Rastafarianism & Michael Manley

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The 1972 general election in Jamaica is often remembered for what followed it: Michael Manley's first administration and the most radical experiment in the modern era of Jamaican politics. However, the campaign itself was also a novelty, perhaps most notably because of the People's National Party's self-conscious adoption of Rastafari symbolism and imagery. As the sociologist Anita Waters has written of the party in that election: "Her Majesty's loyal opposition, in contrast to the 'racial harmony' of the previous campaign, was now saluting with clenched fists and threatening to 'beat down Babylon'."[1]

The infusion of Rastafari into mainstream political discourse was a radical departure from past experience. Whereas the Jamaican establishment traditionally viewed the sect as a subversive, criminal sub-culture, Manley appeared to embrace it openly. At PNP rallies across the country, reggae music with unabashedly revolutionary lyrics blared from the sound systems. Candidates could be heard using recognizably Rasta expressions such as "Hail de man," and "Peace and love." Campaigners even took to styling Manley as a latter-day Joshua, sent to deliver Jamaicans from the oppression of Hugh Shearer's ruling Jamaican Labour Party. Manley encouraged this image by wielding a staff he called the 'Rod of Correction', a campaign device laden heavily with Rastafarian symbolism.

The unprecedented appropriation of Rastafari in 1972 raises some intriguing questions. How, for instance, had Rastafari removed itself from the "lunatic fringe" of Jamaican society to find a place in mainstream politics? Moreover, does this development reflect changes in the movement itself or within broader Jamaican society? In this essay I will try to uncover the reasons for this shift. I will argue that Rastafari became a political commodity in 1972 because by then it enjoyed a newfound cultural legitimacy, had lost much of the taboo that once surrounded it and had become an outlet for popular expressions of Black Nationalism and discontent with the postcolonial *status quo*. Manley understood the resonance of

[1] Anita M. Waters, Race, Class, and Political Symbols: Rastafari and Reggae in Jamaican Politics (New Brunswick, U.S.A.: Transaction Books, 1985), 90.

Rastafari themes among parts of Jamaican society, and sympathized with its core objectives of alleviating the country's deeply-entrenched poverty and altering the inherited power structure. Though he shared some of the concerns of Rastafari and used its language and imagery to communicate certain ideas, this should not be mistaken for a sincere embrace of the movement in its entirety.

Rastafari seemed to emerge almost spontaneously in Jamaica during the early 1930's. In fact, the movement drew on several trends embedded in Jamaican culture: the religious revivalism of the late 19th century, traditional Afro-Christianity and an anti-colonial peasant movement dating to the maroons of the 18th century. The influence of two more recent developments, however, distinguished Rastafari from earlier native religious movements in Jamaica. The first was the teachings of Marcus Mosiah Garvey which were by then in currency throughout North America and the Caribbean. Garvey's emphasis on black nationalism and Pan-Africanism informed the Rastafarians' Afrocentric world view, as well as its demand for repatriation to the spiritual homeland of Ethiopia. The second inspiration was the coronation of Haile Sellasie as Emperor of Ethiopia in 1930. The event, widely featured in Western newspapers and newsreels, was imbued with messianic significance by some of Garvey's followers, who saw it as the fulfillment of biblical prophecy.

Although adherents have always been loath to describe Rastafari as containing an official doctrine or ideology — preferring instead to regard it as a way of life — a few essential tenets can be identified. First and most important is a belief in the divinity of Halie Selassie, a living incarnation of god, or Jah. Rastafarians viewed Jamaica as an exile analagous to that of the ancient Israelites, a hellish existence characterized by systematic dehumanization at the hands of Babylonian oppressors. Africa, and specifically Ethiopia, represented the promised land to which Selassie the redeemer would soon arrange repatriation. The practice of Rastafari must be understood as a response to the perceived Babylonian conditions of Jamaican society. Their resistance was manifested most visibly in cultural practices such as the growing of dreadlocks and marijuana usage, which rejected the norms and aesthetic preferences of colonial society.

The identity of the first Rastafarian preacher remains in dispute, but the distinction is most often given to Leonard Howell. A

committed Garveyite, Howell began preaching news of the coming of the black messiah throughout the poorer districts of Kingston in 1933. Although he attracted only a small following in the early years, Howell's radical preaching earned him the fearful scrutiny of the colonial government and Jamaican establishment. An early account of one of his meetings from the *Daily Gleaner* reflects the tone of the initial response to the emergence of Rastafari: "Devilish attacks are made at these meetings, it is said on the government, both local and imperial and the whole proceedings would tend to provoke insurrection."[2] For much of its history, the *Gleaner* was the voice of the island's planter and merchant elite and featured a strongly pro-British editorial position. Its coverage of Rastafari is thus highly slanted, but nevertheless serves as a useful barometer for measuring the changes in mainstream responses to the movement.

From the outset, the Jamaican establishment regarded Rastafari — despite the sect's relative obscurity — as an existential threat to the colonial order. The source of the official anxiety surrounding the movement is not hard to identify. Rastafari represented at its core a wholesale rejection of the hegemony of whiteness and the will to "bring about fundamental transformation of an unjust social society if not its total destruction."[3] In his preaching, Howell openly supported the Nyabingi, an anti-colonial resistance movement in Uganda and called openly for death to all "white oppressors" in Jamaica. Before preaching to crowds of typically a few hundred, Howell would often ask his followers to sing "God Save the King" but to do so knowing that they sang not "for King George V, but for Ras Tafari, our new king."[4] In colonial Jamaica, this act of pledging allegiance to a foreign sovereign amounted to treason. Indeed, it was for selling images of Haile Selassie for one shilling apiece that Howell was eventually arrested in 1933. In the official indictment, the colonial government accused Howell and his deputy Robert Hinds of sedition for attempting

> to excite hatred and contempt for his majesty the King of England and of those responsible for the government of the

[2] Anthony Bogues, Black Heretics, Black Prophets: Radical Political Intellectuals (London: Routledge, 2003), 159.
[3] Rex Nettleford, Introduction to Dread: The Rastafarians of Jamaica, by Joseph Owens (London: Heinemann, 1979), ix.
[4] Ennis Barrington Edmonds, Rastafari: From Outcasts to Culture Bearers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 40.

> island, and to create disaffection among the subjects of his majesty in this island and to disturb the public peace and tranquility of the island.[5]

Thus the colonial government considered Rastafari an unappeasable and existential threat which, like virtually all anti-colonial movements of the era, was met with violence and repression. This initial response to Rastafari set a tone and precedent for several successive Jamaican governments — even after independence — in their approach to dealing with the movement.

It was the 1938 labour rebellions — sparked primarily by the hardships of economic depression — which gave rise to the two political cartels that have dominated Jamaican politics ever since. The protests lacked an explicit racial motive or content, but nevertheless engaged matters of economic disparity redolent of Rastafari critiques. Nevertheless, the brethren were conspicuous by their absence in the marches and roadblocks which for a time paralyzed the entire country. Rastafari, as we have seen, dismissed the possibility of redemption from within Jamaica, and looked instead to a salvation that must perforce come from without. Although the labour movement did include several ex-Garveyites, Rastafarians took little or no part in the revolt. This disengagement from a genuine moment of mass radicalism had, I submit, lasting significance. Instead of achieving an early rapprochement with the labour movements that became Jamaica's dominant political actors in the postwar period, Rastafari solidified its place in the outermost margins of Jamaican politics. This in turn ensured a fraught relationship with the fledgling Jamaican state, which repressed the dissident movement with a zeal worthy of its colonial predecessors.

Official antipathy for Rastafari in Jamaica persisted even after self-government was ceded by the British in 1944. The antagonism remained in part because the Rastafarian, with his strident calls for a fire and brimstone destruction of the Jamaican state, was still regarded as a likely agent provocateur. This long-standing association between Rastafari and lawlessness was, in the eyes of the Jamaican establishment, borne out by several episodes in which Rastafarians were seen to be taking up arms against the state. The most prominent of these incidents took place in 1960, when

[5] Horace Campbell, Rasta and Resistance: From Marcus Garvey to Walter Rodney (London: Hansib Publications, 2007), 71.

security forces raided the Rastafarian commune of the Reverend Claudius Henry. The government believed that Henry, with the support of a black militant organization in New York, was planning an armed insurrection against the Jamaican state. A raid on the camp in June 1960 ended in a prolonged shootout which killed two soldiers and wounded three others. The revolt was met with a massive week-long security operation involving over 500 police and soldiers, resulting in the arrest of over 100 Rastafarians.[6] The 'Henry Rebellion' was a relatively minor skirmish and easily suppressed, but the scale of the government response is revealing.

Another episode of Rastafarian unrest three years later seemed to confirm official suspicions of the movement. The precise cause of the Coral Gardens incident remain obscure, but it seems likely that it was a land dispute between a group of Rastafarians and a local businessman in the Montego Bay area that resulted in the torching of a petrol station and the murders of eight people. News of the violence was soon reported in Kingston as an attempted insurrection. Within hours, the Prime Minister and the Commissioner of the Jamaican Constabulary Force convened on the area, backed by nine armored vehicles from the Jamaican Defence Force. The Coral Gardens incident, like the Henry Rebellion before it, amounted only to a minor disturbance. Yet the government's response, as Lacey notes, was to mobilize "the full weight of state power…against four men whose motives and proposed actions were unknown."[7] The paranoia surrounding any perceived attempt at rebellion can be explained in part by Cold War anxieties, specifically the recent memory of Castro's revolution in Cuba. It also suggests however that the image of Rastafarians held by the guardians of society had changed little with the end of colonial rule.

The Coral Gardens incident was thought to demonstrate another dangerous aspect of Rastafarian criminality, namely its association with the cultivation and trade of marijuana. The link between ganja — a plant the Rastafarians considered sacred — and crime was considered self-evident. The *Gleaner* was only repeating a widely-held belief when it observed in an editorial that "most crimes of violence in Jamaica, as in India, British Guiana, Trinidad and

[6] Terry Lacey, Violence and Politics in Jamaica, 1960-1970: Internal Security in a Developing Country (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977), 83.
[7] Ibid., 85.

other places can be traced directly to the use of ganja."[8] The would-be rebels behind the Coral Gardens incident were widely reported to be under the influence of marijuana. Partially as a response to that episode, the JLP government amended the Dangerous Drugs Act in 1964 to increase marijuana-relented sentences from twelve months to five years. The prominence of Rastafarians in the marijuana trade and the drug's association with criminality enforced official perceptions of the sect as a public menace.

The image of Rastafari held by much of Jamaican society during the period was not, on the whole, any more sympathetic. George Simpson, an American sociologist who visited the island to study Rastafari in 1955, noted that the prevailing attitude among the middle and upper classes was "one of contempt and disgust." Although he played down the threat of a Rastafarian uprising, he reported that "it is widely believed that the members of this cult are hooligans, psychopaths, and dangerous criminals. Ras Tafarians [sic] are often referred to as 'those dreadful people'."[9] A *Gleaner* columnist in 1960 wrote that, "it is self-evident that the majority [of Rastas] are lazy, dirty, violent and lawless scoundrels mouthing religious phrases to cover up their aversion to work and ill habits."[10] Perhaps the response was extreme, but the quotation does neatly encapsulate most of the Rastafarian stereotypes which, anecdotally at least, appear commonplace before the late 1960's. Certainly the charge of idleness was frequently leveled against the brethren. In 1963, when a group of Rasta youths protested an American-funded real estate development on the island's north coast, the response of many middle class observers, according to Campbell, was dismissive: "de bway dem lazy and dem no wan wuk, dem only wan fe smoke ganja."[11]

Indeed, the Rastafarians association with marijuana presents a fascinating contradiction. As the above quotation suggests, marijuana use was occasionally used to prove that Rastafarians were generally work-shy, unproductive members of

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[8] Rex Nettleford, Mirror, Mirror: Identity, Race and Protest in Jamaica (Kingston: W. Collins and Sangster, 1970), 81.
[9] George E. Simpson, "Political Cultism in West Kingston, Jamaica," Social and Economic Studies 4, no. 2 (1955), 144.
[10] Edmonds, From Outcasts to Culture Bearers, 82.
[11] Horace Campbell, "Rastafari: Culture of Resistance," Race and Class 22, no.1 (1980), 11.

society. This is closely related to another trope of anti-Rastafarian prejudice: mental deficiency. It is highly telling that the colonial government eventually decided to commit the incurable Howell to a mental asylum. This stereotype seems to have endured; Waters reports meeting a middle class respondent who explained his disdain for Rastas simply because "they are stupid people." Even as late as 1970, becoming a Rastafarian was still "regarded by the wider society as one of mental deterioration," and was seen as "an urgent matter for the psychiatrist."[12] According to stereotype, the link between their mental deficiency and the Rastafarians' chronic marijuana use was clear.

Yet as we have seen, their involvement in the cultivation and trade of ganja was often invoked to link the movement with violence and lawlessness. This too can be found in contemporary responses of Rastafari, including in a *Gleaner* column from 1961. In that piece, the author argues that the "aggressiveness" of the Rastafarians was "intimately wrapped up with ganja smoking," which in turn "breeds irritation which flares up all the time in 'incidents'."[13] Thus the Rastafarian appears to have held dual representations in the popular imagination: at once the spliff-smoking, mentally deficient idler as well as the violent, ganja-addicted revolutionary. In any case, the close association between Rastafari and marijuana served to underscore a perceived remoteness from the mainstream of Jamaican society.

In the first part of this essay I have discussed the continuities in the official response of successive Jamaican governments (both before and after independence) toward Rastafari and how these attitudes were mirrored in wider Jamaican society. The purpose of the preceding pages has been twofold: first, to provide some essential context to the place of Rastafari in Jamaican politics and second, to highlight the complete novelty and radicalism of Manley's appropriation and apparent embrace of the "lunatic fringe." The question now presents itself more pressingly: given the longstanding antagonism between Rastfari and the political establishment as well as an apparent widespread distaste for the movement in Jamaican society, how was Manley's reggae campaign of 1972 even possible? In the following pages I will try to trace the

[12] Nettleford, Mirror, Mirror, 56-57.
[13] Stephen A. King, Reggae, Rastafari, and the Rhetoric of Social Control (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2002), 77.

changes, beginning roughly in 1960, to both Rastafari and Jamaican society which made such a strategy feasible, and even politically attractive.

In 1960, apparently disillusioned with negative press coverage and the myriad popular misconceptions surrounding their movement, several Rastafarians approached the University College of the West Indies (the precursor to the University of the West Indies) to discuss the possibility of an academic study in to Rastafari. This proved to be a shrewd decision. The report, produced by three researchers in a mere fortnight, provided for the first time an historically accurate account of the movement's origins and development. The report was broadly sympathetic to Rastafari, and went to great lengths to dispel many of the myths which had for so long surrounded the sect. As Rex Nettleford, one of the study's authors later recalled, the researchers encountered a complex and diverse group of people who defied simple categorization: "some were indeed committed to a political and military struggle, others revivalist in orientation and in origin, some quietist but all deeply involved with the poverty and deprivation that was their climate of prime concern."[14]

The report was serialized in the *Gleaner* in eight parts, so as to ensure a wide discussion of its contents. It did not alter opinions of Rastafari overnight, but its central conclusions — that the movement was driven by legitimate social and economic grievances, and that the "criminal element" comprised a tiny fraction of the Rastafarian community — seems to have had resonance. As one JLP councillor later recalled:

> The Rastas were frowned on until the 1960 study. The study presented Rasta to the public as something other than criminals. I grew up in a house near a Rasta, and I always thought of him, and any locksman, as a thief. He was said to steal chickens, and he may have — he probably needed to. For most of the middle class, we don't bother to probe much. The professors pointed out that Rastas have non-criminal qualities.[15]

[14] Ibid., 43.
[15] Waters, Race, Class, and Political Symbols, 71.

Government repression of Rastafari and the suspicion often shown towards its followers continued, as we have seen, well into the 1960's and the report did little to alter this in the short term. It remains significant, however, as the first serious attempt within Jamaican society to engage with Rastafari with the aim of accommodation and not further marginalization.

The second major turning point in the legitimization of Rastafari in Jamaica came in 1966, with a brief state visit by Emperor Haile Selassie I. A massive crowd of Rastafarians converged on the airport, as the *Gleaner* reported the next day with some bemusement: "thousands of Jamaicans for whatever reason, were in a frenzy over an alien leader around whom they had woven legends."[16] It was perhaps the single largest gathering of Rastafarians in the movement's history, which resulted not, as the stereotypes would have it, in disorder but rather a mass demonstration of goodwill. As the same *Gleaner* report noted, never in Jamaican history had there been "such a spontaneous, heartwarming and sincere welcome to any person, whether visiting Monarch, visiting VIP or returning leader of a Jamaican party." The state visit earned the movement a respectability it had seldom enjoyed, as several prominent Rastas found themselves socializing with members of the upper and middle classes at the Governor General's residence. The exposure and dignified conduct of the Rastas during the visit, Edmonds argues, "conferred a sort of warrant of credibility on the movement."[17]

Another consequence of the visit was a noticeable doctrinal shift among some adherents away from the founding tenet of repatriation. During a meeting between the Emperor and several Rasta elders, Selassie was reported to have used the phrase "liberation before repatriation" which soon gained traction in the Rastafarian community. This not only dampened the repatriation fervor within the movement but, according to some scholars, gave rise to more explicitly political groups such as the Rastafarian Movement Alliance, which eschewed traditional political passivity. As enthusiasm for a divinely-appointed salvation in Ethiopia waned

[16] Nettleford, Mirror, Mirror, 82.
[17] Edmonds, From Outcasts to Culture Bearers, 86.

during the 1960's, it came to be replaced by its logical alternative: "Deliverance must be in Jamaica."[18]

The newfound cultural legitimacy of Rastafari as well as its increased politicization during the 1960's were both helped immeasurably by the rise of reggae as a popular art form. By the early 1970's, songs by Desmond Decker, Bob Marley and the Wailers and Jimmy Cliff had appeared on the pop charts throughout Europe and North America. The widespread popularity of reggae not only achieved global notoriety for Rastafari, but meant increasingly the movement became synonymous with Jamaican culture for foreign audiences. Many scholars have stressed the importance of reggae's global success in altering domestic perceptions of Rastafari, with Chevannes noting: "International approval silenced all middle-class criticism and opened the way for even greater identification."[19] Even the *Gleaner*, which had previously repeated the familiar middle class criticisms of "primitive" and "uncultured" Jamaican music, began by the early 1970's to feature extensive coverage of reggae artists.

The domestic popularity of reggae and other forms of Rastafarian culture, especially among the young, contributed to another process evident during the 1960's: the blurring of previously rigid distinctions between Rastafari and the mainstream. As Nettleford and his colleagues discovered, Rastafari had always been a heterogenous movement in which 'orthodoxy' could be only very loosely defined. These ambiguities were deepened by the popularity in the 1960's of what Gray calls "functional Rastfarianism" to wit, the selective embrace of Rastafarian language and accessories while ignoring other aspects of its core doctrine.[20] As one Rasta elder recalled to Waters of the late 1960's, "There was a lot of young blood in Rasta then. After that, you might expect anyone to have dreadlocks."[21] Rastafari, aided in no small measure by the popularity of reggae, had become an attractive counterculture for many lower and even middle class Jamaican youths. Typically this psuedo-Rastafarianism took the form of "long and carefully unkempt hair,"

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[18] Stephen A. King, "International Reggae, Democratic Socialism, and the Secularization of the Rastafarian Movement, 1972–1980," Popular Music and Society 22, no. 3 (1998), 51.

[19] Barry Chevannes, "Healing the Nation: Rastafari Exorcism of the Ideology of Racism in Jamaica," Caribbean Quarterly 36, no. 1/2 (1990), 79.

[20] Nettleford, Mirror, Mirror, 94.

[21] Waters, Race, Class and Political Symbols, 106.

the donning of clothing believed to be African, the open defiance of marijuana laws, and the flagrant breach of strict Rastafarian dietary laws.[22] So Rastafarian attitudes and cultural symbols had become widely diffused in Jamaican society by 1972, embraced by people who were in other respects decidedly not Rastafarians. This means we cannot understand any subsequent political appropriation of Rastafari as addressed exclusively to the Rastafarian community, strictly defined.

Another effect of reggae's explosion in popularity was to place Rastafari firmly in contemporary political discourse. There remains a debate among scholars about the timing and scale of Rastafarian political engagement. As we have seen, Rastafari did not shy away from vociferous criticism of every aspect of colonial society, including its political arrangements. At the same time, Rastafarians formed no political parties of their own, did not join the existing parties and refrained from discussing politics in all but the broadest conceptual terms. Reggae, however, was often quite topical, replete with references to everyday events relevant to ghetto life. In one hit song from the late 1960s, for example, the Ethiopians reflected on the rolling strikes and go-slows that had become a fixture of daily life for Jamaicans:

> Look deh now — Everything crash
> Firemen strike — Watermen strike
> Telephone pole men too
> Down to the policeman too
> What bad by the morning
> Can't come good a-evening[23]

Reggae not only served to popularize Rastafarian argot, but to associate it with the politics of resistance. Given the genre's leitmotif of escaping "downpression" and "beating down" the tormentors of Babylon, reggae leant itself to co-optation by opposition politicians. So it is not surprising that "Look deh now" became a popular phrase at PNP rallies, especially when speakers were pointing to alleged abuses or corrupt practices on the part of the ruling JLP. It is worth noting that the PNP's use of reggae declined in subsequent elections (when they enjoyed incumbency) while the now-opposition JLP quickly embraced it. Indeed, few

[22] Edmonds, From Outcasts to Culture Bearers, 89.
[23] Waters, Race Class and Political Symbols, 96.

politicians of the 1970's referenced reggae and Rastafari with as much enthusiasm as JLP leader Edward Seaga, who declared at one party rally in 1976: "But I want him [Manley] to know that Eddie is trodding creation, and the kingdom over which he rules no longer exists, because 'Jah Kingdom Gone to Waste'...Youthman and daughta should know which is their party."[24] Seaga, a light-skinned scion of the Levantine minority, made for an unlikely dread. His use of Rastafarian idiom however underscores a broader point. The popularity of reggae made it possible for politicians, especially those in opposition, to appropriate the Rastafarian language of resistance without necessarily embracing the core tenets Rastafari itself.

All of the developments listed thus far are essential in understanding the PNP's appropriation of Rastafari in 1972. The movement had gained visibility, cultural legitimacy and, if not acceptance, certainly unprecedented accommodation in Jamaican society. Perhaps the most important development, however, was a newfound association between the Rastafarian critique of Jamaican society and an emergent black consciousness and disillusionment with the postcolonial status quo that had taken hold in Jamaica by the late 1960's.

To explain this process, a word on the socioeconomic context of the 1960's is necessary. One of the central tenets of the Jamaican nationalism propagated by the two political parties was what Gray calls "Jamaican exceptionalism," the belief that race had ceased to be a dominant factor in social relations.[25] Alexander Bustamante — the first prime minister of an independent Jamaica and a member of the largely brown middle class — identified racial harmony as one of his guiding political principles: "People in the world have come to point at Jamaica as a leading example...[of a country] where races work and live in harmony with ever increasing respect for each other."[26] The myth of racial harmony was ubiquitous in official expressions of the Jamaican "national ethos" in the 1960's. For instance, a civics textbook produced by the Ministry of Education wrote approvingly of this multiracial ideal, urging high school students to "accept ourselves as an integrated community and

[24] Edmonds, From Outcasts to Culture Bearers, 92.
[25] Obika Gray, Radicalism and Social Change in Jamaica, 1960-1972 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 54.
[26] Ibid.

work towards the full development and prosperity of every individual, disregarding racial identification."[27]

In the historical narrative endorsed by Bustamante and Norman Manley then, nationalism was concerned primarily with the achievement of political sovereignty, a linear process which culminated with independence in 1962. The Rastafarian critique rejected the received narrative in the strongest terms, supplanting its pre- and post-independence periodization with a cyclical "Dread history" which stressed temporal and ontological continuities. In this conception of history, "multiracial Jamaica" was simply Babylon in another guise, fundamentally unaltered by the manufactured symbolism of independence. This idea of a "continuous colonial society" is repeatedly expressed by the reggae artists of the era, such as Peter Tosh who sang in a popular song: "Four hundred years, four hundred years / and it's the same philosophy."[28] For Rastafarians, the notion of a racially harmonious Jamaica was an obvious lie; a ploy to justify the continued exploitation of the black majority. As one Rasta critic — writing under the pseudonym 'Interpreter' — observed in 1963:

> [We] the black majority who has helped plow the soil, planted the vineyard and gather the fruits thereof , we are not the benefactors. Those who benefit are the protectors. They share the crops, they boss the work and own the shares...the majority of Jamaicans are black — why then are not the black supreme here?...Jamaica's independence means a well without water, a treasury without money.[29]

The Rastafari critique of neocolonialism — which maintained the rule of white, creole and "socially white" elements of society over the black majority — was mirrored by the economic stratification of Jamaica's dependent economy, which made mockery of the self-serving mythology of the island's elites. The country's principal industries were almost entirely foreign owned or else in the hands of the tiny ethnic minorities. The economic boom supported by the expanding bauxite and tourism industries failed to alleviate gaping economic inequities in Jamaica. Indeed, it has been

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[27] Nadi Edwards, "States of Emergency: Reggae Representations of the Jamaican Nation State," Social and Economic Studies 47, no. 1 (1998), 23.
[28] Ibid., 25-27.
[29] Nettleford, Mirror, MIrror, 61.

estimated that shortly after independence the country held the highest rate of inequality in the world: the richest five percent of the country controlling thirty percent of the economy, the poorest fifth controlling only two percent.[30] Despite nationalist rhetoric, independence had failed to alter the colonial structure of the Jamaican economy and had only served to entrench existing class-colour correlates.

Although Rastafarian had once been alone in uttering these subversive criticisms, this was no longer the case by the late 1960's. These ideas were a central component of the Black Power movement, which by then, had taken hold of the middle class intelligentsia. Walter Rodney, a visiting Guyanese academic at the University of the West Indies at Mona, was perhaps the first to recognize the commonality of interests and ideas among Jamaica's discontents. In the eight months he spent on the island before his expulsion in 1968, he worked to forge an alliance between radical intellectuals, the urban poor and Rastafarians. He recognized Rastafari as an authentic, homegrown black nationalism which could be used in the effort of ending the "mental slavery" of neo-colonialism. The rioting sparked by Rodney's expulsion suggested that black pride and criticisms of the incongruities of the inherited power structure had become widespread. In short, Rastafari did not create the growing Black Power sentiment or radical political engagement of the late 1960's, but it provided both with an outlet for their expression, a readily available culture and language of resistance.

We can turn now to the election of 1972 and its unprecedented incorporation of Rastafari. As I have argued in the foregoing pages, by the time of Manley's campaign Rastafari was no longer the "cult of outcasts" it had been a scant decade earlier. Indeed, between 1960 and 1972, it had been transformed from an obscure, dissident fringe group of perhaps 10,000 to a vibrant movement of upwards of 100,000 followers.[31] At the same time, its language and attitudes had become widely diffused throughout Jamaican society. Largely through the success of reggae, Rastafari enjoyed a cultural legitimacy it had long been denied. Although negative stereotypes persisted, the movement had come to be viewed by many as an authentic, Jamaican expression of black consciousness. Indeed, its critique of neo-colonialism gained

[30] Edwards, "States of Emergency," 28.
[31] Lacey, Violence and Politics in Jamaica, 39.

widespread credibility as disillusionment with the record of Jamaica's post-independence government grew. By 1972 it had become possible to invoke Rastafari simply because the movement had lost much of the taboo that once surrounded it. As one PNP campaign manager later recalled:

> [Their] numbers had swelled. A lot of middle class kids became Rastas. It is also true that by that time, their image had improved…they weren't necessarily a bad element. Their language was gaining currency among the middle classes and the school children. We had the feeling that Rasta talk was understood across the country.[32]

The question is often posed in the literature about the sincerity of the PNP's appropriation of Rastafari. Should we understand Manley's use of Rastafari as cynical opportunism or as evidence of a genuine embrace of the movements beliefs and principles? The answer, as ever, probably lies somewhere in between. Manley *did* cleverly manipulate the language and symbolism of Rastafari to successfully cast himself and his party as the voice of popular aspirations against an authoritarian and undemocratic regime. Reggae music was particularly useful in demonizing the JLP as the oppressive agents of imperialism, out of touch with the concerns of the "sufferers" or black poor. Manley's familiarity and ease with Rastafari helped him appeal to progressives, the youth, the urban poor and to benefit from the "diffusion into the crevices of Jamaican society of black pride."[33]

Yet it would be mistaken to attribute the PNP's turn to Rastafari to mere cynicism alone. Under Michael Manley, the party had undergone a fundamental transformation between 1968 and 1972, which ended the traditional policy convergence between the two parties. In essence, the PNP rediscovered the leftist impulse which it had suppressed during the 1952 purge of an internal Marxist faction. It absorbed many elements of 1960's radicalism, including members of the new independent unions, which advocated nationalization and workers control of industry, as well as Black Power intellectuals such as D. K. Duncan and Arnold Bertram after

[32] Waters, Race, Class, and Political Symbols, 196.
[33] Michael Kaufman, Jamaica Under Manley: Dilemmas of Socialism and Democracy (London: Zed Books, 1985), 63.

the dissolution of the Abeng collective.[34] The party's turn to the left meant that it was now more open to discourses it would have once eschewed. In other words, Manley's criticisms of the dominance of foreign capital and extreme wealth disparities did not make him a Rastafarian, but it placed him and his party in a similar intellectual framework. Although Manley used Rastafari idiom and symbols to communicate these ideas to a broader audience, this did not render them insincere.

Still, there remains a hint of truth to the charges of co-optation which many scholars have leveled against the PNP's campaign. This is probably best demonstrated by considering the relationship between Manley's government and the Rastafarians after the election victory. Initially there was hope within the Rastafarian community that it had found an advocate and defender in Manley. A hymn sung at Claudius Henry's Peacemakers' Church during the election went: "Haile Selassie I is our God / Claudius Henry is our King / Michael Manley is our Joshua / What a peace of mind / Our Joshua has come."[35] This optimism seemed at first to be justified. Manley made headlines by publicly condemning the police for shaving off the dreadlocks of brethren who they were interrogating. He also paid more than just lip service to the ideals black pride, and even encouraged his cabinet colleagues to replace their suits and ties with open neck African-inspired karebas.

Manley's government certainly evinced more sympathy to Rastafari than its predecessors, but its attitude was hardly a sincere embrace of the movement and all its beliefs. For instance, despite his pledge to review Jamaica's draconian drug laws, Manley's stance on ganja differed little from the established policies. He agreed to only minor reductions in sentences and even cooperated with the Nixon Administration in Operation Buccaneer, aimed at eradicating Jamaica's marijuana fields. Furthermore, it was at Manley's behest that "Babylon" was given unprecedented powers under the Gun Court and Suppression of Crime Act. Reggae songs were regularly and arbitrarily banned from the airwaves, just as they been under the JLP. This, coupled with the failure of democratic socialism to alleviate poverty or demonstrably alter the class structure meant that

[34] Carl Stone, "Stone, Power, Policy and Politics in Independent Jamaica," in Jamaica in Independence, ed. Rex Nettleford (Kingston: Heinemann Caribbean, 1989), 28.
[35] Waters, Race, Class, and Political Symbols, 127.

Rastafarian support faded into disillusionment. By the late 1970's, Manley's place in the brethren's esteem appears to be best described by Max Romeo's tune "No, Joshua, No":

> You took them out of bondage,
> And they thank you for it,
> You sang them songs of love,
> And they tried to sing with it;
> But now in the desert
> Tired, Battered and Bruised
> They think they are forsaken
> They think they have been used[36]

In conclusion, the answer to the question posed at the beginning of this essay is perhaps the most obvious one: Manley and his party turned to Rastafari in 1972 because it had become politically advantageous to do so. Much of this has to be attributed to the drastic overhaul of the image of Rastafari in Jamaican society witnessed during the 1960's. Not only had the Rastafarian movement grown in the decade between independence and Manley's victory, it had earned a cultural legitimacy long denied to it. The PNP's campaign can also be explained by the popular explosion of reggae — which supplied the party with a wealth of topical references as well as a familiar idiom of resistance, which suited the populist tenor of the campaign. By demonstrating his fluency in the language of the 'sufferers', Manley solidified his image as a champion of the discontented and dispossessed.

Manley did not share the central Rastafarian concerns of repatriation or the legalization of marijuana, as his record in office shows. Yet, in some ways the 1972 campaign reflects a meeting of minds. Manley and the re-radicalized PNP shared the Rastafarian criticisms of Jamaica's economic injustices. Indeed, the socialist project of the 1970's represented a genuine, although ultimately failed attempt to address these problems.

[36] Campbell, Rasta and Resistance, 137.