of any nation; That until the color of a man’s skin is of no more significance than the color of his eyes; That until the basic human rights are equally guaranteed to all without regard to race; That until that days, the dream of lasting peace and world citizenship and the rule of international morality will remain but a fleeting
illusion, to be pursued but never attained.

(this is a speech given to the U.N. and is the basis of Bob’s song “war.” again, I believe none of this is new to you. this is the Truth to me, which is why I am rasta, a believer in the true message of God, which has come from many voices…)

Also, nesta robert marley, his life and mission, the message he spread through his music has led me to know him as a true prophet. His message is Gnostic, and Christian, but is overwhelmingly about LOVE, Respect, Oneness, the battle against the evil forces of the devil’s philosophy, and he knows that “righteousness shall cover the earth like water cover the sea”

well. it is all summed up in one word for me. Oneness. this is rasta to me, and why I attempt to follow the tenants and philosophies provided by political and social leaders like Marcus Garvey (acceptance of our true nature, the appreciation of the mother land), Haile Selassie, Nesta bob Marley. plus, reggae music is the life blood of this socially conscious philosophy… I love it. it moves me. I am a spiritual dancer.

rasta is personal acceptance, autonomy, the true expression of the power within, rasta is…
i have been rasta from ever since …it is in my blood, there is no denying my true nature. i know where I come from…
i hope this is at least a start for your understanding of my interest…
we can talk more sometime, in person, if you prefer…
it would be nice to hear a story about jamaica, and your decision to extend your stay over a decade.

Basil Walters

Basil Walters is a journalist for the Jamaica Observer newspaper. He is a black Jamaican, dreadlocks Rasta man. Basil has written extensively about reggae music, Rastafari and Pan-African affairs for over thirty years in that country. I met Basil in Jamaica in 1988. Basil is married to Gloria Walters, one of my best girl friends. Gloria and I joined the Peace Corps and traveled to Jamaica in the same group in 1981. Gloria and I keep in contact weekly through emails. As my study progressed it seemed only natural that I seek Basil’s thoughts on my topic. I think I was also seeking approval and validation of my study. Basil’s email response to me is presented as follows in its original format:

In response to your questions, if I Overstand it correctly, you are asking in essence, if the culture/philosophy of Rastafari can be practiced in places like Columbus, Ohio without it losing its authenticity. If that’s the question then the answer is yes, a RESOUNDING YES.

The culture/philosophy of Rastafari is a UNIVERSAL AFROCENTRIC PERSPECTIVE.
It is because of its universality why it has crossed borders, continental borders, and today a Rastafarian can be found in the most remote part of the world. Rastafari is EVERYWHERE.

The universality is expressed in a number of ways within the Rastafari ethos. The CREED or the tents of the Ancient Nyahbinghi Order is “DEATH TO BLACK AND WHITE DOWNPRESSERS”

If you notice, “Black” is mentioned first, therefore if one is an oppressor or a downpressor, it doesn’t matter what the race, class or creed, the judgment is the same.

And even more fundamentally, the Rasta One’s mantra is always – “EQUAL RIGHTS AND JUSTICE” as well as “ONE LOVE.”

Those are just two examples of the universality of the Teachings of Rastafari.

Of course, you are well aware of HIS MAJESTY’S TEACHING – “The color of a man’s skin is no more significant that the color of his eyes.”

So Rastafari Culture/Philosophy has spread worldwide. There is a reason for it spreading worldwide. This is because it is more than a religion, it’s A WAY OF LIFE, its about positive cultural cross-fertilisation. It’s for this reason, Rastafari tents, precepts, principles, the programmes, the possibilities provide a theory and strategism for social engineering. The Rastafari WORLDVIEW is to redirect a world civilization which has mostly lost its consciousness and moral compass. The worldview of Rastafari is about redefining or influencing the existing world order.
And as a result of which, people of all races (not just black people), have come to depend on it to correct many of the ills of societies and the miseducation of a decadent and corrupt world order. This can be seen in the promotion of a healthy lifestyle for the development of one’s mental, physical and spiritual well-being. Many of the issues for which the Rastaman and woman were the first crusaders, are now gaining prominence even from non-Rasta quarters. Issues such as vegetarian eating habits, protection of the environment, and above all, matters such as Reparations and repatriations. Is not that Rasta is anti-white, but that Rasta is anti what the white race did to the black race historically.

Of course, thanks to the international impact and power of Reggae Music this has become a voice, a vehicle and an avenue of expression for Rastalogy.

If there are any further questions or clarification, you know are free to make contact with me as usual.

Matt Stinson

Matt is a thirty-one year old African American Rastafarian brother born and raised in Columbus. He is a student at a local community college and has been growing his locks for six years. I met Matt through a friend of mine who thought that he would be a good person to interview. I met Matt for the first time on October 25th, 2007 at 7:00 pm in the coffee shop at Barnes and Nobles in the Lennox shopping center near the Ohio State University campus. I have since seen, greeted and spoke with Matt at many of the reggae concerts I attend in Columbus.

Matt started listening to reggae music in the late 1980s. In the late 1990s he started to learn about Rastafarian. His curiosity about the message in the music led him to
research RastafarI on his own and talk to RastafarI in Columbus. He says that “I was attracted to what I heard. It was something that I was never told before in school or in my own household.” Over the years RastafarI grew on him and after a couple years of learning he began to see our people in a different light he had never seen African people in before. Matt says that being a Rasta has made him aware and conscious of his roots and heritage. Through RastafarI he learned about the teachings of Marcus Garvey and Haile Selassie. He says that through Rasta he learned about a more positive image of Africa. Matt says Rasta keeps him grounded, focused, humble and on the right path to be successful in life.

I asked Matt about his practices as a Rasta man. On a personal level he begins each day with prayer and from time to time Rasta brothers in Columbus have prayer and study groups on particular nights of the week. He says that among Rasta he finds a common solidarity, kindness and respect in the community. He feels that people who adhere to RastafarI demonstrate a certain respect towards each other and wishes that more African American brothers and sisters would give it a chance. In 2006 he participated in Haile Selassie’s earthday (birthday) celebration with the RastafarI community in Columbus.

Matt has traveled to Jamaica and anticipates visiting Africa one day. His experiences in Jamaica were “like no other” and “very humbling.” In his home he has a couple of pictures of Bob Marley and pictures of the His Majesty’s royal family. He visits the Roots Records shop regularly to talk to people there about the music and the movement.
Jennifer Cabrera

I was introduced to Jennifer by Carl Newman, the owner of Roots Records Shop. I met Jennifer at her home in Bexley. Jennifer is the daughter of Hugo and Donna Cabrera, former owners of Skankland and Negril, Jamaica Records. Jennifer is a Caucasian woman in her late thirties married to an African American brother, Damon Gordon, from Hilliard, Ohio. They have three children. Jennifer works in customs at a well known fashion company in Columbus. She does not prescribe to any one particular religion. She does not participate in any Rastafarian activities. She says if you’re a good person, you live well, do good to other people, do right by yourself. Jennifer shared her parents’ histories with me as well as her own story about being raised by a mother and father who were among the earliest promoters of reggae music in Columbus.

Jennifer’s father, Hugo, visited Jamaica over forty times in his life. He opened a booking agency in 1981 that brought Jamaican acts to local clubs, and began Negril Jamaica Records on High Street. He founded Skankland, in 1987. Skankland was one of Columbus’s first reggae clubs to bring international Jamaican reggae acts to the city. It was located at 574 E. 5th Avenue. When her father opened Skankland, Jennifer was seventeen. She remembers that Skankland drew a crowd of college professors, Ohio State University students, graduate teaching associates, people from Cincinnati and a large continental African following. Her parents did not profess to be Rastas but her father had dreadlocks and both mother and father were “hippies big time, opened minded people who loved everything and everybody, especially reggae music.”

Jennifer has traveled to Jamaica on many occasions first as a young child with her parents and as an adult at least seven times to check out Jamaica’s reggae festivals. She
is a hardcore reggae and dancehall fan. Jennifer feels that because people in American do not understand the lyrics of reggae music it makes it difficult for the music to become mainstream. Jennifer loves the energy of the music and describes her experiences at Jamaica’s reggae events as fabulous “there is nothing like being in an open air outdoor venue under the beautiful stars with thirty to fifty thousand people waving their arms – nothing like that - a very interesting experience, lots of energy there.”

Monday July 21, 2008, 2:08 pm. Jennifer Cabrera called me about thirty minutes ago. I had contacted her about a week earlier via email to ask her to look over what I had written so far. I read to her the section I had written regarding her interview. She was pleased with the work. I filled the few gaps that I wasn’t completely sure of. We spoke pleasantly for a few minutes and wished each other the best. Now I have at least one “official” member check completed.

Roots Records

My first visit to Roots Records shop on High Street in Columbus was on a rainy Thursday afternoon on October 19, 2006. The shop sells a large collection of reggae vinyl records and CDs as well as incense, reggae magazines, and t-shirts. I was greeted rather unenthusiastically at the door by a white male dreadlocked employee. I introduced myself and discussed my research with him. His response was he thinks the Rasta community would be interested in talking to me about my research. He gave me some information about what was happening in the RastafarI community and apologized for his lack of social skills.

I visited the shop again on a Tuesday afternoon on November 28th, 2006 with the intention of talking to the owner, Carl Newman, to see if I could make arrangements to
schedule an interview with him and also to buy two tickets to the upcoming Sizzla reggae
show. I spoke to a black dreadlocks Jamaican brother named Cush for about ten minutes.
He was from the parish of St. Ann, Jamaica, where I lived for thirteen years. We seemed
to know some of the same people. I white guy came to the door with a dog and asked if
he could bring the dog in the shop. “Yes, of course,” Cush replied while greeting the
dog. Cush went upstairs to tell the owner I was there. I was invited up to meet Carl, a
handsome middle-aged slightly balding white man. We talked informally for about forty
minutes about my research and his work as a promoter of reggae music. He agreed that I
could interview him and do observations in the shop. Carl gave me two CDs by Roots
High Power sound system and I left the shop.

I did not officially interview Carl until a year later on a Tuesday afternoon on
October 9th, 2007. On my second interview I was mesmerized by Carl’s knowledge of
reggae music and his role as a promoter in bringing some of Jamaica’s finest reggae acts
to Columbus (See figures 4.5 – 4.8). Hugo Cabrera had been Carl’s mentor and good
friend. Carl bought the business from Hugo in 1998. Carl shared a wealth of archives
with me that included newspaper articles and posters documenting Hugo’s works as a
reggae promoter, some of which I later copied. Carl travels to Jamaica often to conduct
business. We talked for hours. One of his employees, a young African dreadlocked
brother from Gambia, named Modou Bah, joined the interview. Modou Bah said that he
has been listening to reggae since he was a child in Gambia. Modou Bah grew up in a
Muslim country and professes Islam. He does not consider himself a Rasta though he
relates to the movement’s African unity, history and pride.
Carl has been into reggae music since the beginning of its movement to the United States in the mid 1970s. He was moved by the positive uplifting lyrics of the music, its drum and bass rhythms and syncopation. During our interview, Carl claimed that everybody suffers and struggles in their own way. He maintains that reggae music provides a space for relaxation, dancing, and forgetting about worries. He quoted Bob Marley’s lyrics “forget your worries and dance.” He stated, “I think most of the lyrics come straight from the good book like Proverbs. The music brings it to a level where everybody realizes and understands it and gets into a harmonious relationship with themselves.”

Carl says he has read Marcus Garvey and can understand his teachings. He has not read too much about Haile Selassie and says “that is very strong stuff, it’s all good and needs to be understood.” Carl says he doesn’t know if he is Rasta and to him Rasta means a pure and clean way of thinking. He considers himself just a “messenger” or “mail man” carrying the torch that was passed to him by Mr. Hugo Cabrera. He says he feels blessed to be a part of it.

I asked Carl about the evolution of reggae music. He says that reggae remains a counterculture, alternative underground music that neither African Americans or white Americans have fully embraced. He asserts that continental Africans are the biggest supporters of reggae in Columbus, claiming 60% Africans, 20% African Americans and West Indians, and 20% whites make up the percentages of reggae music that sells in Columbus.

Carl loves the energy of dancehall music and thinks there is a lot of amazing talent in dancehall. He feels that corporate radio stations maintain the status quo and
monopolies of airplay. He says that dancehall’s anti-gay lyrics prevent it from being played on the radio. Homophobia is widespread in Jamaican culture. In Jamaica, homosexuality is illegal and anti-gay lyrics are dominant in dancehall music. Carl said, “artists need to get back to more Rasta stuff and get into kids’ minds.” Carl gave me four DVDs about Haile Selassie and two Roots High Power sound system CDs before I left the interview. Later that week he made arrangements for me to meet Hugo’s daughter, Jennifer.

By my third interview with Carl on Friday night of March 15th, 2008, after many phone calls, and a reggae show or two in-between, I had developed a most embarrassing and intense “giggling teenage crush” on him (Phoebe Snow, Poetry Man lyrics, 1977). By this time I had tightened up my research questions and wanted to run them by him. Carl just sort of laughed at my research questions that now centered around Cushman’s (1991) assertions questioning how authentic Rastafarian and reggae codes served as sources of social solidarity and justice for the group which originally articulated it. He claimed that it was a ridiculous assertion that could be applied to just about anything.

During the interview I felt awkward trying to mask my attraction for Carl. It was night, we were alone in the shop, the smell of sweet incense filled the space. We talked and laughed for hours. We watched an internet broadcast of Prince Charles’s visit to Jamaica that same week. The video covered Prince Charles’s visit to the Bob Marley museum on Hope Road in Kingston. Some Rasta bredrin (brothers) were playing drums for Prince Charles. Rita Marley was in attendance. Carl and I both agreed that Bob Marley must be turning over in his grave. Carl emailed Roger Steffens regarding my research while I was there and gave me Steffens (2001) book The World of Reggae
Featuring Bob Marley Treasures From Roger Steffens’ Reggae Archives to carry home. The next morning Carl emailed me with a response from Roger Steffens confirming his availability to assist me with my research.

At the time of this writing on Friday morning July 18, 2008 at 7:26 am I still cannot discern how my attraction for Carl affected my research experience. I do know that I felt vulnerable and sometimes unsure of my own motives during our interactions.

Seefari

Tom Carroll is the founder of the Seefari reggae group located in Wilberforce, Ohio. I conducted a telephone interview with him on Sunday October 7th, 2007. For purposes of this study I will refer to Tom as Seefari. I prefer that name better than Tom. Seefari has been a good friend of my sister Ashaki and my brother-in-law Haile since the mid 1980s. I met Seefari briefly in Dayton during that time.

Seefari is a middle-aged Caucasian Rasta man with long dreadlocks flowing to his knees. He has been a musician since he was a teenager. In the early 1980s Seefari began listening to Bob Marley’s music and as a result he began to profess Rastafari. He recently produced his latest CD, Rasta Italist, on which he plays all the instruments and sings lead vocals. (See figure 4.9). Of his latest CD he says, “I was trying to go for that approach that early reggae musicians had because I see that lacking in reggae now. The song writing and the presentation of the music is not what is used to be.”

In our interview he spoke highly of His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie. The first time he recalls seeing Haile Selassie was on television at the funeral of John F. Kennedy. Seefari sees Haile Selassie as an avatar of Christ, a Christ messiah personality. He says the “fact that he came back as an African King is really important because his presence
helped to restore balance in the world regarding the impression of Africa.” He says that “it’s a real important symbol to the world that we have an African Christ figure.”

I asked SeefarI what it is like to be a part of a movement that signifies Black Nationalism. He replied, “I’ve been fortunate to affiliate with a lot of Africans and Jamaicans and have been able, I think, to comprehend what the movement is about.” He says that he would like to visit Africa one day but is not motivated personally for repatriation but is certainly in favor of everyone else who is. As for Bob Marley, SeefarI says that “Bob has this universal appeal that seems to go beyond any kind of racial, religious or societal barriers, you know, rich poor, black, white from all different countries. They all love Bob.” SeefarI believes that Bob Marley is the reincarnation of Yared the great Ethiopian song writer.

Seefari believes that RastafarI has evolved over the years to a movement about all people everywhere moving to a positive place. He sees Zion as a spiritual place where all humans will be, all creation will have that oneness of God. On another note he says because RastafarI is associated with reggae music and reggae music has become very commercial, RastafarI itself has become commercialized and in that process has been marginalized to a certain extent. SeefarI appreciates dancehall music as a style of cultural expression. He feels dancehall energized the music but it became commercial and got away from Rasta.

SeefarI has never traveled to Jamaica but has met countless numbers of Jamaican RastafarI. He has reasoned with RastafarI from Twelve tribes, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Nyabinghi and Bobo Shanty. SeefarI feels a special attraction for Nyabinghi and
the Rastafarian natural way of life. He adheres to a strict vegetarian diet. Like many
Rastafarian dreadlocks bredrin (brothers), Seefari takes the vow of the Nazarene serious.

The Nazarite took a vow by which his life, for a certain time, would be devoted to
the Lord. The Nazarite law was one of the legislations of Sinai by which he as
forbidden to drink wine or strong drink, his hair must remain uncut, it being the
product of his body that is devoted to God, and he had to keep himself
ceremonially clean. (The New Analytical Bible and Dictionary of the Bible,
p. 149, 1950)

Cedric “Im” Brooks

Cedric is a well known elder Jamaican Rastafarian man, an accomplished
saxophone player, and member of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Cedric has traveled
throughout Africa, the Caribbean, the United States and Europe. He presently resides in
New York and is a member of the Skatalites band. I met Cedric in Jamaica in 1981. He
is the godfather and mentor of my children’s father, Akete. When Akete and I married in
1982, Cedric presented us with a large original wood framed Ethiopian painting depicting
four Ethiopian women preparing a meal. His band, Light of Saba, played at our wedding
reception. Akete and I have been separated for eight years.

I interviewed Cedric by telephone on Wednesday evening September 5, 2007.
We had not spoken to each other in over twenty years. Ever since I have known Cedric I
have always highly regarded his expertise and involvement in the Rastafarian community.
Cedric has traveled to Shashemene in Ethiopia. His sentiments were similar to those of
Haile’s in that he felt that Rastafarian efforts in Shashemene are challenging for the
brothers and sisters who have repatriated there. I sought his assistance at the beginning
of my study because I have always valued his wisdom and knowledge. I felt that his words would help me to validate my research experience.

Our discussion centered on the historical, spiritual, and political aspects of Rastafari and the international impact of reggae music. Cedric claims that Rasta’s acknowledgement of Haile Selassie as God is in itself a political stance. He pointed out that in Jamaica one of the main tenets of Rastafari was repatriation. Cedric stated, “Rasta philosophy itself is a part of the resistance against colonial powers and the general oppression of all people.” He reminded me that the earliest Rastas in Jamaica rejected British colonialism, criticized the local government and begin to relate directly to the Ethiopian crown.

We discussed the beginnings of reggae music in Jamaica and its evolvement to a global scale. I asked Cedric if he believes that reggae music has the power for social transformation and change. “Yes,” he replied, “it is a part of the legacy of all music.” He recalls that in Jamaica music was banned by the colonial powers because of the recognition of the communicative spirit and intensity of the music. Cedric reminded me that two of Jamaica’s national heroes, Sam Sharpe and Nanny, used the music as part of their organizing force to help peak the spirit of black people to resist slavery.

Cedric maintains that during the time of Bob Marley the music made a significant turn of the message that it brought. The image of Bob Marley became an icon unto which many people began to project a Bob Marley image. He says that people seem to idolize Bob more than His Imperial Majesty and that is something that is kind of a little bit troubling to him sometimes. Cedric said that he “needs to see a return to the real traditional drumming chanting of the Rastafari movement.”
Cedric claims that although reggae music seems static in some western countries and transformed by the system from an active revolutionary form to a passive enjoyment type of fare there are some African countries and black communities that are taking on reggae as their voice in the revolution. He states “reggae music is still very potent in a lot of the depressed black communities.”

**The Ark Band**

The Ark Band is a local reggae group with two of its founding members from the island of St. Lucia. I interviewed, Terry Bobb, one of the band’s founding members, on Thursday August 30th, 2007, at the Scarlet and Grey Café near the Ohio State University campus. Terry’s interview was the first official interview I conducted when I began this dissertation. Prior to the interview I called Terry to discuss my intended research and make arrangements for an interview. His response to my call was kind. I visited the café twice to hear the band play their regular Thursday night gig. While there I introduced myself to Terry. I also viewed the band’s website. After a follow-up telephone call to Terry, I conducted an interview with him.

Terry Bobb is a dreadlocks middle-aged brother from St. Lucia. His father and grandfather were musicians. Terry has traveled to Jamaica where he learned a wealth of knowledge regarding reggae music. He describes himself as a Biblical Christian. Though Terry does not profess Rastafarian, at the age of nineteen in St. Lucia he was thrown into jail for hailing Rastafarian and growing his dreadlocks. Terry feels that people grow dreadlocks because in their heart they decided it was a peaceful thing to do. Like many other youth who grew their dreadlocks in the early 1970s, Terry’s mom was greatly concerned about her son’s future and insisted that he be sent to America. Instead Terry
chose to go to the hills of St. Lucia and gain knowledge of Rastafari from ten Rasta men who lived in the hills of St. Lucia. I asked Terry how he came to know Rastafari in St. Lucia. He stated, “It is through Bob Marley we come to know Rasta in St. Lucia. The whole world comes to know Rasta through Bob Marley.”

In 1976 Terry moved to Brooklyn, New York. He saw Bob Marley twice at the Apollo. He says “people just worshipped Bob Marley” and “Marley is the biggest inspiration in his life.” In 1986 Terry and his brother Eustace moved to Columbus and have resided here ever since. He says that people called them Bob Marley and that Columbus was like a “breath of fresh air.” In 1987, Terry and Eustace founded the Ark Band which is now one of the longest existing reggae bands in the city (See figure 4.10). The band plays original and cover versions of calypso, reggae and soca music. The band has traveled throughout the United States, Canada and Jamaica. The Ark Band website states that their music is “designed to entertain, educate and enlighten all types of people. THE ARK BAND continues to be a dynamic force on the American scene after two decades, their songs expressing the love, peace, togetherness and spirituality needed in our world today!” I asked Terry if he thinks reggae music is transformative. He replied “reggae is a powerful peaceful music and the cry of the people.”

Reggae Concerts

During my eighteen-year residence in Jamaica, I attended countless numbers of reggae concerts. Prior to conducting my research I had only been to two reggae concerts in the four years I have resided in Columbus. For purposes of this study, I attended fourteen reggae concerts as a participant observer. The majority of shows were sponsored by Roots Records and included some of Jamaica’s finest reggae acts such as
Sizzla, Barrington Levi, Half Pint, Tony Rebel, Capleton, Luciano, Buju Banton, Ziggy Marley, The Wailers, The Meditations, and Morgan Heritage. Ten of the concerts were held at the same location in Columbus, two at Promo West, one in the Short North, and the other at The 20th Annual Reggae Festival in Dayton.

*On Sunday September, 2nd 2007 I went to Dayton for the weekend to attend the 20th annual Dayton reggae festival and visit my father. I arrived at the festival just in time to see the Ark Band’s performance. They played a mixture of salsa, calypso, with some commercial reggae tunes. The crowd was diverse, old, young, black and white. Vendors sold Rasta inspired art and craft including skull caps, red, gold, and green scarves, and T-shirts with images of Bob Marley, Marcus Garvey, and Haile Selassie on them.*

*The next day an article about the festival by Ben Southerly, (2000) Reggae Festival rocks downtown, headlined the local section in the Dayton Daily newspaper. Southerly, as well as people he interviewed for the article, had high praises for the festival. One attendee said of the festival “it’s real multicultural, multigenerational. It’s not one specific crowd the music is real kid-friendly and has a lot of positive messages.” Another attendee said she enjoyed the festival because the Rastafarian scene emphasizes peace, freedom and love, we’re all one in the big scheme of things, and at events such as the Reggae Festival, we learn to understand each other’s culture, each other’s beliefs.*

*Whereas the newspaper article stressed the positive vibes of the festival my own sentiments were slightly negative. A drunken man almost fell over my children. He eventually landed in the bushes where the police sought him out. The festival was sponsored by Michelob Beer. The heavy consumption of alcohol by the patrons was*
evident. The festival appeared to me more or less like a drunken hippy fest. I left the venue feeling disappointed. A year later when I interviewed Queen, who sets up her booth at nearly every regional reggae concert, she told me the same drunken man is there each year at the Dayton reggae festival.

At many of the reggae concerts I would be greeted warmly by people who I had interviewed for this dissertation including Queen, Matt, Carl, Jennifer, and Buck. I observed and met many continental Africans at the concerts who told me they come to reggae spaces to meet other Africans in the Diaspora.

As my attendance at the reggae concerts increased my interactions with the Rastafarian and reggae community became closer. By the time I attended His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie’s 116th earthday (birthday) celebration at Nelson Park in Columbus on Saturday July 19, 2008, I found myself fully immersed in the Rastafarian community in Columbus.

A day or so before Haile Selassie’s earthday celebration Queen asked me to make flyers for an upcoming meeting for Rastafarian sisters in Columbus. She asked for my assistance in organizing the meetings at her house in August. My seventeen-year-old daughter, Netsanet, was able to quickly create the flyer after I gave her the specifications and located a picture on the internet of Empress Menen, Haile Selassie’s wife. At 8:30 am, Saturday morning I arrived at Nelson Park hoping to catch the opening prayers for the event. Things were running late. I ended up helping out, by hanging large banners in the park depicting Rastafarian icons. I met and talked with a white dreadlocks Rastafarian guy who also practices Buddhism. I talked with the five or six African American
RastafarI brothers who were also there to set up for the event. I helped move tables and set up preparations for the food.

I went home in the early afternoon and returned to the park by four, after I picked up my brother-in-law Haile. I left again and picked up my twenty-two year-old daughter, Hirute, and returned to the park. I spent the evening video recording the events, took pictures for this dissertation, passed out flyers, got IRB consent papers signed, and had a good time. I met a RastafarI sister from Thailand who I had hoped to interview a year earlier for this study. At the time I called the sister last year she was pregnant and her doctor had prescribed bed rest. When I met her at the park on Saturday her baby girl was almost a year old, healthy, happy and beautiful. The sister told me in our short conversation at the park that there was a large following of RastafarI in Thailand. I told her a rough draft of this dissertation was due soon but I would love to hear her story about her journey to RastafarI one day. I gave her a copy of the flyer announcing a RastafarI sisters meeting in August, inviting her to come.

The event drew a fairly large crowd of RastafarI brothers and sisters as well as others. My sister Phyllis who lives in Westerville stopped by with my sister Anita who lives in Dayton carrying her grand baby in tow. RastafarI bothers played Nyabinghi drums (See figure 4.11). Haile spoke about the history of RastafarI. Queen and others served ital (natural) food. A group of African American drummers and dancers performed traditional West African music and dance. A local reggae group, The Arms Band, set up their equipment. Haile opened up that part of the show singing reggae tunes and playing guitar. I had not heard him sing in years. His voice was as strong as ever. Two local dreadlocks RastafarI sisters sang some great old Ethiopian inspired reggae
tunes. A dreadlocks brother performed some dancehall style reggae mixes. The activities ended at 9:30 pm with Haile leading the crowd singing Bob Marley’s *Redemption Song*. Prayers were conducted and Psalms were read by elder RastafarI brothers and the event came to a close.

The next day Queen called me to let me know that some RastafarI brothers and sisters would be meeting at her home that day to conduct a prayer meeting and reason about RastafarI. She wanted to know if I could come and record the session. I was too busy to do so but we made plans to gather at my home Thursday evening. The Columbus RastafarI community will be traveling to Cincinnati on Wednesday, July 23rd, 2008, to celebrate Haile Selassie’s earthday with the RastafarI community in that city. Due to my busy schedule I will not be attending.

Ghana

In 2004 I participated in a month long Ohio State University study abroad trip to Ghana. It was that trip that helped me decide the topic for this dissertation. In Ghana I observed RastafarI culture and reggae music. Wherever I went people recognized my attire signifying Rastafarian culture. I always wear an Ethiopian cross necklace, headwraps and long skirts. Reggae music was played by local bands in the hotels we stayed in. Television shows featured both local and international reggae acts. On our last evening in Accra, the capital city of Ghana, we visited a beach where reggae sessions were held every Wednesday night. I was approached by an elder Ghanaian RastafarI brother on the beach whose dialect sounded very much like Jamaican patois (Creole) mixed with words unique to RastafarI. We struck up a conversation about RastafarI and I was offered some herb to smoke which I declined in the presence of my non-RastafarI
peers. The brother was quite knowledgeable about Rastafarian culture and told me there are many brothers and sister who adhere to Rastafarian lifestyles in Ghana. However, I did observe the absence of women at the beach. When I returned from Ghana, I was determined to write my dissertation on a topic that would link Africans in the Diaspora.

Conclusion

The themes, patterns, ideas, consistencies, and inconsistencies that emerged from the narratives in this chapter were deducted primarily by a process of reflection and writing. I cannot claim that they do not reflect my personal biases. The daunting task of composing an unbiased analytical logic to ethnographic fieldwork in a culture that mirrors my own life is overwhelming. As a researcher having the intersectionality of both Rastafarian and scholar is a complex position. Especially considering that Rastafarians often reject the teachings of “Babylon’s” educational institutions as oppressive structures of colonial dominance (Edmonds, 2003). Employing Babylon’s institutionalized language I have “gone native” (Tedlock, 2003) which in itself is complex because I reject the use of the term “native” when defining myself and those who subscribe to the culture in which I study.

Janesick (2003) addresses the issue of bias by pointing out that “the qualitative researcher accepts the fact that research is ideologically driven….there is no value-free or bias-free design…. and the myth that research is objective in some way can no longer be taken seriously” (p. 56). Janesick asserts that by identifying one’s biases early in the research the qualitative researcher “articulates the ideology or conceptual frame for the study” (p. 56). Ladson-Billings (2000) aligns the outsider / insider status of scholars of color with W.E.B. Dubois’s notion of double consciousness (p. 260). Furthermore,
Lason-Billings suggest that double consciousness be read “not a pathetic state of marginalization and exclusion, but as a transcendent position allowing one to see and understand positions of inclusion and exclusion – margins and mainstreams” (p. 260). Clifford (1986) maintains, “insiders studying their own cultures offer new angles of vision and depths of understanding” (p. 9). Extending Dubois’s double consciousness notion to research paradigms, Ladson-Billings asserts that many scholars of color find themselves in an “epistemological limbo - between the old discourse and the new” (p. 267) when they make methodological decisions regarding research. Denzin and Lincoln (2002) maintain that classical ethnography has emerged from “presumptions of authority, legitimation, and rights of representation as a claim to timeless truth” (p. 3) to reflexive ethnographies that “anchor their experimental (and traditional) writing in an ongoing moral dialogue with the members of a local community” (p. 1).

Goodall (2000) discusses ethical issues of ethnography in regards to the obligations that researchers have to the respondents in their studies as well as to the readers of ethnography. Goodall is firm in his view that “authors are accountable for what they have written” on behalf of the participants in their studies as well as to the readers (p. 9). As a researcher having insider / outsider status I feel obligated to my participants to present the culture I observed and the interviews I conducted in the best possible light. I hope I have not committed, as Bruner (1993) cautions, “putting the personal self so deeply back into the text that it completely dominates, so that the work becomes narcissistic and egotistical. No one is advocating ethnographic self-indulgence” (p. 6).
Canadian researcher Carole Yawney (1995) implies that ethnographers should give up on a rigid sense of polarized notions of Rastafari centre and margin and recognize the legitimacy of evolving diasporic expressions of the movement (p. 61). Gordon and Anderson (1999) state, “Africa serves as the key symbol for the particularity of black identities, not just for a set of Afrocentric intellectuals but a wide variety of peoples who identify as black” (p. 395). They advocate an “‘ethnography’ of diaspora, conceived not simply as the ethnography of various communities of African descent but, rather, as an ethnography of various forms of diasporic politics and identification” (p. 289).

During the process of collecting data for this dissertation, I re-connected with people who I had not connected with for years. I met new people and made new friends. I interviewed a diverse group of people who all identify with Jamaica, Rastafari culture, and reggae music. I found that among Africans in the Diaspora, Rastafari aesthetics and visual culture signify a common denominator. In spaces where Rastafari aesthetics abound the red, gold, green, dreadlocks, reggae music, pictures of Haile Selassie, Bob Marley and Marcus Garvey signified among Africans in the Diaspora a space for interaction, unity, networking, and solidarity. Among non-African descendents in this study, I found a deep love for Jamaican / Rastafari culture, and reggae music and a sincere respect for a new vision of African history and culture. Like their African descended counterparts, they acknowledge and held high contributions made by black people in the struggle for social change and movement. From the little island of Jamaica, I found a diverse group of people in and outside of Columbus who identify with Rastafari’s stance against oppression and a rejection of Babylon’s institutionalized western cannons of thought and practice.
RastafarI and reggae music provides a space for the teaching of black culture and history among the majority of the people I interviewed. For some reggae, music provides a space to feel freedom even if it is just for a few hours of dancing at a reggae concert. Ethiopians, Somalis, other continental Africans, African Americans, West Indians and white Americans come together at reggae spaces to dance, socialize with each other, have a good time, and network. For some of the participants in this dissertation, RastafarI and reggae music provides a means to make a living either by selling wares, providing the music or writing about the culture. The dreadlocks jewelry vendor, who I see at most reggae and RastafarI spaces, Queen, and the RastafarI brother I met Saturday at Nelson Park who makes sandblasted mirrors, make their living by creating, buying and selling RastafarI art and craft.

For me RastafarI is one of the most dominant Diasporic practices of visual culture performed largely by people who identify with Jamaican culture. It is my hope the autoethnographic presentation of the narratives presented in this chapter have contributed to the literature that seeks to understand how various forms of “diasporic politics and identification” (Gordon & Anderson, 1999) within the African Diaspora are practiced and understood in various contexts. The practice and consumption of RastafarI culture outside of Jamaica and the interactions between agency and play are complex issues. To measure the consequences of cultural appropriation and commodification of RastafarI culture seems insignificant when compared to the impact the movement has made in the lives of the people who I interviewed.
Figure 4.1 Queen's Booth, Sister Queen and Ivy

Figure 4.2 Queen's Booth, Rasta hats

Figure 4.3 Queen’s Booth, badges and jewelry

Figure 4.4 Queen’s Booth, Rasta jewelry
International reggae artists perform in Columbus, OH
Pictures courtesy of Roots Records, Kristin Kolaczkowski
Figure 4.9 SeefarI

Figure 4.10 The Ark Band
Figure 4.11 Columbus Nyahbinghi Drummers: from left to right, Brothers Jahbo, Haile, Maha, and Lael
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

Yesterday Thursday, July 24, 2008, two RastafarI sisters and four RastafarI brothers met at my house. We gathered to discuss organizing activities in the RastafarI community in Columbus. Out of the seven of us who gathered, six are either visual or performing artists.

Tuesday, July 28, 08 2:08 am. I got a call from my sister friend Gloria from Jamaica, late yesterday afternoon. She called to tell me that Sister P Maureen Rowe passed away. Sister P, a beautiful dreadlock, Jamaican, RastafarI sister, I met when I first went to Jamaica. She was one of our Peace Corps trainers, a mentor, friend and scholar. Her contribution to the scholarly literature on gender in RastafarI is unparalleled (1998).

The purposes of this study were one, to investigate how the aesthetic codes and political values associated with indigenous Jamaican reggae rhythms and Rastafarian culture are contextualized in Columbus, Ohio. Two, to study the consequences of cultural appropriation in Columbus, Ohio, for the “integrity” or “authenticity” of original Rastafarian codes and ability to serve as a source of social solidarity and social justice for
the group which articulated it. In addition, three, to question what art educators can learn about social justice and aesthetic codes from a study of Rastafarian Culture in Columbus, Ohio.

I have provided insight into the experiences and events of my life that led me to a Rastafarian way of life. I have documented historical circumstances that link Rastafarian culture directly and indirectly to Columbus, Ohio; especially, I have provided a theoretical framework based on social movement and critical theory in which to conceptualize this study, and namely, I have documented a diverse audience of voices engaged in Rastafarian and reggae music discourse and experience. Most importantly, I have provided a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) of Rastafarian and reggae music that speaks to its contextualization in various geographic locations.

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the significance of this study to the fields of art education, cultural studies, and African and African American studies. By examining Rastafarian and reggae gatherings as community celebrations and as radical politics, I argue that a study of Rastafarian is significant to the field of art education. I begin by establishing a correlation between the visual and performing arts and Rastafarian culture. I briefly revisit contributions scholars have made regarding correlations between Rastafarian culture, reggae music and cultural appropriation and commodification. I continue by addressing the field of cultural studies as a precursor in education for the inclusion of popular culture in school curriculum. I also discuss the inclusion of an African-centered pedagogy as a significant component in education. I conclude by examining ways in which scholars are presently engaged in visual culture discourses and its impact on art education pedagogy.
The visual and performance arts are an integral component of Rastafarian culture. Edmonds (2003) states

Historically, Rastas have shown a predilection for involvement in arts and crafts. This allows many to escape working in Babylon’s economic structure, which they view as oppressive and exploitative. Also strong visual imagery and symbols form a part of the Rastafarian ethos. Thus, art in the service of religious and cultural convictions has always been essential to Rastafari. (p. 98)

Spencer (1998) states, “clearly, the new music, visual art, drama, and poetry of Rastafari are engaged in changing existing social structure outside – and these days, also inside – Rastafari (p. 277). Spencer makes a case for a direct correlation between the arts and Rastafarian culture asserting, “artists returning to an Afrocentric perspective, celebrating a hero such as Garvey in craft, chant, music, drama, drumming, and dance provides a most appropriate means for disseminating their new political aspirations and modes” (p. 278).

He continues stating:

In oral cultures, music, poetry, drama, painting, sculpture, and dance become part of the means of educating and disseminating information. When these are infused with themes that call for social change that is beneficial to many, they can transcend cultures and work powerfully to alter attitudes toward injustice and prejudice. (p. 280)

Borrowing from Eyerman and Jamison (1998), I contend, “social movements create a context in which the traditions carried through art become actualized, reinvented, and revitalized” (p. 46). Like Eyerman and Jamison, I also recognize there is a fine line between art and ideology and that the two can and should be distinguished (p. 46). Such
a fine line is nowhere more evident than in the production and consumption of reggae music.

**RastafarI, reggae music, and social change**

The issue of RastafarI and reggae music as liberating and emancipating politics has been discussed by several authors (Barrett, 1997; Campbell, 1987; Edmonds, 2003; Spencer, 1998; Van Dijk, 1998). Conversely, some scholars observe that cooptation by political and commercial forces can dilute the movement’s potential as an agent of social change (Edmonds, p. 25). One such scholar, Obiagel Lake (1998), argues, “while Diaspora Africans are grooving to the reggae beat, capitalist industries continue to prosper once again – using Africans as human capital (p. 125). Lake asserts that “in absence of an agenda that speaks to self-determination (as in control over the means of production), many people of African descent grab at the symbols of power and revolution without demanding and organizing for substantive change” (p. 123). Lake claims that the devotion that people of African descent have for reggae music compensates for the lack of any real revolutionary organization (p. 123). She maintains that though it is possible for people of African descent to organize politically she feels we have not acquired the cultural and political unity necessary to control our own destinies.

Based on my observances of RastafarI culture, reggae music, and the findings of this study I disagree with Lake’s assertions. I argue that indeed RastafarI has acquired the cultural and political unity necessary to strengthen its cause but unfortunately lacks the economic means and knowledge to do so. Based on personal conversations and experiences I have had with people for over twenty-five years regarding the RastafarI movement, I have found that more often than not, money is a primary obstacle, not unity,
in achieving change in one’s personal and collective life. On a personal level I am often taken aback especially by Rastafari brothers who in their “escape of working in Babylon’s economic structure” (Edmonds, 2003) find themselves in grim economic situations that threaten their personal and family conditions. Many Rastafari men I have met view money with negative connotations. I feel this is an unfortunate attitude among Rastafari men that hinders the progress of the movement. I question where this attitude stems from. It could be rooted in the biblical adage that “money is the root of all evil.” On the other hand, it could be the result of a more complex set of conditions rooted in social / historical circumstances and lack of educational pedagogies that positively encourage black males to achieve and become all who they can become.

Cultural studies and the popular

Cultural studies theorists Lawrence Grossberg (1992) and Henry Giroux (1992) cast contemporary cultural studies as a site in education for the practice of critical pedagogy and inquiry through the study of popular culture. Scholars of Cultural studies argue popular culture is one of the principle sites where divisions of ethnicity, gender, generation, sexuality and social class are established and contested; that is, popular culture is an arena of struggle and negotiation between the interests of dominant groups and the interests of subordinate groups (Storey, p. 4). Cultural studies sets popular culture between the interests of a dominant capitalist ideology and the production and consumption of culture as practiced by and lived by the “people.” Giroux argues, cultural studies has implications “for providing a set of categories that deepens the radical democratic project of schooling while theoretically advancing the discourse and practice of critical pedagogy as a form of cultural politics” (p. 164). Giroux (1994) states:
“pedagogy in the more critical sense illuminates the relationship among knowledge, authority, and power. It draws attention to questions concerning who has control over the conditions for the production of knowledge” (p. 30). He continues: “it draws attention to the ways in which knowledge, power, desire, and experience are produced under specific basic conditions of learning” (p. 30). Giroux and Simon (1989) argue, “critical educators need to retheorize the importance of popular culture as a central category for both understanding and developing a theory and practice of critical pedagogy (p. 4). Beverly Gordon (1993) makes a claim similar to Giroux and Simon (1989). Gordon argues, “in popular culture, film, literature, and music seem to provide alternative ways of seeing the world and the struggle for authenticity among ordinary people” (p. 223).

Implications for Art Educators

Art educators (Duncum, 1987; Freedman, 2003; Lanier, 1969; Tavin, 2003) argue popular culture should be incorporated into the general art education curriculum. In the article, “What, Even Dallas? Popular Culture Within the Art Curriculum” Duncum (1987) used the popular television show Dallas to study popular culture. Duncum maintains a study of Dallas “could take students to the very heart of social structure” (p. 14). Duncum further suggests, “students should study not only popular culture, but posters, banners, videos, and so forth, produced by the poor, powerless, and unsuccessful who operate from alternative or resistant positions” (p. 14). A study of Rastafari and reggae music offers the same possibilities for studying the material, musical, and visual culture of a population of people who operate from a resistant position.

Adding to this discussion, Paula Rosenblum (1981) in the article “Popular Culture and Art Education,” states:
The popular arts should be included in the art curriculum for a variety of reasons: the popular arts facilitate the aesthetic experience; their content is of relevance to the students and through criticism, can lead to a more critical analysis of these and other art forms; the popular arts allow students to talk about emotionally meaningful concerns; they can aid in the student understanding of his culture as well as the cultures of other peoples; the popular arts can provide the art curriculum with material of great social relevance. (p. 10)

In the article “Microethnography of a Grateful Dead Event: American Subculture Aesthetics”, Deborah Smith-Shank (2003) examines the “artworld created by participants in, and visitors to, the Grateful Dead experience” (p. 82). In some ways, my study of RastafarI culture and reggae music is similar to Smith-Shank’s study of the Grateful Dead aesthetic. Like the Grateful Dead artworld described in Smith-Shank’s article, RastafarI and reggae music artworlds are generally “unfamiliar cultural systems having tentative connections of the mainstream artworld” (p. 89). Smith-Shank argues: “describing the aesthetic experience of an alien culture could be an invaluable tool for art education” (p. 89). Smith-Shank contends the Grateful Dead artworld that surrounds the concerts are “rich sources of information about what, how, and why art is made” and that “by extending the boundaries of art education to include the exploration of small cultures and the arts is a giant step toward understanding the continuing development of civilization” (p. 89).

In addition to the Grateful Dead article, Smith-Shank’s (2003) “Community Celebrations as Ritual Signifiers” can serve as a model to examine RastafarI celebrations.
In the article, Smith-Shank argues celebrations are essential to a culture’s survival (p. 59).

Smith-Shank states:

Community-based fairs and festivals celebrate one or more aspects of what a community identifies as important. The communion and juxtaposition of complex visual signifiers identify the community to which they are connected and its members. The celebrations invites participants to know themselves as members of a unique small culture within the framework of the cultures at large, and to acquire signifiers that let other know of their affiliation. (p. 60)

Smith-Shank proposes suggestions for pedagogy in her article. She provides the example of a third grade teacher who uses holidays and celebrations as an interdisciplinary program that integrates art with all areas of the curriculum. Smith-Shank contends teachers can assist students understanding of the ways in which cultures are created, maintained and transformed by studying community celebrations (p. 63).

On the Ohio State University campus dreadlocks are a familiar site, worn by white and black students. I recall a young female white student in the second year writing class I taught at Ohio State who wore dreadlocks. She knew very little about the history of Rastafarian and Jamaican culture. I encouraged her to write her final paper about Rastafarian and dreadlocks. The results of her study yielded valuable information she shared with her peers in a final presentation. The student and her peers were all the more knowledgeable about Rastafarian culture by that student’s search for her own understanding of a culture thousands of miles away.

In “Festivals as Artistic Events”, Mary Jane Bolin and Raymond D. Dunstan (1985) make observations regarding festivals, the artworld and education. They maintain
the collective behaviors of festivals have not received the attention they deserve in art circles (p. 33). In the article Bolin and Dunstan give examples of pilot programs in East Harlem, New York and suburban New Jersey elementary and middle schools where educators and students used festivals as a model for pedagogy. Students in these schools used the study of festivals, which culminated in festivals presented by students to celebrate the accomplishments and conclusions of the school year. In the process, students studied and discussed local and national events such as the Rose Bowl Parade, Puerto Rican Day Parade and New York’s Harlem Day Parade. Workshops and guest speakers such as museum educators, actors, artists and musicians were invited to the schools were the programs were initiated.

Vincent Lanier (1969) maintains popular music is an art form that provides an “aesthetic vehicle by means of which young people speak to each other and to themselves of what they conceive to be relevant, vital issues” (p. 316). Lanier suggest the study and production of popular visual art can help change a school environment “from hostile environments for youth, breeding alienation, to ones which supports a meaningful examination of social issues relevant to the young and helping to reform society” (p. 319). Though Elsa Bowman (1989) bemoans the demise of classical music in school programs she does, however, suggest the study of popular music can leas to critical analysis. Bowman asserts, by studying the production rock concerts as models, schools could produce their own senses of community. She states, “the excitement and sense of belonging created by media events like BAND-AID and Hands Across America, could be co-opted by schools creating their own events and celebrations” (p. 122).
In Jamaica, at Ferncourt High School, where I taught arts and crafts, I initiated several such activities similar to what Bowman describes in her article. By using popular Jamaican music, visual and performing arts, students learned the importance of creating a sense of community for the school by staging concerts and fund-raising activities. Not only did the students realize the significance of creating a sense of community at their school, they were able to raise funds to purchase equipment for their performing arts group.

Afrocentricity

George Sefa Dei (1994) states Afrocentricity is the “validation of African experiences and histories, as well as a critique of the continued exclusion and marginalization of African knowledge systems from educational texts, mainstream academic knowledge and scholarship” (p. 5). Rastafari community gatherings and reggae music provide spaces for newcomers and seasoned members to learn about black history and culture. In the process of researching this study, I too learned more about African and African American history and culture. I learned about John Robinson, an African American aviator from Chicago, whose commitment against the Italian invasion of Ethiopia lead him to pilot military and errands for Haile Selassie during the invasion. I also learned about Janet Braggs, an African American female aviator in Chicago, who hosted over one hundred Ethiopian students in her home between 1947 and 1974. Her commitment to Ethiopia’s war efforts against Italy’s invasion, lead her to visit Ethiopia in 1955. She returned to Chicago, months later, as Ethiopia’s honorary consul general in Chicago (Gebrekidan, 2005). My knowledge of the events and people who influenced Ethiopianism in the African Diaspora was amplified.
In her article “The necessity of African American Epistemology for Educational Theory,” Beverly Gordon (1990) makes the following observations regarding African centered pedagogy:

African educational theory goes hand in hand with African-American epistemology: the study or theory of the knowledge generated out of the African-American existential condition, that is of the knowledge and cultural artifacts produced by African-Americans based in African-American cultural, social, economic, historical, and political experience. A wealth of literature and information exists that could inform educational research and have practical teaching implications. Outside of the field of education, the generation of knowledge in literature, music, and history produced by African-American men and women has powerful pedagogical implications. (p. 3)

Angela Walters (1996), a white scholar from New Mexico, describes how she learned African history from listening to reggae music in the article “How I Learned African History from Reggae.” Walters maintains that in her school in New Mexico, African history began with the Middle Passage and ended with the civil rights movement (p. 43). She states from reggae she learned facts about Africa “that ideally should have been an integral part of her education but were decidedly not” (p. 44). Walters praises reggae musicians for disseminating stories of African history, culture, slavery, racism, struggle, and victory. Walters maintains, “reggae is part of popular culture primarily being heard among today’s youth, which is an ideal place to confront and besiege racism” (p. 44). Peter Murrell (2002) argues that an African-centered pedagogy is necessary for African American children to confront the ideology of racism. I argue that African-
centered knowledge is necessary for all children to “confront the ideology of racism” and RastafarI and reggae music provide vehicles of expression for confronting such issues.

A Possibility of Hope

Throughout this chapter, I have provided an analysis of the intersections between popular culture, art education and the study of RastafarI culture as contributions to the ongoing discourse of visual culture. In the body of this dissertation, I have described how RastafarI has emerged as a black socio-political movement in Jamaica to a contemporary cultural phenomenon popularly associated with the genre of reggae music. I argue there remains in the face of appropriation of RastafarI culture through reggae music a possibility of hope for the movement’s liberating and emancipatory politics. Paul Gilroy (1991) maintains the study of Rastafarian culture gives prominent place to issues of gender conflict, sexuality, and eroticism (p. 199). Gilroy argues: “Rasta comprises a radical politics capable of universalizing the issue of emancipation beyond the primary question of racial or ethnic particularity” (p. 198). From my personal experiences in Jamaica, Ghana, and cities in America, I have felt a sense of belonging among RastafarI regardless of geographical location. Even at a reggae session in Brazil where my age and appearance were much different from other patrons, I was welcomed warmly with open arms.

RastafarI community gatherings and reggae music events are sites of symbolic and liberating expressions. RastafarI greet each other with expressions of “peace and love” and refer to each other as brothers and sisters. I have never witnessed an act of violence at RastafarI gatherings or reggae events. I usually shun large crowds but in the midst of a jam-packed reggae concert, I can still find a great sense of peace and pleasure.
At Rastafari community gatherings and celebrations, I find a sense of comfort in the company of people who share the same ideologies, social issue concerns, eating habits, and affinity for reggae music as I do. Reggae concerts appeal to my musical tastes and aesthetic preferences. At reggae concerts I can “let my hair down,” sing along with the songs, dance, and have fun. The lyrics of reggae music speak of love, “romance,” justice, equal rights, black ideology, mother earth, and sometimes just about having a good time. Rastafarian community gatherings and celebrations provide spaces for the expressions of a community of people who share the same beliefs. At Rastafari gatherings and reggae concerts, I find myself in the company of people who share the same concerns I do about respecting the environment and ushering in a world free of war, oppression, and inequality.

In the article “If You See Something Say Something: Visual Culture, Public Pedagogy and the War of Terror,” Tavin and Robbins (2006) discuss a critical pedagogy that encompasses a possibility of hope. Tavin’s and Robbins’s description of classrooms imagined in critical education circles as sites for the “mobilization of concrete hope and production of subjects capable of recognizing and responding to social injustice and human suffering” (p. 104) is commonly familiar to Rastafari reasoning. Fundamental to Rastafari discourse are the spaces that address issues of injustice and human suffering and sustain a possibility of hope.

Reflexivity

3:50 am Sunday, August 24, 2008. On Thursday afternoon, August 14, I passed my final oral exam. In other words, I successfully defended my dissertation in the company of five Ohio State University professors. I am thankful the process is complete.
After the exam my adviser, Terry Barrett, and I discussed the suggestions that emerged during the oral defense of my research. I needed to reflect further on my initial research questions, especially question number three; what can a study of Rastafarian Culture in Columbus, Ohio, teach art educators about social justice and aesthetic codes? I ponder the question: “What did this study teach me, an art educator, about social justice and aesthetic codes?”

Saturday, August 30, 2008, 12:56am. Spencer (1998) argues music, poetry, drama, painting, sculpture, and dance are means of educating and disseminating information and when the arts are infused with themes that benefit social change it (art) can transcend cultures and work powerfully to alter attitudes toward injustices and prejudice (p. 280). While I find it difficult to articulate exactly what I have learned about social justice and aesthetic codes through this study, I do know that the study of art, social movement, and theory results in meaningful knowledge. A study of the artifacts a culture creates and the values associated with those artifacts are meaningful ways to engage learners. Teachers can challenge themselves and their students to examine existing images and aesthetic codes in regards to how such images may or may not signify social justice and change. Students can be encouraged to create their own aesthetic codes and images that promote social justice in hopes of affecting positive social change. It is my hope that those who read this study can benefit from its approach and use its methods inside traditional classroom walls, as well as museum spaces and community based projects to promote positive change.
Questions for further research

A diverse set of questions arise from this study for further research. Some that come to my mind include; how can issues of racism be addressed and confronted through popular culture in the classroom? How and where does teaching and learning occur? How do the intersections between play, agency, and consumption affect learning? What are the implications for an interdisciplinary approach to the study of art and community-based education? Moreover, how can an African-centered pedagogy benefit learning?

Much of this study is based on an interdisciplinary approach to learning. When I began this research, I was convinced its interdisciplinary approach would make the connections between art, education, reggae, and a study of RastafarI clear. However, as the research progressed, I was often asked, “how are you going to bring this around to art education?” Or, in an exclamation of surprise someone would say, “Oh really, your dissertation is coming out of art education?” I would quickly let them know that I minor in African and African American studies. I could not understand why the connection was not as clear to others as I thought it should be. Sometimes I doubted myself. However, as I conclude this portion of my research I realize how my personal preferences for the aesthetics associated with RastafarI and reggae music resulted in what I hope is a meaningful document.

The community in Columbus whose members contributed to this study comprises a diverse network of people who in many instances know each other and share some of the same views regarding the struggle for liberation and a world free from oppression. My study engaged me in the community as a researcher and participant. As a result, I have been asked by RastafarI in Columbus to help organize and continue to document the
activities and events in the RastafarI community in Columbus. I ponder the effects of teaching and learning in community-based, art-driven projects where educators become engaged.

I question how and where does teaching and learning occur and how do the intersections between play, agency, and consumption affect learning? How would a teacher practically engage reggae and RastafarI in the classroom to confront racism and teach history? I like to imagine what a unit plan in a classroom of elementary school students would look like if their music unit included genres of music including reggae as well as “classical” and other diverse choices. I consider the ways teachers might ask students to engage themselves in their daily lives in and outside the classroom to find satisfaction and learning in the critique of their own popular culture preferences or of a community, they might choose to study.

I consider how African American males might benefit from a unit plan on Pan-African thought that included the teachings of Haile Selassie, Marcus Garvey, Kwame Nkrumah, Malcolm X, Bob Marley, and other Diasporic blacks. What types of artistic community-based productions and entrepreneurial activities would black males be engaged in if African and African American history provided the cornerstone of their formal education? Further research of these questions and others are needed to determine where and how possibilities for teaching and learning occur in and outside of classroom walls.
APPENDIX A

CONSENT TO PARTICPATE IN RESEARCH
Current Consent Form
The Ohio State University Consent to Participate in Research

Study Title: A Study of Rastafarian Culture in Columbus, Ohio
Researcher: Ivy Chevers
Sponsor:

This is a consent form for research participation. It contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate.

Your participation is voluntary.
Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and will receive a copy of the form.

Purpose:
The purpose of this research is to study Rastafarian culture in Columbus, Ohio. An aim of the study is to document the use of visual, material and popular culture of Rastafarian people. Another purpose of this study is to analyze how Rastafarian culture evolves as it travels from one geographic location to another.

Procedures/Tasks:
Taped oral history interviews will be conducted with individual Rastafarians. You will be asked permission to have your picture taken as well as pictures of the arts and crafts you produce. Audio tape recordings will be made during the interviews. The transcribed tape recordings and photographic images will be used in my dissertation, conference presentations and publication/journal articles related to this study.

Duration:
Each interview should take from two to three hours. You may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with The Ohio State University.

Risks and Benefits:
There are no risks involved in this study. This study will provide the first documented history of Rastafarians in Columbus.
Article I. Confidentiality:

Efforts will be made to keep your study-related information confidential. However, there may be circumstances where this information must be released. For example, personal information regarding your participation in this study may be disclosed if required by state law. Also, your records may be reviewed by the following groups (as applicable to the research):

- Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies;
- The Ohio State University Institutional Review Board or Office of Responsible Research Practices;
- The sponsor, if any, or agency (including the Food and Drug Administration for FDA-regulated research) supporting the study.

Incentives:

Your participation in this study will provide perspectives about the Rastafarian community in Columbus that would otherwise not be available.

Article II. Participant Rights:

You may refuse to participate in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you are a student or employee at Ohio State, your decision will not affect your grades or employment status.

If you choose to participate in the study, you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. By signing this form, you do not give up any personal legal rights you may have as a participant in this study.

An Institutional Review Board responsible for human subjects research at The Ohio State University reviewed this research project and found it to be acceptable, according to applicable state and federal regulations and University policies designed to protect the rights and welfare of participants in research.

Article III. Contacts and Questions:

For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you may contact:

Dr. Terry Barrett at (614) 292-7183 or barrett.8@osu.edu and Ivy Chevers at (614) 351-0764 or chevers.2@osu.edu.

For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact Ms. Sandra Meadows in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-800-678-6251.
If you are injured as a result of participating in this study or for questions about a study-related injury, you may contact Ivy Chevers.

**Signing the consent form:**

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form and I am aware that I am being asked to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I will be given a copy of this form.

By signing this document and checking the box I agree to give permission for public use of my real name, identifiable images, and voice recordings for this research as well as for conference papers and publications/journal articles related to this research.

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**Investigator/Research Staff**

I have explained the research to the participant or his/her representative before requesting the signature(s) above. There are no blanks in this document. A copy of this form has been given to the participant or his/her representative.

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APPENDIX B

LETTER AND QUESTIONNAIRE
To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Ivy Chevers. I am a graduate student in the Department of Art Education at The Ohio State University. I would like to interview you to gather information regarding your interests in Rastafarian culture. I am collecting data about the everyday practices and rituals of individual Rastafarians. I am interested in collecting information regarding your beliefs as a member of the Rastafarian community. As part of this research I am also gathering information regarding your use of Rastafarian visual, material and popular culture artifacts.

You will initially be asked to participate in one, two hour interview. With your permission I may need to request a second interview if I find I have additional questions. In the interview, which will be taped with your permission, you will be asked to discuss your experiences and beliefs as a Rastafarian.

The results of this interview will be used for my dissertation, conference presentations and publication/journal articles related to this study. The minimum age requirement to participate in this study is eighteen. When my research is complete I will ensure the privacy of the tapes by keeping them solely in my possession or make other arrangements to your satisfaction and consent.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact me either by mail, e-mail, or telephone. One copy of this form is yours to keep. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Ivy Chevers
Graduate Student
Department of Art Education
The Ohio State University
(614) 292-7183 (Art Education Department)
(614) 351-0764 (home)
(614) 208-5853 (cell)
chevers.2@osu.edu
SAMPLE BASELINE QUESTIONS

What circumstances lead you to becoming a Rastafarian?

How long have you been involved in Rastafarian culture?

Are there any particular people who influenced you to become a Rastafarian? If so, who?

Could you tell me about some of the experiences you have had as a Rastafarian?

What does being a Rastafarian mean to you?

Are you a member of a particular group of Rastafarians? If yes, describe the functions of the group you belong to.

What are your Rastafarian beliefs?

Have you traveled to Jamaica or Africa? If so, describe your experiences there.

Do you prescribe to a particular diet? If so, describe the diet and tell me why you prescribe to that diet?

How would you describe a typical day as a Rastafarian?

What type of Rastafarian activities do you participate in? Describe them.

Are you a member of the Ethiopian World Federation, The Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Twelve Tribes, The Nyabingi House or any other Rastafarian community? If so, please describe your affiliation with that particular community.

How often do participate in Rastafarian activities?

Do you celebrate Rastafarian holidays? (Ethiopian Christmas, the Coronation of His Imperial Majesty, Bob Marley Day, etc.)

What types of Rastafarian visual artifacts do you have in your home or use in your everyday life? What do these visual artifacts mean to you?

Are you a reggae music enthusiast? If so, tell me, who are the reggae musicians you listen to and when you first started to listen to reggae music?

How would you describe some of the places you attend to listen to reggae music?
In what ways, if any, has your involvement in Rastafarian culture led to any changes in your lifestyle?

Has your involvement in Rastafarian culture led you to participate in any social justice issues that reflect your commitment to Rastafarian beliefs?

Considering your knowledge of authentic Rastafarian culture how do you think Rastafarian practices evolve when practiced by people in your country?
APPENDIX C

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL
Dear Dr. Barrett,

The Behavioral IRB APPROVED BY EXPEDITED REVIEW the above referenced protocol. The Board was able to provide expedited approval under 45 CFR 46.110(b)(1) because the research presents minimal risk to subjects and qualifies under the expedited review category(s) listed below.

Date of IRB Approval: February 8, 2008
Date of IRB Approval Expiration: February 8, 2009
Expedited Review Category: 6,7

If applicable, informed consent (and HIPAA research authorization) must be obtained from subjects or their legally authorized representatives and documented prior to research involvement. The IRB-approved consent form and process must be used.

Changes in the research (e.g., recruitment procedures, advertisements, enrollment numbers, etc.) or informed consent process must be approved by the IRB before they are implemented (except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects).

This approval is valid for one year from the date of IRB review when approval is granted or modifications are required. The approval will no longer be in effect on the date listed above as the IRB expiration date. A Continuing Review application must be approved within this interval to avoid expiration of IRB approval and cessation of all research activities.

A final report must be provided to the IRB and all records relating to the research (including signed consent forms) must be retained and available for audit for at least 3 years after the research has ended. It is the responsibility of the investigator to promptly report to the IRB any serious, unexpected and related adverse events or potential unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.

This approval is issued under The Ohio State University’s OHRP Federal wide Assurance #00006378.
All forms and procedures can be found on the ORRP website – www.orrp.osu.edu. Please feel free to contact the IRB staff contact listed above with any questions or concerns.

Shari R. Speer, PhD, Chair
Behavioral and Social Sciences Institutional Review Board

Behavioral and Social Sciences Institutional Review Board
Office of Responsible Research Practices
300 Research Foundation
1960 Kenny Road
Columbus, OH 43210-1063
Phone (614) 688-8457
Fax (614) 688-0366
www.orrp.osu.edu
APPENDIX D

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD RE-APPROVAL
Dear Dr. Barrett,

The Behavioral IRB APPROVED BY EXPEDITED REVIEW the above referenced protocol. The Board was able to provide expedited approval under 45 CFR 46.110(b)(1) because the research presents minimal risk to subjects and qualifies under the expedited review category(s) listed below.

Date of IRB Approval: March 14, 2007  
Date of IRB Approval Expiration: February 27, 2008  
Expedited Review Category: 6, 7

If applicable, informed consent (and HIPAA research authorization) must be obtained from subjects or their legally authorized representatives and documented prior to research involvement. The IRB-approved consent form and process must be used.

Changes in the research (e.g., recruitment procedures, advertisements, enrollment numbers, etc.) or informed consent process must be approved by the IRB before they are implemented (except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects).

This approval is valid for one year from the date of IRB review when approval is granted or modifications are required. The approval will no longer be in effect on the date listed above as the IRB expiration date. A Continuing Review application must be approved within this interval to avoid expiration of IRB approval and cessation of all research activities.

A final report must be provided to the IRB and all records relating to the research (including signed consent forms) must be retained and available for audit for at least 3 years after the research has ended. It is the responsibility of the investigator to promptly report to the IRB any serious, unexpected and related adverse events or potential unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.

This approval is issued under The Ohio State University’s OHRP Federal wide Assurance #00006378.
All forms and procedures can be found on the ORRP website – www.orrp.osu.edu. Please feel free to contact the IRB staff contact listed above with any questions or concerns.

Shari R. Speer, PhD, Chair
Behavioral and Social Sciences Institutional Review Board

Behavioral and Social Sciences Institutional Review Board
Office of Responsible Research Practices
300 Research Foundation
1960 Kenny Road
Columbus, OH 43210-1063
Phone (614) 688-8457
Fax (614) 688-0366
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APPENDIX E

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL: BRAZIL AND JAMAICA
Approval Amend
Version 11/28/06
June 4, 2008
Protocol Number: 2007B0034
Protocol Title: A STUDY OF RASTAFARIAN CULTURE IN COLUMBUS, OHIO,
Terry T Barrett,
        Ivy E Chevers, Art Education.
Request to amend the protocol dated 05/27/08—Add interviews in
Brazil and Jamaica
Type of Review: Amendment—Expedited
Approval Date: June 3, 2008
IRB Staff Contact: Jacob R. Stoddard
        Phone: 614-292-0526
        Email: stoddard.13@osu.edu

Dear Dr. Barrett,

The Behavioral and Social Sciences IRB APPROVED the above referenced protocol. In addition; the protocol has been approved for a waiver of documentation of the consent process for Mr. Basil Walters.

Note that if applicable, informed consent (and HIPAA research authorization) must be obtained from subjects or their legally authorized representatives and documented prior to research involvement. The IRB-approved consent form and process must be used. Changes in the research (e.g., recruitment procedures, advertisements, enrollment numbers, etc.) or informed consent process must be approved by the IRB before they are implemented (except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects).

It is the responsibility of the investigator to promptly report to the IRB any serious, unexpected and related adverse events or potential unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.

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The Jamaica Cultural Alliance Website

The Ohio Historical Society Website