REGGAE IN THE MOTOR CITY: THE AFROPOLITAN AESTHETICS OF REGGAE IN DETROIT, MI

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ABSTRACT

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Reggae, though it originated on a small Caribbean island, has extended far beyond its origins in Jamaica. Not long after its inception, this music became disseminated through popular commercial channels, which facilitated reggae's global presence and exposed it to a wide and diverse audience. In conjunction with its far-reaching appeal, reggae's origins in the black, Jamaican, working-class community and its connections to the Afrocentric faith known as Rastafari have also allowed this music to serve as a tool for pan-African expression. In addition, reggae has been used by marginalized populations, both in Jamaica and abroad, as a critical voice against oppressive forces. With these factors in mind, I examine the people and places associated with reggae music and culture in Detroit, Michigan, how reggae is used as a social unifier there, and the ways in which these practices fit into the larger scheme of reggae as a globally circulated musical form. I use the theoretical orientation of Afropolitanism to discuss the aesthetics and politics of reggae in Detroit and as a global art form.

Through ethnographic research, which focuses on certain key figures and locations associated with Detroit reggae, I determine how various groups participating in the reggae scene in Detroit use this music and its associated culture to orient themselves, both in Detroit and in relation to reggae as a global phenomenon. I ask, what does this music mean to its participants? How is it used to construct personal and group identity? How does what is happening in Detroit relate to reggae music's larger global narrative?

Through my work I conclude that Detroit is an important, globally connected site for the production of black culture, albeit a culture that often finds itself in a marginalized position—both in Detroit and in the world at large. I find that reggae, while not being a powerfully influential force in Detroit, plays a significant role in generating a sense of community within this context, particularly as concerns Detroit's non-contiguous Afro-Caribbean community. Furthermore, reggae music works to connect places like Detroit to a larger African and Afro-diasporic world.

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I would like to thank first and foremost the Detroit reggae community for allowing me to participate in their scene. This access was instrumental in my work. I would like to thank my family, and particularly my parents and my brother Peter, for supporting my efforts throughout this process. Without you this would not have been possible. I also thank Beth Raps for always pushing me towards something more and for her undying commitment towards helping me in this and in so many other endeavors. Last I would like to thank my advisor and teacher, Sidra Lawrence, for her invaluable instruction and always working with me towards my academic success, and Katherine Meizel, for all her kindness and guidance.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

My phone buzzes. It's a text from King Mellowman about a rehearsal for his reggae group, Mellow Runnings. I mark the time and address in my calendar. The afternoon of the rehearsal I drive the seventy-five or so miles from Bowling Green, Ohio to Detroit, Michigan, stopping along the way for some gas and a coffee. Before long I find myself in the northwestern part of Detroit, in the Dexter-Linwood area. Here I encounter tree-shaded streets lined with big brick houses, many of which appear to be uninhabited and in disrepair. The place seems quiet given the size of the neighborhood. I park my '89 Pontiac across from the address I was given, shoot Mellowman a text, and walk to the door. Mellow (which is what everyone calls him) meets me there and takes me upstairs.

One reason that I'm here today, apart from meeting Mellowman's band and watching rehearsal, is to get acquainted with Idris Nia, a reggae and dancehall DJ. Mellow has been helping me find my way around the Detroit reggae scene and thought Idris would be a good person for me to interview because he is one of the older members of the community. He was right. Idris is a bright-eyed intellectual, very knowledgeable about reggae music and its place in Detroit. My voice recorder on the table beside us, Idris fills me in on some history and details of the scene while his grandson plays at his feet. Idris has been involved with Detroit reggae for quite a while and is a font of knowledge on that subject and many others. Our interview eventually comes to a conclusion and I hear some of the musicians warming up on the third floor. I head upstairs to check it out.

Detroit is a city that is often characterized through a narrative of decline and resurgence. Its so-called "renaissance" is evident in the condition of the city center, which, to me, resembles

a pinball machine with all the lights from the casinos, theatres, and sports stadiums, the bustle of the traffic, and the ever-present hum of the overhead elevated tram. Development can be noted in the Midtown corridor, on the campus of Wayne State University and through the windows of the boutique restaurants and shops that surround it. Dexter-Linwood seems to have been left out of this refurbishment scheme somehow. The large, well-built houses attest to a time when this neighborhood was an affluent Detroit suburb, but its current state indicates that it was not part of recent redevelopment efforts. It is a place pushed to the margins and neglected, but it is also a place where I observed a coming together of family and community; a place where I observed educated, talented, and engaged artists perfecting their work and supporting each other's efforts.

Here is where Detroit reggae resides, not occupying a central position within the city but occupying a central position to those who are involved with it. It operates as a unifying device for a tight-knit community of practitioners and participants who do not always share geographic connections with one another or the revitalized aspects of the city in which they live. These individuals use reggae as a space of shared identity among themselves and with certain larger global movements with which their music aligns. And they use reggae as a voice with which to project this identity, throughout their city as well as to the world.

Detroit can be understood both as a cosmopolitan city and as a city with central importance to the black diaspora. Marked by its connections to African and Afro-diasporic culture and modes of being, it can be understood through the analytical frame of Afropolitanism. Afropolitanism is a set of theoretical and practical orientations that characterize how scholars and artists make sense of a distinctly African set of global circulations. As I will argue, reggae music in Detroit can be convincingly interpreted through this framework, both because of its history and circulations, and because of the ways that it references blackness and Africanity in its

performance articulations. Many aspects of reggae music and culture, and specifically through its association with the Rastafarian religion, are emblematic of black and African aesthetics and cultural values. This, in conjunction with reggae's status as a globally important popular music, allows it to function broadly as a cultural voice of pan-Africanism and as an Afropolitan expressive mode. Reggae music as it is found in Detroit serves this same function, while also being an important unifier for the Detroit Caribbean community and as a mouthpiece for the city's marginalized black inhabitants.

Reggae music began in the black working-class neighborhoods of Kingston, Jamaica. Since its inception, it has been disseminated across the globe, with communities in Africa and the diaspora using the genre as a node for creating shared space and identity. Reggae is an important vehicle for black expression and community. When considering the role of reggae in community building, we can look towards the urban centers of the diaspora in order to think about how the music structures social engagement, identity, and articulating relationships to other parts of the African world.

In this thesis I examine the reggae music scene in Detroit, Michigan, looking specifically at the ways reggae music and the spaces associated with its performance serve to connect different African diasporas in a city that often marginalizes those populations. The types of identities and circulations inherent to reggae are reflected through the development of these communities, and in this way reggae—a local popular music originating on a small Caribbean island—articulates a set of new and multiple meanings through its expression in Detroit. I examine these relationships through the lens of Afropolitanism and through the global circulation of reggae music and culture. I argue that we can look to notable reggae figures and the circulations of their music in order to substantiate the claims of Afropolitanism as a productive

lens through which to read cross-cultural community building. By situating Detroit reggae artists and audiences against the backdrop of such global circulation, I intend to demonstrate the particularities of Detroit's reggae community and the webs of connections formed throughout the African diasporas.

Theoretical Framing

In order to make my arguments and situate my ethnographic work, I draw from interdisciplinary models provided by ethnomusicology, diaspora studies, and popular music studies. Ethnomusicology—through the work of scholars such as Lise Waxer, Michael Largey, and Wayne Marshall, among others—has discussed the circulation of Caribbean music, including reggae, throughout the Caribbean as well as to various other parts of the globe.[1] Ethnomusicologists have also concerned themselves with diasporic formations and the ways music and culture are shared and altered through these constructs.[2] I utilize these concepts as a foundation for examining the ways reggae music facilitates exchange between different diasporic communities (African, Afro-Caribbean) in Detroit and how the Detroit reggae scene is part of a larger network of Caribbean music circulations. One of the connective tissues at play in this dynamic is Afropolitan identity. In order to situate the Afropolitan expressions, aesthetics, and identities of Detroit reggae, while accounting for the tensions of racialized and class-based

[1]Lise Waxer, ed., *Situating Salsa: Global Markets and Local Meaning in Latin Popular Music* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Lise Waxer, "*En Conga, Bonga y Campana*: The Rise of Colombian Salsa," *Latin American Music Review* 21, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2000): 118-168; Peter Manuel, and Michael Largey, *Caribbean Currents: Caribbean Music from Rumba to Reggae*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2016); Raquel Z. Rivera, Wayne Marshall, and Deborah Pacini Hernandez, eds., *Reggaeton* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); Dick Hebdige, *Cut 'n' Mix:Culture, Identity and Caribbean Music* (New York: Routledge, 1987); Bob W. White, "Congolese Rumba and Other Cosmopolitanisms," *Cashiers d'Études Africaines*, no. 168 (2002).

[2] Thomas Turino, "Introduction: Identity and the Arts in Diaspora Communities," in *Identity and the Arts in Diaspora Communities*, ed. Thomas Turino and James Lea (Warren, MI: Harmonie Park Press, 2004), 3-19; Peter Manuel, "The Construction of a Diasporic Tradition: Indo-Caribbean 'Local Classical Music,'" *Ethnomusicology* 44, no.1 (Winter 2000): 97-119; Ingrid Monson, ed., *The African Diaspora: A Musical Perspective*, (New York: Garland, 2000).

regulations in the city, I bring in Sidra Lawrence's concept of "marginalized Afropolitanism" in order to better frame this discussion.[3]

The concept of Afropolitanism is informed by the concept of Cosmopolitanism, which, as understood by ethnomusicologists, deals with the exchange of local cultural ideas and ways of being that are globally dispersed and circulated. Those involved in a cosmopolitan identity formation may not always live in close proximity to one another or share a unified sense of home but are connected through shared practices.[4] These shared practices are typically conglomerations of technologies and stylistic expressions—like musical instruments, musical styles, and the cultural modes attached to musical genres—that are circulated globally yet coalesce into a definable whole that can be seen as new and transnational while retaining certain local characteristics.[5] In general, cosmopolitan musical formations are understood as those that circulate outside of their immediate space of production, those that employ global sign systems, and those that articulate identities not confined to locality.[6] Though there has historically been a correlation between mobility and cosmopolitanism, not all cosmopolitanisms rely upon the mobility of their actors,[7] but often rely on a movement of cultural ideas and products. The way in which reggae music is expressed and experienced by and through the people and places associated with its performance in Detroit can be understood as cosmopolitan, as the performances and spaces draw from both the discourses associated with Detroit as a black global

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[3] Sidra Lawrence, "Afropolitan Detroit: Counterpublics, Sound, and the African City," *Africa Today* 65, no. 4 (Summer 2019): 19-37.

[4] Thomas Turino, *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans, and Popular Music in Zimbabwe* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 7-8.

[5] Martin Stokes, "On Musical Cosmopolitanism" (The Macalester International Roundtable, Macalester College, Saint Paul, MN, September 26, 2007), 6, http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/intlrdtable/3.

[6] Turino, *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans, and Popular Music in Zimbabwe*; Thomas Turino, "Are We Global Yet? Globalist Discourse, Cultural Formations and the Study of Zimbabwean Popular Music," *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 12, no. 2 (2003) 51-79.

[7] Ifeoma Nwankwo, *Black Cosmopolitanism: Racial Consciousness and Transnational Identity in the Nineteenth-Century Americas* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

cultural center, and reggae as a globally circulating genre and symbol of identity formation. Many of the people who perform, listen to, and associate with reggae culture in Detroit draw from the cosmopolitan cultural capital of the music, though themselves may not be mobile.

In order to discuss the relationship between blackness, marginalized urbanity, and global circulations, I will utilize the theoretical framework of Afropolitanism. The types of identities and aesthetics produced through cosmopolitan formations are a reframing of the Afropolitan identity markers that characterize much global black culture.

Chielozona Eze characterizes Afropolitanism as an "effort to grasp the diverse nature of being African or of African descent in the world today." In his article "Rethinking African Culture and Identity: The Afropolitan Model," he argues that "Afropolitanism corresponds to what has been called the cultural face of cosmopolitanism."[8] He goes on to state that "An Afropolitan…is that human being on the African continent or of African descent who has realized that her identity can no longer be explained in purist, essentialist, and oppositional terms or by reference only to Africa."[9]

> The term Afropolitan was first coined by Taiye Selasi in 2005. According to Selasi:
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> perhaps what most typifies the Afropolitan consciousness is the refusal to oversimplify; the effort to understand what is ailing in Africa alongside the desire to honor what is wonderful, unique. Rather than essentialising the geographical entity, we seek to comprehend the cultural complexity; to honor the intellectual and spiritual legacy; and to sustain our parents' cultures.[10]

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[8] Chielozona Eze, "Rethinking African Culture and Identity: The Afropolitan Model," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 26, no. 2 (2014): 239.

[9] ibid., 240.

[10] Taiye Selasi, "Bye-Bye Babar," *The Lip*, March 3, 2005, 4.

This unwillingness by the Afropolitan to allow their complex makeup to be condensed into an essentialized "Africanness," but rather an acceptance and celebration of their hybridity is echoed by Eze and is part of what it means to be Afropolitan.

Taiye Selasi writes that "the Afropolitan must form an identity along at least three dimensions: national, racial, cultural."[11] Because of factors like colonialism, the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, and globalization, African identity has become increasingly more difficult to define, and in this way the relationship between the three factors outlined by Selasi is complicated. In discussing Afropolitanism's complex multiplicities Selasi writes:

> You'll know us by our funny blend of London fashion, New York jargon, African ethics, and academic successes. Some of us are ethnic mixes, e.g. Ghanaian and Canadian, Nigerian and Swiss; others merely cultural mutts: American accent, European affect, African ethos. Most of us are multilingual: in addition to English and a Romantic or two, we understand some indigenous tongue and speak a few urban vernaculars…There is at least one place on The African Continent to which we tie our sense of self."[12]

Selasi's description aligns with Eze's statement that "The African is no longer understood as being in opposition to the European, but as incorporating Europeans, Asians, and the rest of the world."[13] Eze also makes the point that "Afropolitanism is the realization that existence is always hyphenated,"[14] which is a notion that perfectly expresses both contemporary globalized conditions and the hybridity characteristic of the Afropolitan mode of being.

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[11] ibid., 5.
[12] ibid., 2.
[13] Eze, "Rethinking African Culture and Identity," 238.
[14] ibid., 245.

Considering something or someone Afropolitan, as opposed to simply cosmopolitan, can be useful in that the term allows its bearer access to a wider global context that is not required to fall in line with the European and American cultural norms that have typically dominated global movements in fields such as music, fashion, literature, and art. Still, there is debate surrounding the term's usefulness, some asserting that it is too elitist and focused on western-style consumerism and forms of cultural capital, while others contend that it allows for a richer, less racially embedded way of considering Africa and its historic place in the world.[15] Despite this debate, contemporary music scholars have noted Afropolitianism's usefulness as an analytical lens and have employed it in their work.[16]

The hybridity and hyphenated sense of identity, the importance of establishing a connection to Africa as a geographic location, and the idea of being cosmopolitan in a culturally specific way—all of which are key markers of Afropolitanism—are also defining characteristics of reggae music. Reggae, like the Jamaican dancehall music scene it developed out of, was initially a black, Jamaican, working-class entertainment and expression. Dancehall culture can be linked back to Jamaican slave-era practices that blended European and African dance and music forms.[17] This includes country dances where mento—a type of early Afro-Jamaican popular music—bands would perform. It was entertainment by and for the black, Jamaican, lower classes, as was reggae when it was born from this movement in the late 1960s. The hybridity

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[15] Achille Mbembe, "Afropolitanism," In *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent*, ed. Njami Simon and Lucy Durán, trans. Laurent Chauvet (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2005), 26-30; Amatoritsero Ede, "The Politics of Afropolitanism," *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 28, no. 1 (2016): 88-100; Emma Dabiri, "Why I'm Not an Afropolitan," *Africa is a Country* (January 21, 2014), https://africasacountry.com/2014/01/why-im-not-an-afropolitan; Stephanie Bosch Santana, "Exorcizing the Future: Afropolitanism's Spectral Origins," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 28, no.1 (2016): 120-126.

[16] Ryan Skinner, "An Afropolitan Muse," *Research in African Literature* 46, no.2 (Summer 2015): 15-31; Ryan Skinner, "Why Afropolitanism Matters," *Africa Today* 64, no. 2 (Winter 2017): 3-21; Ryan Skinner, *Bamako Sounds: The Afropolitan Ethics of Malian Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015); Lawrence, "Afropolitan Detroit: Counterpublics, Sound, and the African City," 19-37.

[17] Norman Stolzoff, *Wake the Town and Tell the People: Dancehall Culture in Jamaica* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2000), 23-25.

associated with dancehall culture's beginnings in conjunction with its strong black and African affiliations helps locate it within the realm of the Afropolitan, and by extension positions reggae within that realm.

Reggae music at the time of its inception was an amalgam of black cultural products, including Jamaican mento, American R&B, and African drumming styles like those associated with Kumina and Nyabinghi religious practices. In this early iteration, even before its rise to global pop significance, the music was already part of a larger chain of exchange between different parts of the African world and the diaspora. Lloyd Bradley points out these relationships, drawing connections between certain musical aspects of reggae and African drumming styles, and between reggae and the mento bands of the early black Jamaican dancehall events. In discussing Lee Perry's "People Funny Boy"—a song that is considered one of the earliest examples of reggae music—Bradley notes:

> Several guitars are used rhythmically rather than merely melodically. It's those guitars that produce a speedy strumming pattern not unlike mento's banjoes, while the overall measured percussiveness leaves all sorts of holes that are artfully filled in with Burru- and Kumina-style rhythmic statements.[18]

In further reference to Lee Perry's song, Bradley claims that, "essentially, you're listening to Africa. As it was in the sixteenth century," drawing connections between early reggae and its African roots.[19]

We can also see reggae's alignment with Afropolitanism in the music's propulsion into broader renown by Chris Blackwell in the early 1970s. In 1972 Blackwell, through the Island record label, was involved in producing the album *Catch a Fire*, by the reggae group The

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[18] Lloyd Bradley, *This is Reggae Music: The Story of Jamaica's Music* (New York, Grove Press, 2000), 198-199.

[19] ibid., 198.

Wailers. The album's involvement with such a major label like Island, with its far-reaching distribution channels, allowed reggae music exposure to a larger global market. Aiding this process is the fact that certain modifications were applied to features of the band's music and image to make the project align more with the Euro-American style rock music that the album would be fighting with for market share.[20] And while there is controversy surrounding the alterations associated with the production of *Catch a Fire*—some claiming that these changes compromised the music's authenticity—the fact remains that this marked a shift towards a reggae that was more broadly influential as well as influenced.

The treatment applied to *Catch a Fire* and The Wailers exemplifies the sort of global hybridization typical of Afropolitanism—as described by Eze, Selasi, and other scholars.[21] This historical point also marks the introduction of reggae—and more importantly, this particular brand of reggae—onto the global popular music stage. This was a move that gave this once little-known Caribbean island music a more far-reaching and cosmopolitan presence. And additionally, reggae's status as a black cultural product grants it the "cultural face," as Eze would put it, that extends reggae from the cosmopolitan to the Afropolitan.

Reggae's affiliation with the religion known as Rastafari also helps in establishing its Afropolitan identity. Rastafarianism has shared a connection with reggae since the early days of the music's development. According to Darren Middleton, "reggae's first 45rpm single promoting Rastafari spirituality, Little Roy's 'Bongo Man,' hit the top of the Jamaican song charts in 1969,"[22] just a year after the release of Lee Perry's "People Funny Boy." Further cementing the connection between reggae and Rastafari is the conversion of Bob Marley, Peter

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[20] Mike Alleyne, "Globalization and Commercialization of Caribbean Music," *Popular Music History* 3, no. 3 (2008): 256-258, doi:10.1558/pomh.v3i3.247.

[21] Eze, "Rethinking African Culture and Identity;" Selasi, "Bye-Bye Babar;" Mbembe, "Afropolitanism;" Ryan Skinner, "Why Afropolitanism Matters;" Ryan Skinner, "An Afropolitan Muse."

[22] Darren Middleton, *Rastafari and the Arts: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 91.

Tosh, and Bunny Livingston to the faith over the course of the 1960s. Marley, Tosh, and Livingston (also known as Bunny Wailer) were the key members of The Wailers, arguably the most iconic reggae group of all time and, as noted earlier, the band that helped launch reggae into global fame. "This early reggae was an insider artistic expression, produced by and intended for Rastafari themselves," Middleton states.[23] And it was groups like The Wailers that did a great deal in terms of spreading Rastafari's message and generating a connection in the minds of most between Reggae music and Rastafarianism.

What connects Rastafari most strongly to Afropolitanism is its largely Afrocentric aesthetic, worldview, and cultural articulations. One of the most important figures in helping to establish this ideology was the preacher, Marcus Garvey. Operating in the early part of the twentieth century, mostly in Jamaica—where he was born—and the United States, Garvey was a Black Nationalist and founder of the United Negro Improvement Association. An early supporter of the Pan-African movement, he was instrumental in furthering the notion among Afro-diasporic communities of "Africa as a symbol of identity, and Africa as a home."[24]

Garvey's teachings had a significant impact on the development of Rasta ideology and identity, most significantly his reported prophesy of the rise of Haile Selassie I as emperor of Ethiopia in 1930. Selassie is Rastafari's religious figurehead and it is from Selassie that the faith gets its name. Selassie's given name was Tafari Makonnen, however, during the course of his political career he was granted the title of Ras—meaning head or prince—which would have preceded his given name (*Ras Tafari* Makonnen). The Africanist focus of Garvey and the gaze towards Ethiopia for political and spiritual guidance gives Rastafari, although it arose in the Americas, a decidedly African personality. In this way Rastafari bestows upon reggae, through

[23] ibid., 89.
[24] Barry Chevannes, *Rastafari: Roots and Ideology* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1994), 39.

their strong tie, the located African "sense of self" important to Selasi's description of Afropolitanism.

The Pan-Africanism championed by Garvey shares similarities with Afropolitanism. For instance, they are both concerned with modern, global African identity and creating for that identity a more equitable position in world affairs. There are, however, important differences that separate these two ideologies. According to Achille Mbembe, one of the key differences has to do with racial identity. He states:

> Pan-Africanism, to a large extent, is a racial ideology. Afropolitanism is not, in so far as it takes into account the fact that to say "Africa" does not necessarily mean to say "black." There are Africans who are not black. And not all blacks are African. So Afropolitanism emerges out of that recognition of the multiple origins of those who designate themselves as "African" or as "of African descent."[25]

Mbembe's statement highlights Afropolitanism's increased number of entry points in comparison to Pan-Africanism. In this way, for many, Afropolitanism is better situated to look to the future and the growing interconnectivity and hybridity of our world. Both concepts mark out notions of belonging, though they do so according to different principles.

The city of Detroit, Michigan, also possesses qualities that I interpret as being readily viewed through the lens of Afropolitanism. One of these is the influence exerted on the city by black migrants wishing to find refuge from the horrors of slavery and racism. According to David Katzman, "the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 had prohibited the extension of slavery into the triangle bordered by the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers," and while this prohibition was only a ban on bringing new slaves into the area, by 1837 slavery would become totally abolished in the

[25] Achille Mbembe, interview by Sarah Balakrishnan, "Pan-African Legacies, Afropolitan Futures: A Conversation with Achille Mbembe," *Transition*, no. 120 (2016): 30.

newly established state of Michigan.[26] These measures didn't necessarily keep freed slaves living in Michigan from being considered second-class citizens but, regardless, the state would have been a more favorable location compared to other parts of the country. Katzman states that "boarder and southern state blacks looked to the old Northwest as a haven from slavery and Negrophobia."[27]

A factor that would have contributed to the black migration to Michigan is its proximity to Canada, where slavery had been abolished years before. This might account for why in Michigan, by 1850, "the urban Negroes of Detroit…comprised the single largest group of blacks, nearly one quarter of the state's black population."[28] Detroit—a burgeoning urban center where work could be found, and just across the Detroit River from the less racially stifling climate of Canada—would have been an ideal place for black Americans of the nineteenth century to seek better opportunity and an increased chance for equality. And although the black community in Detroit started out small, it would soon become an important force in shaping the growing city.

In the wake of the American Civil War many newly freed black people began to move to Northern urban centers to escape the conditions of segregation still present in the South. Detroit, a growing industrial center where employment opportunities were increasingly more available, was a prime destination for these migrants. The rise of the Detroit auto industry in the early twentieth century was a factor that added to this city's appeal. While black labor was often met with discrimination this was less the case concerning the auto industry centered in and around

[26] David M. Katzman, *Before the Ghetto: Black Detroit in the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 5.
[27] ibid., 13.
[28] ibid.

Detroit. These manufacturers hired blacks in large numbers and gave them comparatively better pay and afforded them greater opportunities than many other industries.[29]

Another way that Detroit can be distinguished as a center for black culture is its connection to the Motown record label. This company was started in Detroit by Berry Gordy in 1960 and was well known as an important promoter of black musical talent. Many influential black musicians—Michael Jackson, Marvin Gaye, Diana Ross, and Stevie Wonder among them—were involved with the Motown label during the early stages of their careers. The city's association with the development of such a large amount of black talent marks it as an important cite for the production of black culture.

Detroit's longstanding connection to black culture and the black American experience links this globally interconnected industrial city to Eze's Afropolitan notion of "the diverse nature of being African or of African descent in the world today,"[30] and allows us to mark the city as a black space. In this thesis, I argue that the black and cosmopolitan nature of Detroit in conjunction with the black and cosmopolitan nature of reggae music generates within the people and places associated with reggae in Detroit a decidedly Afropolitan character.

Methodology and Chapter Outline

Through the ethnographic fieldwork I have conducted relating to this topic I will investigate Detroit reggae's Afropolitan characteristics. During the course of my fieldwork in the Detroit reggae community—which took place predominantly in 2018 and 2019—I spent time observing, talking informally to, and interviewing a number of individuals who are deeply involved with today's reggae music in Detroit. During this period I also attended live reggae events at different venues in the Detroit area, including Thomas Magee's Whiskey Bar and

[29] August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 5-7.

[30] Eze, "Rethinking African Culture and Identity," 239.

Sporting House, Kola Restaurant & Ultra Lounge, and Roak Brewing Co., and participated more broadly in the Detroit reggae scene. My field research will be analyzed within the context of the musical histories of the genres of reggae and dancehall, and against the theoretical orientation of Afropolitanism. I will utilize Lawrence's concept of a marginalized Afropolitanism in order to seek specific reference to the manner in which the cosmopolitan circulations of blackness and Africanness are utilized within a marginal community. Finally, I situate these musical identities and experiences within the historical political movement of Pan-Africanism and its contemporary expressions.

In the following chapters I will discuss various aspects of the Detroit reggae scene and its meanings. In Chapter 2 I look at the individuals who participate in and practice reggae in Detroit today. This includes musician interviews and an outline of Detroit reggae performance practices. Chapter 3 is an outline of two venues in Detroit where live reggae is performed—Thomas Magee's Whiskey Bar and Sporting House and Kola Restaurant & Ultra Lounge. In this chapter I look at the ways in which these venues are important to the performance of reggae in Detroit and how these locations are used in the construction of community in the Detroit reggae scene. Chapter 4 deals with marginalized Afropolitanism in Detroit and how it functions within Detroit's reggae community. Here I also look at the global circulation of reggae music and culture, Detroit's place in that scheme, and marginalized Afropolitanism in this larger scope. In the final chapter I offer a set of conclusions concerning the people and places of today's Detroit reggae, their place in the broader Afropolitan world, and how marginalized Afropolitanism operates in the Detroit reggae community.

CHAPTER 2: THE PEOPLE OF DETROIT REGGAE

In order to better understand reggae's impact and importance to those involved with its performance in Detroit I spent time attending reggae shows at various venues throughout the city and speaking with performers and audience members. I also conducted formal interviews with some of the scene's key members: multi-instrumentalist, bandleader, and author, Horatio Bennett; DJ and vocalist, Idris Nia; musician, vocalist, and bandleader, Jamal "King Mellowman" Clark; and drummer, Noel Paris. Through this process I was able to gain a sense of Detroit reggae's history, how reggae functions for those involved with it in Detroit today, and how these things relate to a larger Pan-African and pan-Caribbean context. Some of what I learned has to do with who is performing reggae in Detroit, how it is being performed, and who attends these performances and why.

The Performers

One of the most interesting and important figures I interviewed from the Detroit reggae community is Horatio Bennett. I met Horatio during a reggae show at the club, Thomas Magee's, where King Mellowman introduced us. Horatio has been involved in Detroit reggae since its beginnings and proved to be an exciting person to talk with on this topic. We exchanged contact information and from there I was able to set up an interview with him, which took place at his home in Oak Park, just north of the Detroit city limit. Horatio has a long history as a musician and advocate for Caribbean culture and while talking to him I learned quite a bit about the early days of reggae in Detroit and about the city's Caribbean community.

In 1967, Horatio moved from Jamaica's St. Catherine Parish to the Chicago area to attend college. In 1971, after graduating from Greer Technical Institute, and spending some time at

Northwestern University, he headed to Detroit. Once in Detroit he founded the band The Herbal Experience, which is credited by many in the Detroit reggae scene (Horatio included) as the city's first reggae band. In 1973 they released *Save the Land*, which Horatio told me was the first reggae record produced in Detroit.

Bennett's involvement with reggae music preceded his coming to the United States. According to him, he was a founding member of the first reggae/rocksteady band in his home town of Linstead, Jamaica, known as The Mighty Vulcans. The same innovative spirit that drove Horatio to start The Mighty Vulcans in Jamaica followed him to Detroit. In our interview he told me "when I came to the United States I still carried that attitude of 'if there isn't one I'm going to make it.'"[31] Even so, the task of starting a reggae band in Detroit at that time was not without its challenges. When discussing putting together The Herbal Experience, Horatio said "When I started the band there were no other Caribbean musicians that I could find, not in this area."[32] Undeterred, he ended up enlisting the help of American high school students who could play instruments, training them as reggae musicians, and inserting them into the group.

Discussing the early days of the Detroit reggae scene, Horatio told me that the music did not initially have a strong following, even within the black community. With the rise in popularity of groups like The Wailers among a white American rock audience in the early to mid 1970s, white Detroit rock bands started adding reggae numbers to their performances. One such band that Horatio described to me was Black Market and according to him "we credit them for really popularizing the music in the area."[33] In relation to this, Horatio said that white variety acts like this could get gigs more easily than unknown black groups. To get more exposure himself, he eventually followed this same variety act model with The Herbal Experience, but

[31] Horatio Bennett, interview by Richard Hopkins, April 8, 2018.
[32] ibid.
[33] ibid.

somewhat in reverse: instead of a band that played some reggae along with their main style his band would be a reggae band that incorporated other styles—in their case R&B and, interestingly enough, punk rock.

Aside from being a musician—and a multi-instrumentalist at that—Horatio is also a music producer, has worked as a radio broadcaster, and has a number of published books to his credit. An avid supporter of Caribbean culture in Detroit, Horatio at one time published both a magazine, *The Caribbean Focus*, and a newspaper, *Caribbean SourceNews*, based in the area. And, around the time that he moved to the city, he noticed many Detroiters would leave town to attend carnival parades in other places. His view was that "Detroit needs its own carnival,"[34] so in response to this notion, Horatio founded one in 1973, staging the city's first Caribbean carnival, The West Indian Day Parade. Keeping with his tradition of supporting Caribbean culture in Detroit, Horatio and his wife Natasha are currently involved in the planning of a Caribbean-American museum and cultural center in the city.

Another individual in the Detroit reggae scene I spent time talking with is the reggae DJ Idris Nia, also known by the stage name Eddie Riott. I was introduced to Idris by Mellowman as well, during a rehearsal for Mellowman's group, Mellow Runnings. In addition to being a DJ, Idris also "toasts," which is a type of vocal performance that commonly accompanies Jamaican dancehall DJing. His interest in reggae music came from his time at Howard University in Washington, D. C. in the early 1970s. Idris told me that Howard had a multi-cultural atmosphere and large international student presence—including individuals from the Caribbean—and that reggae performances were not uncommon there. His turning point, however, was when an African American friend invited him over to his place to listen to a few reggae records. When

[34] ibid.

Idris, who at that time was interested in jazz and progressive rock, heard Peter Tosh and Bob Marley he was hooked.

In discussing what appealed to him most about reggae, Idris said "what really attracted me to it was the artistry and the purpose. I liked reggae because they were exploring issues like free South Africa, way before that was popular. Legalize marijuana, way before that was popular."[35] He also appreciates the music's capacity for positive influence as compared to other styles, stating "we need to emphasize more positive music and more healthy music, and reggae provided that for me."[36]

Upon returning to Detroit in 1979, Idris began getting involved with the city's emerging reggae scene. His marriage to the Jamaican reggae singer, Imani, furthered his interest in reggae music and culture. Idris served as a songwriter, producer, and partial manager for Imani's Detroit-based group, Bandulu, which, according to Idris, was Michigan's first female-led reggae band. In addition to his involvement with Bandulu, and his career as a DJ and toaster, Idris has spent time as a reggae radio disc jockey in and around Detroit and Michigan's Upper Peninsula and was a member of the reggae band Cry on Cue.

The Detroit reggae musician I spent the most time with during my fieldwork was Jamal "King Mellowman" Clark. Mellowman was one of the first reggae musicians in Detroit that I really got to know and he showed me around and introduced me to many of the people I ended up talking with and interviewing. I first saw Mellowman at Kola Restaurant. He was there performing with his group, Up Rizin Steel Drum Band. I also ended up running into him at a show at Thomas Magee's. He was starting to become a familiar face to me and seemed to be linked-in with the reggae scene in Detroit so one night at Kola I introduced myself and asked if I

[35] Idris Nia, interview by Richard Hopkins, April 8, 2018.
[36] ibid.

could interview him. On most of my visits to Detroit during my fieldwork I would either intentionally meet up with Mellowman and go around town with him, or accidentally run into him at whatever show I was going to. It was during one such visit, after eating Chinese food together at a north Detroit shopping mall food-court, that we sat down for an interview.

Mellowman is a Detroit native and has a longstanding history with the city's reggae scene. According to Idris Nia, "Mellow, he was only 11 when he came into the reggae scene,"[37] and during our interview, Idris cited King Mellowman as one of the more important figures in Detroit reggae today. As a dedicated musician with the ability to play a variety of instruments, Mellowman often maintains multiple projects, including producing his own solo records, fronting his own group, Mellow Runnings, and performing as a side-man with various bands around the city.

King Mellowman's parents are both from the Caribbean—his father from Nassau in the Bahamas, his mother from the island of St. Kitts—and this has given Mellowman a strong personal connection to Caribbean culture. His parents were also avid musicians who played a wide variety of musics, including reggae and calypso. This resulted in Mellowman being exposed to music at an early age, and particularly the music of the Caribbean.

Mellowman, like many of the reggae musicians I talked with in Detroit, values reggae music for its ability to uplift and convey a message. In describing the music, he likened it to gospel, stating that reggae—music and lyrics—has an "inspirational feel" and "spiritual vibe."[38] When I asked Mellowman if reggae music evoked those sorts of feelings more-so than other types of music, he told me: "oh, reggae can do that. Once it gets into you…it's like soul."[39] I went on to ask if he thought that was a central feature of reggae music, to which he replied "I

[37] ibid.
[38] Jamal Clark, interview by Richard Hopkins, March 17, 2018.
[39] ibid.

think so," adding "once you have that feeling, you really don't want to let it go."[40] He told me that what makes reggae different from other musics was "the feel of it," saying "It [the feel] hits you automatically."[41] I also asked King Mellowman about the rise of reggae music in Detroit and what made it unique, to which he replied, "it was unique in Detroit 'cause nobody was doing it so tough."[42]

I also spent time talking to the drummer Noel Parris. Noel was the first reggae musician I met when I started my fieldwork. His band, Universal Xpression, plays regularly at Thomas Magee's, which is a club I went to frequently for reggae events. I would usually show up early to the shows, partially because admission was free before a certain time, partially because most times I had already been in Detroit all day and was ready for some music, and partially because if I was there early it would give me a chance to talk to the musicians before they were too busy. Noel was always there early as well and since we are both drummers it was easy for me to strike up a conversation. It was in this interval one night, after setting up his drums and before the show got started, that he sat down with me for an interview. We went to the café next door to the club, had a plate of wings, and talked about Detroit reggae.

Noel's band, Universal Xpression, keeps a busy schedule performing in the Detroit area and around Windsor, Ontario, as well as touring parts of the United States. Originally from the Caribbean island of St. Thomas, Noel spent time in New York City before coming to Detroit in the early 2000s. He was drawn to New York by his interest in jazz music, but after the September 11th attack on New York's World Trade Center in 2001, he left the city for Detroit, where he has family.

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[40] ibid.
[41] ibid.
[42] ibid.

In Detroit, he became involved in the reggae scene and started drumming for the band Universal Xpression. His background as a jazz drummer makes his interpretation of reggae rather interesting. Noel is a firm believer in putting his own personality into whatever he does, and his mixing of jazz licks with reggae rhythms make for a fresh approach to the music. What Noel told me about reggae echoed the same sentiments I had heard from the other reggae musicians I interviewed. When I asked him what reggae's message is, some of the things he mentioned to me were the music's ability to uplift black people, and its message of social justice.[43]

The idea that reggae has the capacity for positive influence and social change were ubiquitous among the musicians I interviewed in Detroit. Noel, King Mellowman, and Idris specifically listed these ideas as reasons they got involved in performing reggae music. They are notions that are important to some of the globally recognized reggae figures that I will talk about later on, and also relate to the idea of marginalized Afropolitanism that I will discuss later as well.

One of the key features I recognized about the reggae musicians in Detroit was their pan-Caribbean identity. Most of the musicians I talked to have some sort of relationship to Jamaica, but, more importantly, all of them share a relationship to the Caribbean. They have all spent time in the Caribbean or have an important sense of Caribbean heritage, and this comes through in the way they relate to reggae. For those that perform reggae in Detroit, the Caribbean is a part of their identity and these relationships are expressed through the way they perform their music. Also expressed through their music is a strong connection to the United States: Horatio is Jamaican but plays punk and gospel, Mellowman has a strong Caribbean lineage but enjoys performing R&B and country, Noel comes from St. Thomas but is an avid jazz fan. They are all

[43] Noel Parris, interview by Richard Hopkins, April 28, 2018.

reggae musicians, but are also more than that and it comes across in the way they perform reggae. The way these Detroit reggae artists infuse their music with aspects from parts of the black Caribbean as well as the United States is in line with the "hyphenated existence" described by Eze and Selasi as inherent in being Afropolitan. As Eze points out, the Afropolitan doesn't function in purely "essentialist" terms "or by reference only to Africa."[44]

Detroit reggae musicians also exude a cosmopolitan presence, in the way they approach their music and the way they understand the world. Most of them are well educated, well traveled, can play multiple instruments, understand many different styles of music, and have a cultural sense that extends beyond their local context. They see themselves as part of the Detroit reggae community and the Detroit Caribbean community, but also part of a larger world; one that has ties to the Caribbean, Africa, and the further reaches of the diaspora. Idris often alludes to Rastafari and its African imagery, Horatio is a strong advocate of Caribbean culture and its promotion, Noel speaks of reggae's power to engage with black people and further their cause. Their backgrounds make them cosmopolitan, but their involvement with reggae adds the "cultural face," as Eze would put it, that allows them access to the larger Afropolitan world and its global connectivity.[45]

Performance Practice

The room is lit dimly. Patrons are ordering drinks at the bar, or sitting at tables casually talking, and some are grooving nonchalantly to the DJ's music. The stage is set, instruments ready, but the musicians are off to one side talking and laughing. They probably should have started the show by now, but the custom is to wait a bit. To let things simmer a while and see if any late arrivals trickle in. These tend to be late night affairs anyway, and there is always some

[44] Chielozona Eze, "Rethinking African Culture and Identity: The Afropolitan Model," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 26, no. 2 (2014): 240-245.
[45] ibid., 239.

warm-up music, typically performed by a dancehall DJ that is billed on the flyer along with the band. Starting late usually means ending late, and late is when the place really gets bumping. It also allows time for everyone to get a plate before the show gets underway, either from the kitchen or from the caterer that came especially for the event. The dance floor begins to see some light use and the band members take their places on stage. The crowd is ready, the musicians are ready, and the groove kicks in. The bodies begin to move. They cannot help but move.

This is a typical beginning for a Detroit reggae show. Attending these events, I noticed that there were certain features common among performances of reggae in Detroit. One of them was the use of DJs to cover the times when live music was absent, including before and after shows. And while it is not unusual to fill space with recorded music in this way during the course of any live show, whether in a club or concert venue, having DJs perform the task is of particular cultural significance. The sound system phenomenon associated with the early Jamaican dancehalls and their music and culture, which was reggae's precursor, is a medium that employs DJs as the primary performers.[46] This particularly Jamaican practice continues to this day and is where reggae was born, so it seems a fitting method for filling time during a reggae event in Detroit.

The use of sound system style DJs for intermission music is also useful in determining the parameters of the reggae scene. For instance, the Up Rizin Steel Drum Band—in which King Mellowman is a keyboardist and vocalist—utilizes this type of DJing within the context of their performances. While they are not billed specifically as a reggae group, they do perform reggae, as well as other musical styles associated with the African diaspora. Even though they are not, strictly speaking, a reggae band, Up Rizin's use of sound system style DJs, along with their

[46] Lloyd Bradley, *This is Reggae Music: The Story of Jamaica's Music* (New York, Grove Press, 2000), 4-11; Norman Stolzoff, *Wake the Town and Tell the People: Dancehall Culture in Jamaica* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2000), 41-43, 58-63.

performance of reggae (and Caribbean music in general), positions them, and bands like them, as a part of the broader Detroit reggae community.

Another feature typical to the reggae performances I observed in Detroit was the inclusion of a variety of different musical styles associated with the African diaspora. Many of the groups and musicians I watched perform at reggae shows played other Caribbean styles along with reggae. One of these styles is calypso, which is a type of music that originated on the Caribbean Islands of Trinidad and Tobago in the nineteenth century. Calypso has strong ties to African musical practices and a long history of association with the Caribbean Carnival tradition.

Another Caribbean style regularly performed by Detroit reggae bands is soca. Soca is a Trinidadian music that developed in the 1970s. It is a rhythm-heavy Afro-Caribbean dance music that relies on a strong accent on the down beat with an upbeat emphasis throughout. This style is also marked by a repeated bass and drum groove known as the tumbao, which is an Afro-Caribbean rhythm consisting of notes placed on the off-beat of beat two and the on beat of beat four in a cut time measure. Soca was preceded and influenced by calypso and like calypso has played an important role in Carnival tradition.

Calypso and soca have become important and influential popular musics in Trinidad and Tobago as well as other parts of the Caribbean. Aiding in their dissemination is the fact that they are both Anglophone Caribbean products, as is reggae. The system of exchange between the islands of the British Antilles helped facilitate these musics' spread throughout the Caribbean, especially to parts that were under British control, and certain similarities have been noted between aspects of reggae music and calypso. [47]

I also observed Detroit reggae groups performing R&B, including old Motown hits, as well as pop, such as what can be heard on a standard pop radio station, and reggae-style

[47] Dick Hebdige, *Cut 'n' Mix:Culture, Identity and Caribbean Music* (New York: Routledge, 1987), 43-44.

reinterpretations of R&B and pop. This mixing of styles—especially concerning non-reggae Caribbean musics and reggae reinterpretations of non-reggae songs—was something I noticed the sound system DJs doing as well.

One reason for this mixing of styles is commercial, as attested to by a number of the musicians I talked with. For instance, Horatio Bennett, as mentioned, began performing styles in addition to reggae early on with The Herbal Experience, in order to compete with the more popular white variety acts. Noel Parris told me a similar story. His group, Universal Xpression, plays a variety of musics other than reggae, which, according to Noel, is to gain wider appeal. He noted that reggae tends to draw an older crowd and by adding newer, more dance-oriented and pop numbers, his band can also access a younger audience. For reggae bands in Detroit, playing a variety of music other than reggae helps broaden their exposure to audiences outside of the reggae scene.

Another reason for this phenomenon is that the Detroit reggae community is made up of musicians from a diversity of backgrounds. Most of the musicians I talked with have some sort of Caribbean heritage or relationship to the Caribbean, and the bond is not always with Jamaica. This point is better illustrated by what I was told by Idris Nia in regard to two reggae bands in particular: Roots Vibration and Universal Xpression. Idris described Roots Vibration as one of the more important bands in the Detroit reggae scene today and told me that "they, in one form or another, have been [important], from the earliest days right up to now."[48] The leader of this band, Winfred Julian, comes from the island nation of Dominica. According to Idris, this has led to the band incorporating certain musical influences from that island, like zouk—which is an important musical style in much of the French Caribbean—into their playing. In similar fashion, Universal Xpression incorporates non-Jamaican Caribbean musical influences into their playing.

[48] Idris Nia, interview by Richard Hopkins, April 8, 2018.

This group is headed by Richard Parris, from the island of St. Kitts, and, as I noted earlier, their drummer Noel is from St. Thomas. As a result, their music utilizes elements of styles that are popular in their different points of origin, including soca, and calypso.

It is also typical for Detroit reggae bands to incorporate styles from the United States into their performance practice. King Mellowman, with his own group and with some of the others he performs with, incorporates a fair amount of R&B, both in a traditional style and as reggae reinterpretations. Horatio Bennett is involved in a reggae-gospel project with his wife Natasha. And as noted, Noel Parris has a strong background in jazz as well as Caribbean music and tends to interpret reggae tunes in more of a jazz style. His sense of groove is always stylistically correct and in line with the song being played, however, Noel infuses a jazz comping feel to his playing. He always adds little licks and fills that are more common to jazz rather than reggae drumming but in a way that never feels out of place or disrupts the momentum and rhythmic drive of the song.

The musical hybridization found in the Detroit reggae community is a common feature to many musical movements, but this effect is amplified within a diasporic context. According to Thomas Turino, "all identity formation is emergent and 'hybrid' if, by the latter term, we mean inclusive of a variety of elements from different experiences. Diasporic identities, however, are dramatically hybrid because of the multiple ('home society,' 'host society,' 'other diasporic sites') iconic maps of reality and bases for cultural resources." He goes on to state that "diasporic cultural formations, by necessity, incorporate elements (habits) from 'here,' 'home,' and other diasporic sites because this is the nature of diasporic experience."[49]

[49] Thomas Turino, "Introduction: Identity and the Arts in Diaspora Communities," in *Identity and the Arts in Diaspora Communities*, ed. Thomas Turino and James Lea (Warren, MI: Harmonie Park Press, 2004), 13-14.

This musical hybridization is particularly pronounced within an African context, partially because of the impact of Western cultural hegemony on African aesthetic values. Speaking to this dilemma in reference to neo-African music theatre, Akin Euba states:

> African composers trained in the Western tradition of art music face problems of identity. They are unable to disregard the Western idioms that formed the basis of their training and yet they must seek to maintain contact with their indigenous cultural roots, particularly if they choose to live and work in Africa. African composers have the dual role of addressing the international community while at the same time communicating with audiences at home.[50]

Adding to this dynamic is the "feedback loop" that exists between African musical movements and those associated with the diaspora. For instance, certain musics in the Americas that have been heavily influenced by African aesthetics have made their way back to Africa, exerting an impact on musical and cultural practices there. Such is the case with reggae in Côte d'Ivoire and the Cuban rumba in the Congo.[51] These multi-lateral flows of sound and music ideas disrupt any notions of Africa as the roots of diasporic music; rather, there is a continuous exchange that produces black sound that is always part of Africa and part of the circulation of African soundworlds. Reggae music's close ties to African identity, and especially through its links with Rastafari, position it strongly within this feedback loop.

Importantly, according to many in the Detroit reggae community, the reggae scene was much bigger during the 1970s and 1980s and has experienced a steady decline since then. This could *also* be a factor helping to stimulate the level of musical diversity found within

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[50] Akin Euba, "Concepts of Neo-African Music as Manifested in the Yoruba Folk Opera," in *The African Diaspora: A Musical Perspective*, ed. Ingrid Monson (New York: Routledge, 2003), 238.

[51] Mitchell F. Land, "Reggae Resistance and the State: Television and Popular Music in the Côte d'Ivoire," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 12, no. 4 (1995): 445-446; Bob W. White, "Congolese Rumba and Other Cosmopolitanisms," *Cashiers d'Études Africaines*, no. 168 (2002): 666-672.

contemporary Detroit reggae. In order to maintain a fuller performance schedule, many reggae bands in Detroit have had to ensure that their appeal ranges beyond a strictly reggae listening audience.

Finally, it seems important to point out something I was told by quite a few individuals. The Caribbean community in Detroit is not geographically contiguous. Horatio contrasted it with Detroit's "Mexican Village," saying there was no definable area where the Caribbean community resided. Mellowman told me something similar, stating that there was a Caribbean community, but that it was spread throughout the city into separate enclaves. This separation does not, however, seem apparent when attending a Detroit reggae event. The reggae scene in fact appears to be a place where the Caribbean community comes together to express a unified identity. And while the resultant hybridity of this mixed Caribbean presence could potentially obscure the notion that an event is specifically a reggae event, certain identifiably reggae aspects are generally present: all the bands perform some type of reggae music, sound system DJs are nearly always incorporated, and key reggae figures—such as Bob Marley and Haile Selassie I—are often celebrated during the course of performances.

The Audience

According to the performers I interviewed, views concerning the type of people who attend Detroit reggae shows vary. King Mellowman stated that all types of people attend reggae shows in Detroit, saying "you see all people of different shapes and sizes and colors go to the shows."[52] On the other hand, Idris Nia asserted that, of the hardcore reggae fans in the city, about 85% of them are African American or of Caribbean descent. I have seen evidence of both these statements, depending on where I've attended a reggae event.

[52] Jamal Clark, interview by Richard Hopkins, March 17, 2018.

The Irish pub, Thomas Magee's Sporting House and Whisky Bar, in Detroit's Eastern Market, is a venue that regularly hosts reggae and Caribbean music events. Here I witnessed more of a mixed crowd of patrons, like what Mellowman had described. Alternatively, at Kola Restaurant & Ultra Lounge, which is just north of Detroit in Farmington Hills, I experienced more the scenario outlined by Idris. Kola is an African restaurant and hosts predominantly Caribbean (including reggae and sound system DJs) and sub-Saharan African music events. Here I observed that the patrons where mostly black. I have also attended reggae events where the audience was predominantly white. For instance, this was the case at Roak Brewing Co. in Royal Oak, Michigan—which is a suburb to the north of Detroit—where I saw King Mellowman perform for a Sunday brunch.

Some of the demographics specific to the venues I outlined could have to do with the demographics of the areas in which these venues are found. According to U. S. census information of population estimates from July 1, 2017, Royal Oak is a predominantly white community (91%).[53] Considering this, it makes sense that a reggae event in Royal Oak would have a predominantly white audience. According to the same census information, the city of Detroit is predominantly black, but with more of a mixed population.[54] This would account somewhat for the mixed demographic present at a club like Thomas Magee's, which is in downtown Detroit.

Within this context, Kola Restaurant and Ultra Lounge seems more of an outlier. The 2017 census information indicates that Farmington Hills is a predominantly white community.[55]

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[53] United States Census Bureau, QuickFacts, Royal Oak city, Michigan, accessed October 25, 2018, https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/royaloakcitymichigan.

[54] United States Census Bureau, QuickFacts, Detroit city, Michigan, accessed October 25, 2018, https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/detroitcitymichigan.

[55] United States Census Bureau, QuickFacts, Farmington Hills city, Michigan, accessed October 25, 2018, https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/farmingtonhillscitymichigan

However, Kola has a largely black clientele. This is where the nature of the venue factors in. Kola, being an African restaurant, attracts black patrons despite it being located in a majority white community. Similarly, Thomas Magee's while in a majority black location, attracts a more mixed crowd partially because of its Irish pub identity.

There are certain reasons why these demographic concerns are important and they have to do with Detroit reggae and its links to Afropolitanism. Reggae is a genre of music, but it is also connected to a larger African and Afro-Caribbean cultural tradition. These extra-musical concerns are crucial parts of creating a setting where reggae can be most authentically transmitted. One example of these extra-musical concerns is food and drink. Kola's menu is full of African and Caribbean dishes and bottles of Nigerian and Jamaican beer can be bought at the bar. These sorts of food and drink options are not generally available at Thomas Magee's, but on nights that they host reggae shows there a caterer from one of the local Jamaican restaurants is brought in, and the bar fixes a batch of rum punch. The inclusion of African and Afro-Caribbean cuisine at these locations (as opposed to the artisanal sandwiches and craft beer served at Roak) is part of what generates the atmospheric difference between a show that includes reggae music and a reggae show. These extra-musical concerns, as well as demographics, are what help to mark certain venues as black spaces, spaces where Detroit reggae's authentic character and Afropolitan nature becomes most apparent.

Similar to the musicians I talked with, many of the individuals I met in the audience at Detroit reggae shows told me they came because of a sense of Caribbean identity. Either they were from some part of the Caribbean themselves or it was a part of their heritage. This is another example of the type of pan-Caribbean identity associated with Detroit reggae and reggae's ability to serve as a unifying device for the Caribbean community in Detroit. Something

else that I heard from those who attend Detroit reggae events which echoed what I was told by the musicians I interviewed was that reggae music's message, meaning, and purpose was a factor in their coming. Notions of social justice, equality, racial harmony, and consciousness are common themes expressed through reggae music and culture and are important ideas to those who participate in Detroit's reggae scene.

There are certain key factors that connect the people of Detroit reggae together and come through in the way the music is performed and enjoyed. Foremost is the use of reggae as a way for the Detroit Caribbean community, which is spread throughout the city into different enclaves, to find connection between one another and their heritage. Many of the musicians and audience members who attend reggae shows have a mixed sense of Caribbean identity and this hybridity is mirrored by the inclusion of various different Afro-Caribbean styles by Detroit reggae bands. Linked in with this hybridity is the incorporation of American musical styles too, such as R&B and jazz, giving the music both local and transnational facets.

The use of sound system style DJs throughout the scene demonstrates more specifically Detroit reggae's relationship with black Jamaican practices. Even groups that do not play a majority of reggae use this Jamaican form for their intermission music and it is a feature that helps define the scene's parameters. These DJs display the same musical hybridity as the bands they perform with, further cementing the relationship between DJing, Detroit reggae, and the scene to which they belong.

The people of the Detroit reggae community are also connected by the importance they place on reggae's ability to promote a positive and uplifting message. Encapsulated within this message are often themes of black struggle and liberation, as mentioned by Idris and Noel. Reggae is a medium where these concerns can be put forth, and worked out. Reggae's conscious

message and capacity for positive change are valued by Detroit reggae participants and links them to reggae's global circulation, where these notions also operate.

The things that are important to the members of Detroit's reggae community and bring them together as a group are likewise what mark this community as Afropolitan. Detroit reggae's hybrid nature, identity as a globally important black cultural product, and particular ways of being cosmopolitan connects it and its participants to the Afropolitan world and that world's expression both in Detroit and elsewhere.

CHAPTER 3: THE PLACES OF DETROIT REGGAE

Overview: Two Detroit Reggae Venues

There are two venues that I went to frequently during the course of my fieldwork. These are Thomas Magee's Sporting House and Whisky Bar, and Kola Restaurant & Ultra Lounge. According to a number of the individuals I talked with and interviewed, the reggae scene in Detroit used to be much bigger but has more recently experienced a decline. Despite this fact, there are still venues in the city that support a vibrant reggae performance scene. Thomas Magee's and Kola are at the center of this, hosting regular reggae and Caribbean music events and functioning as key sites for the promotion of Caribbean culture in Detroit. When researching reggae venues I came to realize that the predominant focus of the scene today is on reggae and dancehall DJing and this is the mode of performance found at many of the city's reggae and Caribbean clubs. Because my research interests were directed more towards live band reggae performances, I sought out locations where those were featured and Thomas Magee's and Kola were two such places.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Thomas Magee's is an Irish pub located in Detroit's Eastern Market. This venue regularly hosts reggae music events, even though it is not marketed exclusively as a reggae venue. The reason for this is predominantly that the club owner has a longstanding involvement with Detroit's Caribbean community, and is interested in Caribbean music and culture. The reggae drummer, Noel Paris, listed it as one of the few places associated with today's live reggae scene in Detroit. It is also the venue where I first met some of the musicians I interviewed, including Noel and the Detroit reggae luminary, Horatio Bennett. Some of the scene's prominent bands, like Universal Xpression and Roots Vibration, can be found

performing there regularly. Accompanying these performances are always plates of Jamaican jerk chicken, oxtail, and rum punch from the bar.

In addition to featuring reggae events, Thomas Magee's also hosts many ska shows. Ska is a Jamaican popular music that precedes the rise of reggae and was very influential in its development. The form of ska that is performed at Thomas Magee's, however, is more closely associated with second and third wave British and American ska and the British and American punk rock movements. Though seemingly disparate, the origin of ska in Jamaica and the punk-infused ska of the late twentieth century are actually related. Many Jamaican musicians immigrated to England and the United States both before and after Jamaica's independence from the UK in 1962 and Jamaican popular music forms, such as ska and reggae, influenced British and American popular music trends of the late twentieth century. This is particularly evident in the British punk rock of the late 1970s and early 1980s and American ska-punk from the late 1980s and into the 1990s. British punk bands, most notably The Clash and The Police, and American ska-punk bands, such as Operation Ivy, Sublime, and Rancid, are known for their use of reggae and ska musical devices, like ska off-beat guitar riffs and reggae drum patterns.

The relationship between ska, reggae, and punk is relevant to this discussion for a number of reasons. Horatio Bennett, one of my primary interlocutors in Detroit, regularly played punk as well as reggae styles with his band, The Herbal Experience. The connection between punk and reggae in Detroit is further evidenced by the cross over in audience between the ska and punk shows and the reggae shows at Thomas Magee's.

The ska performances at Thomas Magee's can be understood through the cultural lens of punk rock at least partially because of the self-styling of the participants: leather jackets, chain wallets, and combat boots—in conjunction with the mixture of high energy rock with ska and

reggae elements being performed. However, traditional Jamaican ska numbers also feature prominently, which links these events to the broader tone of Thomas Magee's as a Caribbean music venue and supports the notion of this club being an important part of the Detroit reggae community.

The second venue that I will focus on is Kola Restaurant, located north of downtown Detroit, in the suburb of Farmington Hills. Even though it is not located within the Detroit city limits it is still an important location for the production of reggae in Detroit. It is frequented by many of those involved in the Detroit reggae scene and features performances by Detroit Caribbean and reggae musicians, including King Mellowman. Kola is where I first met Mellowman and saw him perform.

Kola is an African/Caribbean restaurant and night club that features African and Caribbean cuisine and entertainment. This venue regularly hosts performances by DJs and musicians from around the Detroit area as well as touring acts. Above the bandstand at Kola there are three paintings. One is of Bob Marley, one is of Fela Kuti, and the third is of a jazz group. These pictures give a sense of the type of music common to Kola. The regular house band that performs weekly is the Up Rizin Steel Drum Band, which plays a variety of Caribbean and black American music, however, reggae is a big part of their repertoire. Up Rizin also typically opens up for bands that perform there from out of town. These groups tend to fall into two categories: Afrobeat and reggae.

Like Thomas Magee's, Kola is not strictly a reggae venue, although its Africana identity makes it an ideal place for the performance of reggae music. Reggae's Afropolitan nature, which I briefly outlined in Chapter 1, and its capacity, through aspects of its musical make-up and association with the Afrocentric Rastafari faith, to serve as a pan-African expression aligns it

with Kola's identity as an African space. This, in conjunction with Kola's associations with Caribbean music and culture, places Kola restaurant solidly within the sphere of Detroit's broader reggae community**.**

Constructing Community within the Detroit Reggae Scene

Thomas Magee's and Kola Restaurant are not only key sites for the performance of reggae, they are important spaces that generate a sense of community for Detroit's reggae participants. Ideas of community that exist within Detroit reggae are not entirely bound to specific locations, however, location is where community is expressed and outwardly solidified. Spaces where members can come together to engage with each other and construct a sense of unity are crucial to the maintenance of a cohesive reggae community in Detroit. There are certain ways that community is constructed in the Detroit reggae scene and the first one I would like to point out has to do with the nature of the Detroit Caribbean community.

As previously mentioned, the Caribbean community in Detroit is spread out into different enclaves. In this way, Detroit's Caribbean community functions as a sort of micro-diaspora within a set of larger diasporic contexts—the Caribbean diaspora and the African diaspora. Despite the separation that exists within the Caribbean community in Detroit, the reggae scene is a place where those separate communities come together. As already stated, many of the reggae bands in Detroit incorporate members and musical styles from non-Jamaican Caribbean locations, and in talking with those who attend Detroit reggae events I learned that many possess a varied sense of Caribbean identity and heritage.

In speaking about diasporic formations, ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino notes that "a sufficient criterion for thinking about diaspora is the use of a homeland—real or imagined—as the basis of group identification, social action, and cultural practice. That is, as with so many

bases of identity, 'home' can be purely symbolic."[56] Turino's notion that a homeland can be imagined or symbolic is not unlike the idea of "imagined communities" presented by Benedict Anderson[57] and points to a way of considering diasporic formations in terms of their relationship to a ubiquitous reference point, or a referential home.

Reggae's position as a widely recognized black Caribbean cultural product, through its far-reaching global dissemination and influence on popular music the world over—starting with its thrust into prominence by The Wailers with their 1972 album *Catch a Fire*—enables it to function in this referential way and allows a broader black Caribbean community to use reggae as a way to seek a more homogeneous identity. On the micro-diasporic level, reggae functions the same way for the noncontiguous Caribbean community of Detroit. This enables Detroit reggae music to incorporate a variety of different Caribbean peoples and cultural ideas while maintaining its core reggae identity. Further bolstering this identity are certain key aspects of this music scene that I mentioned in Chapter 2: the ubiquitous use of reggae music by Caribbean bands, the use of sound system DJs within "reggae" performances, and the recognition of key figures associated with reggae alongside these performances.

Applying Turino's theory of diasporic contexts, it is possible to see how the club Thomas Magee's fits into this construct. Turino asserts that "diasporic cultural formations are characterized by hybridity, with practices and ideas drawn from experiences in the home and a variety of host countries."[58] In a black Caribbean diaspora, the Caribbean is a point of origin and places like the United States and England (particularly as is the case concerning Jamaican immigration and musical influence) emerge as host countries. The British and American punk

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[56] Thomas Turino, "Introduction: Identity and the Arts in Diaspora Communities," in *Identity and the Arts in Diaspora Communities*, ed. Thomas Turino and James Lea (Warren, MI: Harmonie Park Press, 2004), 5.

[57] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 2006).

[58] Turino, 'Introduction: Identity and the Arts in Diaspora Communities," 6.

and ska that were influenced by Jamaican ska and reggae are products of the hybridity associated with the notion of diaspora as described by Turino.

Through Thomas Magee's connection to these cultural products it is possible to point to it as a site for the performance of these types of diasporic expressions and a space with which those who identify with them can engage. Likewise, focusing on the micro-diasporic level, this club's status as a site for the performance of hybrid music, influenced by the myriad Caribbean influences throughout Detroit but coalescing under the umbrella term of reggae, gives it and the reggae music performed there the ability to serve as a shared commonalty, or referential home within the Detroit Caribbean Community. Through these associations, Thomas Magee's becomes a location where the different Afro-diasporic communities in Detroit can coalesce.

The coalition building between the various Afro-diasporic groups in Detroit can also be seen in the coming together of the Detroit Caribbean community around the performance of reggae at Kola Restaurant, however, this space functions on a more macro-diasporic level than does Thomas Magee's. Where Thomas Magee's is a site marked by the relationship of diasporic elements with those of the host country, Kola is a space where ties between the diaspora and the home country (or Africa) become more apparent. In this way, Kola is a place where the various diasporas—African, Afro-Caribbean, Detroit-Caribbean—come into closer proximity.

Kola's identity is as an African/Caribbean club and many of its patrons express a connection to the Caribbean—as is the case generally among those who attend Detroit reggae events—while most also express more specifically a sense of African heritage and connection to Africa. As noted earlier, reggae possesses the ability to function as a common reference point to a broader black Caribbean community. Similarly, it can serve this purpose in a larger Afro-diasporic context. Bradley points out the conspicuous use of African musical elements found in

reggae while Stolzoff notes the African influences on the early dancehall music that would become reggae's birthplace.[59] These musical factors, along with its widespread popularity and connection to the Afrocentric Rastafarian religion, imbue reggae with the power to express a notion of Africa that exists away from, but not divorced from, its homeland. A sense of referential home as it relates to multiple diasporic settings. Kola Restaurant's African/Caribbean identity makes it a perfect location for individuals on different diasporic levels (micro, macro, Caribbean, African, Detroit-Caribbean) to find shared community, and reggae's ability to serve as a referential home for these different diasporic groups makes it the perfect soundtrack.

Another way that a sense of community is constructed within the reggae scene in Detroit is through reggae's close association to Rastafari. The longstanding connection between the Rastafarian religion and reggae since early in the music's development makes reggae almost a religious music. Many of the individuals involved in the Detroit reggae scene that I spoke with cited reggae's spirituality as one of the factors that particularly drew them to the music and quite a few of them, especially the musicians, engage with religion outwardly on some level. For instance, Horatio Bennett is an ordained minister, and I once saw King Mellowman, who is a well-versed Bible scholar, debate scripture at length with two seminary students.

This religiosity shares a relationship with the early development of the black community in Detroit. According to Katzman, in the pre-Civil War era "the first permanent Negro institutions in Detroit, and the cornerstone of nearly all black activities, were the churches."[60] And while the Detroit reggae scene is not exclusively black, reggae's status as a black cultural product and Rastafari's status as a black spiritual practice places them in continuum with

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[59] Lloyd Bradley, *This is Reggae Music: The Story of Jamaica's Music* (New York, Grove Press, 2000), 108; Norman Stolzoff, *Wake the Town and Tell the People: Dancehall Culture in Jamaica* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2000), 26.

[60] David M. Katzman, *Before the Ghetto: Black Detroit in the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 18.

Detroit's black history (and black history in general). Furthermore, it demonstrates the importance of religion to Detroit's black expression and its use in constructing associated communities.

It is also important to consider the size of the Detroit reggae scene when considering how reggae functions in the construction of community. In talking with those that attend reggae shows in Detroit I learned that the scene is rather small. This has contributed to why there are so few venues where live reggae is performed, but it has also caused the Detroit reggae community to be rather tight knit. It is common to run into a lot of the same people when attending reggae shows throughout the city and everybody knows each other. This gives the scene a sense of intimacy that would be absent if it were much larger. It also makes the clubs where reggae is performed, like Kola and Thomas Magee's, far more integral to the community's maintenance. These become limited spaces where the performance of reggae music and culture can occur and be utilized in the construction of community.

The places where reggae is performed in Detroit are significant as more that just physical locations. They are spaces where the members of the reggae community meet and join together as a whole. They are spaces where different people from different parts of the city and with different backgrounds come together to create a small, tight knit, cohesive community, one centered around commonalities shared between the members of that community and with the spaces in which they congregate. Thomas Magee's Sporting House and Whisky Bar, and Kola Restaurant & Ultra Lounge, while not being exclusively venues for reggae performance, still emerge through their ties to reggae culture and music as important sites for the performance of live reggae in Detroit. Reggae music itself functions as a "space" where different diasporic groups—Afro-diasporic, Caribbean-diasporic, Detroit-Caribbean-diasporic—find consensus

identity and Thomas Magee's and Kola are chief among the places in Detroit where these group go to engage with reggae and its ability to draw them together.

CHAPTER 4: DETROIT REGGAE AND THE POLITICS OF MARGINALIZED AFROPOLITANISM

In speaking about the Afropolitan mode of being, Taiye Selasi claims that "you'll know us by our funny blend of London fashion, New York jargon, African ethics, and academic successes," and she mentions of the Afropolitan that "this one lives in London but was raised in Toronto and born in Accra; that one works in Lagos but grew up in Houston, Texas. 'Home' for this lot is many things: where their parents are from; where they go for vacation; where they went to school; where they see old friends; where they live (or live this year)."[61] Selasi's notion of being Afropolitan is one that is marked by class, privilege, and mobility. This is a point of which Eze, among others, is critical.[62] In regard to Selasi's description, Eze counters by writing, "the more damning weakness of the term, as has been pointed out by many critics, is in its exclusivity and elitism. And this stands out even in the very first paragraphs of the original essay, 'Bye-Bye Babar' in which Selasi identified herself and those who look like her as Afropolitan."[63]

The elitism implied by Selasi's usage of the term, and criticized by Eze and others can be seen, according to Amatoritsero Ede, as a struggle against marginalization. For Ede, this manifests itself most specifically in terms of race and class. He writes:

> There is a primary public sphere in the West, which I refer to as the metropolitan public. Its racial composition and (upper and middle) class allegiance is mostly (but not

[61] Taiye Selasi, "Bye-Bye Babar," *The Lip*, March 3, 2005, 2.

[62] Chielozona Eze, "Rethinking African Culture and Identity: The Afropolitan Model," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 26, no. 2 (2014): 234-247; Rebecca Fasselt, "'I'm Not Afropolitan' – I'm of the Continent: A Conversation with Yewande Omotoso," *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, published electronically October 6, 2014, https://doi-org.ezproxy.bgsu.edu/10.1177/0021989414552922; Stephanie Santana, "Exorcizing the Future: Afropolitanism's Spectral Origins," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 28, no. 1 (2016): 120-126, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13696815.2015.1105128.

[63] Eze, "Rethinking African Culture and Identity," 240.

> necessarily only) white and it is privileged and powerful. Parallel to that is an auxiliary social formation, a powerless, under-privileged social configuration, which I will refer to as a "minority public." It is mostly black, mixed-race, migrant, exilic and often working class or lower-middle class but can also be middle class.[64]

For Ede, the Afropolitan seeks to distinguish themselves from the "minority public" by aligning with the "metropolitan public." This is secured through the Afropolitan's subservience to the more important (and privileged and often white) "metropolitan public," and Ede asserts that "the Afropolitan's first audience is the powerful metropolitan public."[65] He also notes that "the Afropolitan artist's symbolic capital—as well as class and spatial mobility—are achieved by the winning of literary prizes or other forms of consecration,"[66] demonstrating the connection between the "metropolitan public"—through acceptance and accolades—and Afropolitan elitism.

The Afropolitanism described by Ede, connected and subservient to a "metropolitan public," points to a way of imagining an Afropolitanism that, while vibrant and vital, exists on a marginalized level. This notion of a marginalized Afropolitanism is a point that Sidra Lawrence makes in her work concerning sound and counterpublics in Afropolitan Detroit. Discussing Selasi's notions of Afropolitanism, Lawrence asks, "Who has the privileges to enter into the spaces that for her [Selasi] define African cities, the lounges and bars, the museums and fashion shows and upscale hotels?"[67] This question echoes Ede's criticism.

While Ede addresses Afropolitan elitism in terms of its links to the "metropolitan public," Lawrence uses the framework of publics and counterpublics to understand artistic and sonic

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[64] Amatoritsero Ede, "The Politics of Afropolitanism," *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 28, no. 1 (2016): 93.

[65] ibid., 93-94.

[66] ibid., 93.

[67] Sidra Lawrence, "Afropolitan Detroit: Counterpublics, Sound, and the African City," *Africa Today* 65, no. 4 (Summer 2019): 20.

expression against and within shared public discourse. She outlines "an Afropolitanism shaped through publics unlike those referred to by artists, scholars, and practitioners with mobility, class, and sexual privilege," with her aim being to reveal the radical potentiality of Afropolitanism as a counter-model to the privileged, mainstream, framework that has been previously mobilized to describe an elite urban public and its inhabitants.[68] Lawrence, like Ede, points to an Afropolitanism that exists on the margins but as an answer *for* the problem of elitism rather than answering *to* it.

This "marginalized Afropolitanism," as Lawrence puts it, shares a relationship with Detroit, of which Lawrence's work makes particular note. In her article, "Afropolitan Detroit: Counterpublics, Sound, and the African City," one of the points she makes relates to the recent economic resurgence the city has gone through. She comments that,

> embedded in a sociopolitical landscape of gentrification (neocolonization) is an increased regulation of how black bodies navigate access to social space. Thus, the ideas of fully functioning and equal citizenship in Detroit are effectively disrupted by tactics that preclude full engagement in social and political systems and displace locals, both physically and intellectually, from the resources and benefits of the current "Renaissance."[69]

This is a characterization that could be applied, in part, to most urban spaces in the United States but also speaks more specifically here to the situation in modern Detroit and how it has generated the conditions which support in that city the capacity for an Afropolitanism that functions in the social margins. This "marginalized Afropolitanism" in Detroit is foreshadowed by a history of black disadvantage associated with that city.

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[68] ibid., 21.
[69] ibid., 22.

There were progressive policies concerning black American rights since early on in Michigan's past and one way this manifested itself was through the string of anti-slavery policies implemented in the north of America. For instance, the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 banned the influx of new slaves into the area, and when Michigan became a state in 1837 slavery was abolished entirely. These laws served to align Michigan's social climate with that of the anti-slavery minded northeast, but that does not mean that Michigan's black population was free from discrimination and unjust treatment. Even after the abolition of slavery in 1837, there were laws that limited black political and civic engagement, including restrictions on voting, militia membership, and serving on a jury.[70]

As Michigan's population grew over the 18th and early 19th centuries, black Americans from different parts of the country migrated there, some in search of opportunity and some to escape oppressive conditions in the south. Many came to Detroit, which was an important industrial and commercial center, and, like many American cities, is one marked by a system of racial segregation. The city's growing black population was mostly relegated to the largely poor and run-down near east side. The city was not, however, strictly segregated. The near east side contained a number of white residents, and black residents lived in various other parts of the city, but black residents outside of the near east side tended to receive harsh treatment and those living *in* it were intentionally disenfranchised from the white institutions found there.[71] This segregation scheme, which is foreshadowed by the discriminatory practices inherent in Michigan's foundations, serves as a precursor to the sense of black marginalization present in Detroit today. In other words, even though Detroit is often characterized as a black American

[70] David M. Katzman, *Before the Ghetto: Black Detroit in the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 5-6.

[71] ibid., 75-80.

city, whose cultural and artistic production has always relied on black expression, the history of the city is deeply embedded in terms of racial oppression and segregation.

Detroit's proximity to Canada shares a relationship with the process of black marginalization that shaped social relations in the city as well. Slavery in the British Empire came to an end in 1833, some years before it was abolished in Michigan concurrent with its induction into American statehood. The British during this era had jurisdiction over Canada, which meant that progressive anti-slavery policies were put in place earlier there than in Detroit—which is just across the Detroit River from the city of Windsor in the Canadian province of Ontario—making Canada a safer location for early black migrants into the area. The economic opportunities in Michigan, however, caused it to be a more favorable destination in some ways, and, according to Katzman, this created a transient class of black immigrants in the Detroit/Windsor area, "drifting here and there in search of freedom or work."[72] The transient nature of these black workers, torn between the financial security of Detroit and the comparatively less racially stifling climate of Canada, adds to the historically marginalized position of Detroit's black community. Being forced to decide between financial security on the one hand and freedom from discrimination on the other, many black migrants to the Detroit area found themselves in a tentative position.

The rise of the auto industry in the Detroit area is another contributing factor which helped to foster a perpetually marginalized black community there. The Detroit auto industry had a reputation for employing a larger percentage of black labor compared to most other industries. The flight of black migrants leaving the Jim Crow south in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the need for industrial labor associated with the first and second World Wars meant that many black Americans in search of a better life ended up in northern industrial centers, like

[72] ibid., 17.

Detroit. One of Detroit's advantages over other cities in the north-east and mid-west—places that could serve as havens from racial discrimination—was the development of the auto industry and its less racially discriminatory practices. Black workers could more easily find employment in auto manufacturing and those jobs provided them with financial opportunity as well as enabling them to develop valuable skills. This is a dynamic that made Detroit an important destination for black migrants.

Despite the favorable conditions experienced by black workers in the Detroit auto industry, the situation was not without its drawbacks. In the industry's early days, most black employees were relegated to dangerous and unpleasant jobs, like paint-spraying, wet-sanding, and foundry work, with very few working in assembly-line production or administration.[73] Black auto workers would eventually cement a relationship with the racially-inclusive United Auto Workers (UAW) labor union, and while this association gained them access to better paying and more sought after jobs, systematic and societal racism remained an ever present factor that hindered the complete integration of black labor into all facets of the industry.[74] Despite the inclusive nature of this important Detroit industrial sector, and the partnership between black labor and the UAW, black workers still found themselves occupying a marginalized status.

Even though conditions in Detroit involving its origins and industrial rise made it a prime location for black migrants seeking financial opportunity and racial equality, it was not a simple task for Detroit's black community to find a home away from the social periphery. This is a fact that remains to this day, and despite the city's majority black population, black Detroit's contemporary cosmopolitan expression emerges not just as an Afropolitan expression but as one on the margins.

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[73] August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 7-8.

[74] ibid., 207-208.

Marginalized Afropolitanism in Detroit Reggae

Previously I outlined characteristics common to reggae that align it with some of the general facets of Afropolitanism. These are: its hybrid nature, its global, cosmopolitan presence, and certain musical aspects that imbue it with a decidedly African character. Running in tandem with reggae's Afropolitan identity is its capacity to function as an expressive tool for groups existing on social and global margins. This is evidenced by the work of various different scholars. Included among them are Luis Alvarez, with his discussion of reggae's use by marginalized native populations throughout the world as a counter voice to the oppressive encroachment of global capitalism, and Rivke Jaffe and Jolien Sanderse, with their depiction of reggae's use by Surinamese maroons as a means to combat prejudice and improve social status within the context of relocation to urban centers.[75] The commodification of reggae music and culture through global channels is a force that has granted different marginalized groups access to it. Likewise, its original use as a tool of protest and subversion by disenfranchised, lower-class Jamaicans has also given reggae the potential to serve as a powerful voice to those existing in the social margins.

Reggae, as an Afropolitan expression in conjunction with its associations with marginal communities places it within the sphere of Lawrence's "marginalized Afropolitanism" and this is particularly true concerning the people and places of the Detroit reggae scene. One way this fact was made apparent to me was during my time spent with Detroit reggae musicians outside of performances. When I first met King Mellowman he didn't always have a car to use and so I would often pick him up if I was in town and give him rides. This was due in part to the fact that

[75] Luis Alvarez, "Reggae Rhythms in Dignity's Diaspora: Globalization, Indigenous Identity, and the Circulation of Cultural Struggle," *Popular Music and Society* 31, no. 5 (December 2008): 577-579; Rivke Jaffe and Jolien Sanderse, "Surinamese Maroons as Reggae Artistes: Music, Marginality and Urban Space," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 33, no. 9 (Oct 2010): 1564.

we had become friends and I enjoyed his company and being able to help him out, but it also gave me time with him to talk about the reggae scene in Detroit and to accompany him to the places associated with it. This meant that I was regularly at his house, which is located off of 7-Mile road, just south of 8-Mile road and the city's northern limits. The West Indian American Association Hall, which is known for hosting Caribbean cultural events, is on 7-Mile in this same area and, as I discovered, this is not a bad part of town to find a good Jamaican restaurant.

The northern border or Detroit around 7- and 8-mile roads has become, over the course of Detroit's history, home to the city's poor and working-classes, separated from the affluence of the city center to the south and the suburbs to the north. This part of the city is majority black and has a reputation for being dangerous and poverty-stricken. During my time spent there I am not sure it seemed that dangerous, or all that impoverished, but despite my evaluation it can still be noted as a marginal space compared to other parts of the city. Most of Detroit's vitality in terms of public transportation, important services, and good employment opportunities is located quite a few blocks south, in the downtown area. A simple walk down the street would not be enough to reach out from this place and grant you access to all Detroit has on offer. In other words, the renewal and development efforts the city has recently undergone have not reached this area, or other majority black areas of Detroit.

King Mellowman's group, Mellow Runnings, rehearses in another part of Detroit, in the Dexter-Linwood neighborhood on the northwest side of the city. This is an old suburb made up of houses mostly built during the first half of the 20th century. The part of the neighborhood where Mellow Runnings has its rehearsal space is full of large, well built, brick houses, but a number of them were in disrepair and it appeared that many were unoccupied. There are also large empty lots where one could have envisioned structures having been at one point. This is the

neighborhood where I first met and interviewed the reggae DJ Idris Nia and is where he resides. It is a space that appears to have been left behind by the level of development and maintenance common to the downtown area, or the Midtown corridor where Wayne State University is situated. Positioned within a marginal status, this area is also one of the places where Detroit reggae finds its home.

Reggae's association with black marginalization in Detroit is also present in Horatio Bennett's planned Caribbean-American museum project. Horatio, who is an important founding member of the Detroit reggae scene and a strong advocate of the city's Caribbean culture, is involved in the process of erecting a museum and cultural center that would serve as a beacon of Caribbean culture in Detroit and as a unifying device for the city's dispersed Caribbean community. One of the areas the city presented to him as a location for the museum is Brightmoor. Horatio did not sound interested in this proposal, indicating to me that this neighborhood is "one of the worst areas of Detroit."[76] Brightmoor is well to the northeast of downtown and is a place that the city would like to revitalize. Part of Horatio's concern is that they would take advantage of locating his museum there as a way of accomplishing their revitalization task without having to foot the bill entirely on their own. He decided to turn down this proposal and instead seek out "an area where a lot of people can come and visit the museum and feel safe."[77] This situation demonstrates the struggle between Detroit Caribbean culture, of which reggae is a mouthpiece, and the forces of marginalization.

Marginalization is a factor that exerts influence on where reggae is performed in Detroit. Many of the venues that support reggae music are located away from the posh nightlife of the downtown area. For instance, Club Caribbean—which is an important site for dancehall and

[76] Horatio Bennett, interview by Richard Hopkins, April 8, 2018.
[77] ibid.

reggae DJ performance—is in the northeast part of the City, not far from the Brightmoor neighborhood. Its reputation as one of the top clubs in Detroit for reggae and dancehall DJing places it at the focal point of the Detroit reggae scene but its physical location positions it in a marginal place compared to its prestige.

One club associated with the reggae scene that is close to the bustle of Detroit's city center is Thomas Magee's, although, its core identity as an Irish pub has the effect of slightly downplaying its importance as a site for the performance of reggae music and culture. Kola Restaurant with its African/Caribbean identity shares a much stronger connection to the reggae performances it hosts, but this club is not even located within the Detroit city limits. Kola, while being a well appointed venue in a nice area, functions as a satellite of the Detroit reggae scene. This issue of proximity has the effect of placing it on Detroit's margins.

Most of the reggae musicians I have interacted with in Detroit I would count as Afropolitans, even in the elitist terms used by Selasi. They are formally educated, well-traveled, engaged in lofty civic and artistic pursuits, and fashion-forward. Even so, they are not beholden to Ede's "metropolitan public," but rather belong to the counterpublic realm of Lawrence's "marginalized Afropolitanism." This is expressed through the places that Detroit reggae inhabits, and the interactions between those who inhabit these spaces and the forces that control who should be where and why. It is also expressed in the narratives that these actors carve out for themselves, in particular an overt commitment to reggae as a mode of social justice, one with a political history.

Reggae, Global Circulation, and the Marginalized Afropolitan

Reggae has its roots in poor, working-class Jamaica and as a Rastafarian expressive voice. This dynamic was altered slightly when the Wailers, with the help of Chris Blackwell,

propelled reggae into the global pop spotlight in the early 1970s. Concurrent with this shift, reggae was marketed to a white, secular, middle-class, Euro-American audience. As a result of this move, reggae gained a great deal of pop culture prominence and became known the world over. The commercialization of the music in this way threatened to put it at odds with its lower-class, black, and Rasta identity, but this process also allowed it to become a globally circulated product that could find purpose with other disenfranchised black communities while poising it to serve as a global Afropolitan unifier.

Reggae's commercial success and global acceptance by different types of racial and social groups worked to give it a stronger cosmopolitan position than the one it enjoyed as simply a Jamaican popular music. Not long after Bob Marley was introduced to the larger world did reggae influences find their way into the music of many global pop icons. Songs such as Paul Simon's "Mother and Child Reunion" (1972), The Police's "Can't Stand Loosing You" (1978), and Eric Clapton's cover of Marley's "I Shot the Sheriff" (1974) are testaments to the important role reggae played in shaping popular music's cosmopolitan sound in the late thentieth century. All the artists I listed here are white Europeans and Americans and this fact precludes them and their work from belonging to the Afropolitan world. The channels by which it reached them, however, also brought reggae to another segment of performers, and ones that could be counted among the Afropolitan ranks. Foremost among them is the Ivoirian musician Alpha Blondy.

Blondy rose to importance in Côte d'Ivoire following the death of Bob Marley in 1981. The county's post-colonial climate favored western influences and expressive forms and the almost exclusively state run media outlets there had little interest in promoting arts based on African models. Mitchell Land makes particular note of this fact, stating "virtually every encounter between the press and Ivoirian artists establishes the inevitable link between the

performer and Western culture."[78] This had an effect on the county's youth culture and many involved looked to Europe and the United States for their inspiration, Blondy among them.

Trends among Ivoirian urban youth during Blondy's earlier years included a fascination with black America which led to many of them learning English, using American slang, and changing their African names to ones that sounded more Western. Blondy aligned himself with these trends in order to, like his contemporaries, take on a more western persona, changing his name multiple times, from Seydou Koné to Johnny, to Elvis, and eventually to Blondy. "This symbolic rite of passage was later realized concretely with his jaunts to Paris, New York and Miami, where he borrowed the reggae of Bob Marley rather than the music of American blacks that was dominating the Ivoirian music scene."[79] For Blondy reggae would eventually become an expressive tool that he would use to critique the Eurocentric and oppressive post-colonial conditions in his country while also appealing to the state-controlled media.

In the years following Côte d'Ivoire's independence in 1960, the country's governing forces sought to implement policies that would help promote economic prosperity, foster a sense of national unity, consolidate their political hold, and lead to modernization. To achieve this goal they promoted Western cultural and social values and utilized the media as a means by which to push this agenda.[80] Reggae's position as a Western global pop force made it palatable to the Ivoirian media, but its anti-Western capitalist, Rasta message allowed it to function as a covert subversion, "A horizontal influence—Jamaican, another Third World sister—and not the vertical influence—American and European popular music."[81] Blondy's hybrid character, mixing European and American style with his African sensibilities and allegiances, is an example of the

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[78] Mitchell F. Land, "Reggae Resistance and the State: Television and Popular Music in the Côte d'Ivoire," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 12, no. 4 (1995): 443.

[79] ibid., 446

[80] ibid., 442-443.

[81] ibid., 446.

Afropolitan concept of "being African or of African descent in the world today"[82] and it is no coincidence that his voice is projected through a reggae amplifier.

Lucky Dube, who according to Jérémie Dagnini is a South African counterpart to Blondy and emblematic of that country's reggae scene,[83] is another important Afropolitan reggae figure. Beginning his career in the early 1980s as a mbaqanga—a type of South African popular music—singer, he eventually turned to reggae and its capacity to express social unity while affecting cultural change. Like Blondy, he wished to critique the negative social conditions suffered by the black community in his country while engaging in a medium that would allow for wide exposure. Reggae seemed the perfect tool and by 1985 Dube had achieved a certain amount of fame, with his album *Slave* becoming at that time the bestselling album in South Africa. What followed were tours to all parts of the globe, a movie appearance, and in 1995 the World Music Award for Best Selling African Recording Artist. Dube, like Alpha Blondy, is an Afropolitan and demonstrated through his success and accolades reggae's ability to function as a voice for Africa in a modern global context.

The maroon communities of Suriname, similarly to Blondy and Dube, used reggae as a means by which to negotiate the complexities of the modern world and their place in it. For them, one of the main functions of participating in reggae music was to gain prestige and acceptance in the face of racial and social discrimination.[84] These groups originally inhabited informal settlements founded by escaped African slaves in the Surinamese wilderness, but by the begging of the twenty-first century many maroons had migrated from their jungle homes into the coastal cities. Here they were persecuted as backwards and criminal, making it difficult for them

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[82] Eze, "Rethinking African Culture and Identity," 239.

[83] Jérémie Kroubo Dagnini, "The Importance of Reggae Music in the Worldwide Cultural Universe," *Études Caribéennes*, no. 16 (Août 2010), under "Problématiques Caribéennes." doi:10.4000/etudescaribeennes.4740.

[84] Jaffe, "Surinamese Maroons as Reggae Artistes: Music, Marginality and Urban Space," 1569.

to find work or decent housing. Turning to reggae culture enabled urbanized maroons the opportunity to obtain legal income and accrue prestige and cultural capital. In this case reggae music worked towards developing for them a kind of Afropolitan status as well as being a marker of it. In addition to its ability to raise their position in Suriname's modern urban centers, reggae likewise connected the Surinamese maroons to the wider, global, cosmopolitan African community.

One key component that allows reggae to function as a marker of global African identity and as an Afropolitan voice in the world at large is the music's close association to Rastafari. This is a relationship that has been in place since reggae's early beginnings and the music is seen by many as a specifically Rastafarian art form. Rastafari's foundations being built on the work of Jamaican preacher and famed Africanist, Marcus Garvey, and its use of the Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie I (crowned in 1930) as the faith's religious figurehead puts the religion in a particularly Afro-centric position. This, combined with its close tie to a globally known and widely popular music form such as reggae, makes Rastafari an especially effective Pan-African expression.

Rastafari is a religion with its gaze towards Africa, and this fact goes deeper than simply its Garvian foundations and homage to Haile Selassie. The religion's further African associations are apparent though the activities of Leonard Howell. Howell has the distinction of being one of the first Rastafari preachers and is also known for establishing the Rastafarian community known as Pinnacle in Jamaica's St. Catherine Parish in 1940. In discussing Pinnacle, Bradley states that it "enjoyed communal property and cooperative labor," and Chevannes notes that "although…each family was responsible for its own upkeep, there was the practice of communal

labor for the good of the organization as a whole, and the sharing of an integrated social life."[85] Before establishing his "*community* of believers" in St. Catherine it was said that Howell, while operating a small bakery in Kingston, would freely give his poor patrons other staples along with their bread.[86]

The kind of socially-oriented sense of community above individual demonstrated by Howell and those involved with Pinnacle would go on to be an important aspect of the Rastafari belief system, and also happens to align with certain African modes of being. A great many societies in sub-Saharan Africa, as Achille Mbembe points out, have communal networks of reciprocity governed by group obligation and familial and societal ties.[87] James Ferguson similarly notes this sentiment as being pervasive in African social concerns and adds that it is not just supported through logical debate but is associated with a particularly African type of moral code.[88]

The importance placed on African social norms and the reverence towards Africa as a symbol and imagined home makes Rastafari a religion that exudes a sense of Africa. Reggae's strong affiliation to this religion, along with certain identifiably African devices embedded in the music, imparts similarly to reggae a strong African identity. The way reggae is performed in Detroit demonstrates connections to African ways of being also and this places the Detroit reggae scene within a global African, as well as Afropolitan, context.

There is in the Detroit reggae scene a system of informal exchange. This is common to many people and places but is ever present in African social configurations. According to

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[85] Lloyd Bradley, *This is Reggae Music: The Story of Jamaica's Music* (New York, Grove Press, 2000), 82; Barry Chevannes, *Rastafari: Roots and Ideology* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1994), 123.

[86] Chevannes, *Rastafari: Roots and Ideology*, 122.

[87] Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 46-47.

[88] James Ferguson, *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 72-77.

Ferguson "while the 'shadow economy' exists everywhere, Africa is perhaps distinctive in that, on much of the continent, it is generally reckoned to be larger than the formal sector."[89] In speaking about the difficulties of the post-colonial situation in much of Africa, Mbembe outlines a similar set of conditions:

> False mileage meters; faked water, electricity, and telephone bills; falsified taxes and other dues: few pay these days. Doctors are abandoning hospitals treating patients at home. Teachers are going through the motions of teaching in official establishments and, in secret, organizing private classes for those with the means to pay. Civil servants are working with one hand and striking with the other. Banned meetings are held at night, in secret. Everything has gone underground.[90]

Many in the Detroit reggae scene are involved in this type of informal exchange. This is made most apparent relating to informal food services. One of my contacts made supplemental income by selling plates of jerk chicken on the side and even brought me one once just as a favor and to try it out. This is not dissimilar to a situation I came across at a backyard, dancehall house party I attended following a reggae show at Thomas Magee's. The DJ was spinning reggae and dancehall tracks, there was an informal cash bar located to one side of the yard, and the kitchen was putting out traditional Jamaican dishes. This setup is not, generally speaking, an entirely uncommon one, but what struck me as unique was the printed menu on the hallway stairs leading into the house's kitchen, listing the dishes that could be acquired at this informal takeout location on the regular.

Communal sentiments, like those I previously mentioned, also abound throughout the Detroit reggae community, indicated somewhat by the "Hug Life" t-shirts that King Mellowman

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[89] ibid., 15.
[90] Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 147.

circulates. It is a tight-knit scene with musicians supporting each other's efforts by filling-in in one another's bands, helping out with rides for band members and equipment, attending each other's events as patrons, and generally backing each other's projects and endeavors with an eye towards furthering the quality of the community as a whole.

I began to feel this spirit of cooperation myself after having spent some time involved with Detroit reggae. On one occasion I was conscripted to drive Mellow Runnings to a show they had in Grand Rapids, Michigan. As a participant in the Detroit reggae scene, my assistance was asked for and my attendance at the event was valued. One other instance that stands out to me was a time when after a show someone I hardly knew invited me to attend an after party on the other side of town. After having spent some time at the party, the individual I was with decided it was time for them to head home for the night. Before leaving they made sure I knew where I was and how to get home, and, me being slightly unfamiliar there, asked a friend to look out for me to ensure I was safe and comfortable. I was hardly known to any of the parties involved in this scenario, but this level of care between members of the Detroit reggae scene is commonplace and is something that exceeds other such music-centered communities I have participated in.

Aspects, such as a communal focus and participation in an informal economy, link Detroit reggae culture to African modes of being. And the activities of the black artists involved in the global reggae community aid in bringing reggae into the Afropolitan fold. Bob Marley, Alpha Blondy, Lucky Dube, and the Surinamese maroons all live a hyphenated existence and either exemplify or (in the case of the maroons) strive towards a cosmopolitan lifestyle complete with global and metropolitan prestige and accolades. Through their music's critical stance against colonialism in Africa, African slavery, and discrimination towards black and African

peoples and through their Rastafarian practices—all mentioned having strong ties to Rastafari—theses musicians pay head to Africa as a place central to their work and exude a sense of being cosmopolitan in a specifically African way.

While they all fall under the umbrella of Afropolitanism, these individuals are also figures who occupy marginal positions. Marley had to compromise aspects of his music during his dealings with Chris Blackwell, Blondy had to affect a western persona in order to get media exposure, Dube experienced governmental and societal friction concerning some of his lyrical choices, and the Surinamese maroons where persecuted as a discriminated cast during their integration into urban life. Rastafari, too, has struggled with marginalizing powers. Early in the religion's development in Jamaica, Rastafarians were severely persecuted. Even in its current position of global popularity it still does not possess the same level of recognition as other world religions such as Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. It is a testament to the power of reggae as a musical and cultural force that despite these odds it would be as far-ranging and influential as it has been and continues to be. With its African associations and world-wide importance and influence, reggae music is a global Pan-African voice and a mouth piece for Afropolitanism. And despite the marginalized position faced by many black reggae artists, the music's fortitude allows it to be heard from this vantage.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

In various ways Detroit has strong ties to black culture. It served as a haven for black Americans escaping the oppression of slavery and segregation—a period in U.S. history lasting from the early seventeenth century until the mid-twentieth century—is the central location for the U.S. auto industry, which has been an historically important black employer, and was the original home of the world-famous Motown record label, which was a strong force in shaping the production of black American entertainment in the twentieth-century. Reggae music has similar ties to the black experience. It was born in the poor, black, working-class neighborhoods of Jamaica, serves as a mouthpiece for the Afro-centric Rastafarian faith, and has the capacity to function as a widespread Pan-African and black Caribbean expression. The city of Detroit and reggae music also share the distinction of being globally significant forces. Detroit is a world commercial and industrial center and reggae is a globally recognized and influential popular music and cultural movement. They are both part of a larger global and cosmopolitan context.

Reggae music as it exists in Detroit connects this traditionally black space to the broader black and African world while also creating a vital sense of community for its Detroit participants, particularly those belonging to the Caribbean community which is spread out into different enclaves throughout the city. Those involved with reggae in Detroit use it as a force of commonality between each other and with larger global movements, one of which is the movement known as Afropolitanism. Through the writings of scholars such as Taiye Selasi and Chielozona Eze, I have identified three characteristics common to Afropolitanism: a hybrid and hyphenated sense of identity, the importance of establishing a connection to Africa as a place, and the notion of being cosmopolitan in a culturally specific way.

Reggae aligns with the facets I have identified as belonging to Afropolitanism in rather specific ways. It possesses a hyphenated and hybrid character, containing influences from myriad places, including Jamaica, the U.S., Africa, and Europe. It is connected to Africa through its use of African musical concepts and its association to Rastafari and this religion's gaze towards Africa. It is also a modern cosmopolitan force with culturally specific black and African roots. The way reggae functions in Detroit demonstrates these tenants as well. The key venues where reggae is performed in Detroit have hyphenated identities and the music performed at them is a hybrid amalgam of Caribbean and American influences. The spaces where reggae is performed demonstrate a connection to Africa through the way atmosphere is created in support of Detroit's reggae culture. The people of the Detroit reggae scene participate in culturally specific African value systems. In these ways the Detroit reggae scene and the people and places associated with it are definably a part of the larger Afropolitan realm.

While being Afropolitan, Detroit reggae falls more specifically under the category of marginalized Afropolitanism. In Detroit, both past and present, there is a history of blackness being marginalized, despite the city's majority black status. Detroit reggae appears to suffer from this same affliction. Much of the reggae scene is found operating on Detroit's margins, segregated and cut off from the city's main arteries and infrastructure. This is added to by the fact that reggae, while crucial to those who engage with it in modern Detroit, is not a largely influential force there.

This marginalized positionality links Detroit reggae to reggae on a larger scale. Major global reggae personalities, such as Bob Marley, Alpha Blondy, and Lucky Dube, are important Afropolitan figures but ones that have still faced the pressures of marginalization. They all have achieved widespread fame and have noteworthy accolades to their credit, but have suffered

difficulties and compromise in order to attain their positions. Reggae music itself suffered through a crucible of difficulties and compromise—through its lower-class, black beginnings and association to Rastafari—in order to achieve its status as a global pop force. And while it currently enjoys an influential place among the ranks of global pop music, its original marginalized status and subversive uses in the face of such pressures have been noted by marginalized communities the world over and have been taken up by them as a tool against their oppression. The marginalizing pressures faced by the Detroit reggae community link it with reggae as a global movement and the marginalization associated with it and the artist who practice it.

Despite its struggle with marginalizing forces, reggae emerges powerful as a positive generator of unity and social justice with the capacity to uplift the mind, body, and spirit. It functions this way in the world and it functions this way in the city of Detroit. Reggae in Detroit serves as a center for community and as a space where that community can find and express itself. It is an Afropolitan voice that sounds within the city while also ranging far beyond its borders.

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