Rastafari and Roots Reggae
What is Rastafari?

- Religion
- Socio-political movement
- System of beliefs and practices
- Philosophy

- Response to colonialism and slavery
What is Rastafari?

• Originated in Jamaica, 1930s
• Now found worldwide
• Rastafari as a global phenomenon through music
Early Roots of Rastafari

- Ethiopian Baptist Church in Jamaica, est. 1784 by George Liele
- Encouraged resistance to slavery
- Less Euro- and white-centric reading of the Bible; **black pride**
- Opposed by the Jamaican white ruling class
The beginning of Rastafari

• **Marcus Garvey** – Jamaican national hero (his face appears on several coins)

• Back-to-Africa movement: philosophical and literal (Black Star Liner)

• Rasta Prophet: "Look to Africa, where a black king shall be crowned, for the day of deliverance is at hand.”
The beginning of Rastafari

- Crowning of Ras Tafari Makonnen as Emperor Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia
- First black African king in 20th C (1930-74)
- Seen as a fulfillment of Garvey’s prophesy
- Living God
  - “King of Kings,”
  - “Lord of Lords,”
  - “Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah”
- (also Biblical titles used to describe Jesus)
Rasta Music - Nyabinghi

• The Burru and Kumina people (descendants of the Maroons)
• In 1930s, some of the only surviving African musical traditions in Jamaica
• Their music became known as Nyabinghi
• Thought of as traditional Rasta music, used in ceremonies
• Drums, chanting, polyrhythms
Ex: Count Ossie and the Mystic Revelation of Rastafari “Grounation” (1973)

- An example of Rasta music (Nyabinghi)
- This style (but not this recording) predates reggae
- Used in ceremonies and reasoning sessions
- Can go on for hours without a break!

- Film clip: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T_z2CLhDJBo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T_z2CLhDJBo)
Ex: The Folkes Brothers feat. Count Ossie – “Oh Carolina” (1960)

• First Jamaican pop song with Rasta drumming
• Birth of reggae?
• Uniquely Jamaican
• Very important step in bringing Rastafari to the mainstream in Jamaica

• Prod. Prince Buster
Some Rastafarian Beliefs

• **Repatriation**: Rastas believe that all Africans in the diaspora are exiles in **Babylon**, who will one day return to **Zion** (Ethiopia or more generally, Africa)

• Many Rastas view themselves as the **Twelfth Tribe of Israel**

• **Haile Selassie I** was/is the living God
• **Marcus Garvey** was his prophet

• The unofficial Rasta anthem

• Sacred: sometimes used in Rasta ceremonies

• “Satta Massagana” is Amharic and translates roughly to “Give Thanks and Praise”
  • Lyrics next slide

There is a land, far far away Where there's no night, there's only day Look into the book of life, and you will see That there's a land, far far away That there's a land, far far away

The King of Kings and the Lord of Lords Sit upon His throne and He rules us all Look into the book of life, and you will see That He rules us all That He rules us all

• Prod. Leslie Kong
• One of the first to give royalties
• Musicians often went to whichever producer would pay more
• Song was banned: lyric “Oh Fari”
• Duke wouldn’t have liked the Rasta reference

• Similar to Rasta Chant style

**Lyrics** (adapted from Psalm 137)

By the rivers of Babylon
Where he sat down
And there he wept
When he remembered Zion

Cause the wicked carried us away
[in] captivity
Required from us a song
How can we sing King Alpha’s song
in a strange land?

**Psalm 137**

1. By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion.
2 There on the poplars we hung our harps,
3 for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”
4 How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?
There is no more water, to put out the fire
Let it burn, let it burn, let it burn
Blood and fire
Judgment has come, and mercy has gone
All weak heart shall lick out and spit up
All righteous shall stand
Worldwide Spread of Rastafari Through Reggae

• Rastafari theology and ideology universalized through reggae music
• “very few modern religions have assumed such a significant place in the mainstream of popular culture through the use of music” (Ennis Edmonds, 2003)
• Iconography
Reggae and Rastafari: Shared Iconography
Roots Reggae Style

- Black Consciousness
- Rastafarian references
- Slower, edgier
- Trad. Rasta chants
- Nyanginghi drums

- Roots in Mainstream of reggae by 1975
Ex: Burning Spear – “Marcus Garvey” (1975)

- Started with Dodd
- Rec. with Jack Ruby, North Coast
  - “Dreader sound”
  - Horns, harmony vocals, less pop oriented
  - Lyrics about Black history, social conditions
- International success
- Lyrics, over
Ex: Burning Spear – “Marcus Garvey” (1975)

Marcus Garvey's words come to pass
Can't get no food to eat
Can't get no money to spend
Come, little one and let me do what I can
For you, and you alone
You know the right and do heed might
Shall be spanked with many stripes
Weeping and wailing and moaning
You've got yourself to blame, I tell you
Do right, do right, do right
Ex: Max Romeo – “War Ina Babylon” (1976)

• A comment on the place of Rastafari in Jamaican society.
• Political violence of 1970s from a Rasta POV
• Prod. Lee Perry
Ex: Max Romeo – “War Ina Babylon” (1976)

Lyrics:
It sipple out deh (it’s slippery out there – slippery means dangerous)
War ina Babylon
Tribal war ina Babylon (look at dat)
It sipple out deh (wha you say?)

De barber man no like de dreadlocks man
De dreadlocks man no like de barber man no
De policeman no like de dreadlocks man
De dreadlocks man no like de policeman, no

When come pride then cometh shame
A man pride shall bring him low, yeah, oh yeah
Honour shall uphold the humble in spirit
And you know it's true, yeah, oh yeah
Lee “Scratch” Perry

• Black Ark Studio
• (More in Dub Section)
  • [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y651C7aNXRc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y651C7aNXRc)
Bob Marley and the Wailers – “War” (1976)

- Lyrics are taken almost verbatim from a speech given by Haile Selassie to the UN in 1963
"...until the philosophy which holds one race superior and another inferior is finally and permanently discredited and abandoned; that until there are no longer first class and second class citizens of any nation; that until the color of a man's skin is of no more significance than the color of his eyes; that until the basic human rights are equally guaranteed to all without regard to race; that until that day, the dream of lasting peace and world citizenship and the rule of international morality will remain but a fleeting illusion, to be pursued but never attained; and until the ignoble and unhappy regimes that hold our brothers in Angola, in Mozambique and in South Africa in subhuman bondage have been toppled and destroyed; [...] until that day, the African continent will not know peace. We Africans will fight, if necessary, and we know that we shall win, as we are confident in the victory of good over evil..."
Ex: Bob Marley and the Wailers – “War” (1976)

Until the philosophy which hold one race superior and another/ inferior
Is finally/ And permanently/ Discredited/ And abandoned -
Everywhere is war/ Me say war

That until there no longer/ First class and second class citizens of any nation
Until the colour of a man's skin/ Is of no more significance than the colour of
his eyes/ Me say war

That until the basic human rights/ Are equally guaranteed to all/ Without
regard to race/ Dis a war

That until that day/ The dream of lasting peace/ World citizenship/ Rule of
international morality/ Will remain in but a fleeting illusion to be pursued/ But
never attained/ Now everywhere is war - war

And until the ignoble and unhappy regimes that hold our brothers in Angola/
In Mozambique/ South Africa/ Sub-human bondage/ Have been toppled/
Utterly destroyed/ Well, everywhere is war/ Me say war.
Rastafarian Practices

• **Ital food** (all natural - no salt, alcohol or meat and sometimes no fish. In line with Old Testament dietary restrictions)

• Smoking **ganja** before "reasoning sessions" - not all Rastas partake, but many do;

• Wearing of **dreadlocks** (also from the Old Testament);

• Playing with **language** (oppresser becomes downpresser, politics is politricks, etc.

Very playful use of English). This way of speaking is used by many Jamaicans, not just Rastas.
Second Half of 1970s

• Roots and Love songs (Lover’s Rock)
• Sometimes by same artist
  – Wider commercial appeal this way
  – Rastafarian imagery sometimes used as a marketing ploy
Ex: Black Uhuru
“Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner” (1979)

• Reggae song and dub version (2:45)
• Dub and Rasta music
Black Uhuru – “Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner” (1980)

Guess who's coming to dinner, Natty Dreadlocks (x2)

Oh I can see you brought some herb for me, Natty Dreadlocks
And Rasta near land Nyabinghi Cudjoe are coming over the hills
Say in time like this, we must live as one
So the Book of Rule shall stand, Dreadlock, Dreadlock

Guess who's coming to dinner, Natty Dreadlocks (x2)

So let's give thanks and praise, Natty Dreadlocks
I appreciate the herb you brought for me, Natty Dreadlocks
Now that things and time have changed
Suffering make me realize what it takes
And how to be a Natty Dreadlocks
Guess who's coming to dinner, Natty Dreadlocks

I'm just coming in from the woods, Natty Dreadlocks
Ex: Johnny Clarke – “Roots Natty” (1977)

Roots natty roots, natty congo, Roots natty roots natty dread And all my brother who were born ina Canada, Your fore parents were born in Africa. And all my sisters who were born in Canada, Your fore parents were born in Africa, So you are African, born ina Canada, African, born ina Canada, African, born ina Canada Our fore parents were born in Africa, And we are born in Jamaica, But every day some people a talk, Like they are born in Africa But we are African born in Jamaica, African born ina America, African born ina England African born ina Canada, Africans, born ina Jamaica...