

RASTAFARI: DREAD, POLITICS, AGENCY

Instructor: Dr. Neil Roberts
Williams College
Mon/Th, 2:35-3:50 PM
Office: x4772, NAB 213
Neil.Roberts@williams.edu

Spring 2009
AFR302.01/ PSCI234.01/
REL261.01
Office hours: Tu, 1:00-3:00 PM

Course description:

The emergence of Rastafari in the twentieth-century marked a distinct phase in the theory and practice of political agency. From its heretical roots in Jamaica, Garveyism, Ethiopianism, and Pan-Africanism, Rastafari has evolved from a Caribbean theological movement to an international political actor. This course investigates the political theory of Rastafari in order to develop intellectual resources for theorizing the concept of agency in contemporary Africana thought and political theory. We will analyze texts and audio-visual works on the political economy of late colonial Jamaica, core Rastafari thinking, political theology, the role of reggae music, the notion of agency, and the influence of Rastafari on global politics.

Course requirements:

Participants are expected to attend class regularly and complete readings for class listed on the syllabus. I will generally begin each class summarizing briefly the previous session's main points, and shall proceed to lecture for a portion of time about the current day's topic. Although this is primarily a lecture course, you should be prepared to engage in a class discussion and group activities. Throughout the semester, we will be connecting intellectual and political themes raised in various texts and documentaries to musical works. Thus, regularly utilizing services such as iTunes or listening to music on CDs is strongly encouraged.

The following requirements serve as the basis for course evaluation:

- (1) 5-7 page Midterm essay (30%)
- (2) Group Lyrics and Politics Project (40%)
- (3) 8-10 page Take Home Final Exam (30%)

Required readings available for sale and on library reserve:

- Amy Jacques Garvey, Ed., *The Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey, or, Africa for the Africans*, 2 Vols. (Majority Press)
- Horace Campbell, *Rasta and Resistance: From Marcus Garvey to Walter Rodney* (Africa World)
- Barry Chevannes, *Rastafari: Roots and Ideology* (Syracuse)
- Christopher John Farley, *Before the Legend: The Rise of Bob Marley* (Amistad)

- Nathaniel Murrell, William Spencer, and Adrian McFarlane, Eds., *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader* (Temple)
- Velma Pollard, *Dread Talk: The Language of Rastafari* (Canoe)

Recommended readings for further research available for sale and/or on library reserve:

- Carolyn Cooper, *Sound Clash: Jamaican Dancehall Culture at Large* (Palgrave)
- Robert Hill, *Dread History: Leonard P. Howell and Millenarian Visions in the Early Rastafari Religion* (Frontline)
- *Kebra Nagast (The Glory of the Kings)* [Frontline]
- Obiagele Lake, *Rastafari Women: Subordination in the Midst of Liberation Theology* (Carolina Academic Press)
- Hélène Lee, *The First Rasta: Leonard Howell and the Rise of Rastafarianism* (Lawrence Hill)
- *My Life and Ethiopia's Progress, Vol. 1 & II: The Autobiography of Haile Sellassie I* (Frontline)
- Robert Athlyi Rogers, *The Holy Piby (The Blackman's Bible)*
- Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (Chicago)
- Werner Zips, Ed., *Rastafari: A Universal Philosophy in the Third Millennium* (Ian Randle)

All other readings are available on reserve, Blackboard, and/or through JSTOR.

Documentaries:

- *Coping with Babylon: The Proper Rastology*
- *Countryman*
- *The Harder They Come*
- *I am Legend*
- *Life and Debt*
- *Marcus Garvey: Look For Me in the Whirlwind*
- *Rebel Music: The Story of Bob Marley*
- *Rockers*
- *Roots Daughters: The Women of Rastafari*

Thematic Course Overview:

- Week 1: Rastafari, Political Theology, and the Contours of Agency
- Week 2: The Political Economy of Late Colonial Jamaica
- Week 3: "Africa for the Africans at Home and Abroad": Garvey, Garveyism, and Pan-African Historicism
- Week 4: On Sovereignty: Ethiopianism, Haile Selassie I, and the Early Rastafari
- Week 5: Dread: Confronting Babylon System

- Week 6: Selassie I, Jah, Rastafari: Tenets of a Creolized Political Theology
 Week 7: Prophet, Priest, and King: The Case of the Bobo Shanti
 Week 8: I-an-I: The Political Language of Rastafari
 Week 9: Roots, Rock, Reggae, Respect: Rasta Musicians and the Marley Aftermath
 Week 10: Modes of Resistance: How Non-State Actors Influence Politics
 Week 11: Gender Trouble? Women and Rastafari
 Week 12: Global Marronage, Movement of Jah People: Rastafari Internationally
 Week 13: Concluding Chant: Implications for Theorizing Agency

Detailed schedule of readings by week:

Part I: Groundings

Week 1: Rastafari, Political Theology, and the Contours of Agency

- Session 1: February 4

Recommended:

Vincent Brown, *The Reapers's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery*, Prologue

Paget Henry, *Caliban's Reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy*, Introduction

Nathaniel Murrell, "Who is Who in the Rasta Academy," Appendix B in Murrell et. al. (Eds.), *Chanting Down Babylon (CDB)*

Discography: Sizzla Kilongi, "Rastafari Teach I Everything"

Week 2: The Political Economy of Late Colonial Jamaica

- Sessions 2-3: February 9 and February 12

Anthony Bogues, "Nationalism and Jamaican Political Thought"

Barry Chevannes, *Rastafari: Roots and Ideology*, Ch. 1

Thomas Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938*, Prologue and Ch. 8

Discography: Bob Marley and The Wailers, *Catch a Fire*

Documentary: *The Harder They Come*

Week 3: "Africa for the Africans at Home and Abroad": Garvey, Garveyism, and Pan-African Historicism

- Sessions 4-5: February 16 and February 19

Charles Carnegie, "Garvey and the Black Transnation"

Barry Chevannes, *Rastafari*, Ch. 3

Amy Jacques Garvey, Ed., *The Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey* (sections TBA)
 Rupert Lewis, "Marcus Garvey and the Early Rastafarians: Continuity and Discontinuity,"
 Ch. 8 in *CDB*

Discography: Burning Spear, *Marcus Garvey/Garvey's Ghost*; Damian "Junior Gong"
 Marley, "Confrontation"

Documentary: *Marcus Garvey: Look For Me in the Whirlwind* (entire)

Week 4: On Sovereignty: Ethiopianism, Haile Selassie I, and the Early Rastafari

- Sessions 6-7: February 23 and February 26

Horace Campbell, *Rasta and Resistance*, Ch. 3

Clinton Chisholm, "The Rasta-Selassie-Ethiopian Connection," Ch. 10 in *CDB*

The First Chant: Leonard Howell's *The Promised Key*, Ch. 21 in *CDB*

Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology*, Chs. 1, 3

Discography: Buju Banton, *'Til Shiloh*; Buju Banton, *Inna Heights*

Audio-visual site: Haile Selassie I on youtube.com

Part II: The Many Faces of Rasta: On Rastafari Political Theology

Week 5: Dread: Confronting Babylon System

- Sessions 8-9: March 2 and March 5

Barry Chevannes, *Rastafari*, Chs. 4-5

Ronald Grimsley, "'Dread' as a Philosophical Concept"

Paget Henry, "Rastafarianism and the Reality of Dread"

Robert Hill, *Dread History*

Discography: Damian Marley, *Welcome to Jamrock*; Morgan Heritage, *Don't Haffi Dread*

Documentary: *Countryman*

Week 6: Selassie I, Jah, Rastafari: Tenets of a Creolized Political Theology

- Sessions 10-11: March 9 and March 12
- ***MIDTERM DUE MARCH 12***

Michael Barnett, "The Many Faces of Rasta: Doctrinal Diversity within the Rastafari Movement"

Kenneth Bilby, "The Holy Herb: Notes on the Background of Cannabis in Jamaica"

Barry Chevannes, *Rastafari*, Ch. 8

Nathaniel Murrell and Lewis Williams, "The Black Biblical Hermeneutics of Rastafari,"
 Ch. 19 in *CDB*

Discography: Black Uhuru, *Liberation: An Island Anthology*; Black Uhuru, *Sinsemilla*; Collie Buddz, “Come Around”; Mutabaruka, *The Ultimate Collection*; Sizzla “Burn the Herb”; Peter Tosh, *Legalize It*

Documentary: *Coping with Babylon: The Proper Rastology* (NB: part of Midterm material)

Week 7: Prophet, Priest, and King: The Case of the Bobo Shanti

- Sessions 12-13: March 16 and March 19
- Form Lyrics and Politics Project Groups & receive project guidelines
- **Students seeking limited travel funds for the project from the Experiential Education Center must first meet with Prof. Roberts before submission of a proposal to Dr. Paula Consolini (Paula.M.Consolini@williams.edu)**

Barry Chevannes, *Rastafari*, Ch. 6

John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution (Vol. II): The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, Ch. 2

Werner Zips, “‘Repatriation is a Must!’: The Rastafari Struggle to Utterly Downstroy Slavery,” Ch. 9 in Zips (Ed.), *Rastafari*

Discography: Capleton, *Still Blazing*; Mims featuring Junior Reid and Cham, “This is Why I’m Hot”; Junior Reid, *One Blood*; Sizzla, *Bobo Ashanti*; Sizzla, *Good Ways*;
Audio-visual sites: Capleton and Sizzla Kilongi on MySpace.com

SPRING BREAK MARCH 21-APRIL 5 (NO CLASSES)

Week 8: I-an-I: The Political Language of Rastafari

- Sessions 14-15: April 6 and April 9

Adrian McFarlane, “The Epistemological Significance of ‘I-an-I’ as a Response to Quashie and Anancyism in Jamaican Culture,” Ch. 6 in *CDB*

Velma Pollard, *Dread Talk: The Language of Rastafari*

Discography: Capleton, *More Fire*

Documentary: *Rockers*

Part III: Over-standing Rastafari: On Agency

Week 9: Roots, Rock, Reggae, Respect: Rasta Musicians and the Marley Aftermath

- Sessions 16-17: April 13 and April 16

Horace Campbell, *Rasta and Resistance*, Ch. 5

Christopher John Farley, *Before the Legend* (full text)

Verena Reckford, “From Burru Drums to Reggae Ridims: The Evolution of Rasta Music,”

Ch. 14 in *CDB*

Discography: Bob Marley and The Wailers, *Rastaman Vibrations*; Lucky Dube, *Respect*; Peter Tosh, *Equal Rights*; Peter Tosh, *Talking Revolution*

Documentary: *Rebel Music: The Story of Bob Marley* (entire); *I am Legend* (short clip)

Week 10: Modes of Resistance: How Non-State Actors Influence Politics

- Sessions 18-19: April 20 and April 23
- **Draft of Lyrics and Politics Project due April 20**

Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, Ch. 3

Rupert Lewis, *Walter Rodney's Intellectual and Political Thought*, Ch. 5

Discography: Anthony B, *Universal Struggle*; Bob Marley and The Wailers, *Survival*; Bounty Killer, *Ghetto Dictionary: Mystery*; Mavado, *Gangsta for Life*; Mavado, "So Special"; Munga, "They Don't Care"

Documentary: *Life and Debt*

Week 11: Gender Trouble? Women and Rastafari

- Sessions 18-19: April 27 and April 30
- ***LYRICS AND POLITICS PROJECT DUE APRIL 30 (text & Html versions)***

Carolyn Cooper, *Sound Clash*, Ch. 1

Obiagele Lake, *Rastafari Women: Subordination in the Midst of Liberation Theology*, Ch. 1

Maureen Rowe, "Gender and Family Relations in Rastafari: A Personal Perspective," Ch. 4 in *CDB*

Imani Tafari-Ama, "Rastawoman as Rebel: Case Studies in Jamaica," Ch. 5 of *CDB*

Discography: Tami Chynn, *Hyperventilating*; Marcia Griffiths, *Naturally*; Lauryn Hill, *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*; Lil' Kim, "Lighters Up (Welcome to Brooklyn)"; Lady Saw, *Passion*; Lady Saw, *99 Ways*; Lady Saw, "What Is Slackness"; Serani, "No Games"

Documentary: *Roots Daughters: The Women of Rastafari*

Week 12: Global Marronage, Movement of Jah People: Rastafari Internationally

- Sessions 20-21: May 4 and May 7

Barry Chevannes, *Rastafari*, Ch. 10

Katrin Hansing, "Rastafari in a Different Kind of Babylon: The Emergence and Development of the Rastafari Movement in Socialist Cuba"

Louis Kaplan, "Yahweh Rastafari! Matisyahu and the Aporias of Hasidic Reggae Superstardom"

Frank Jan Van Dijk, "Chanting Down Babylon Outernational: The Rise of Rastafari in

Europe, the Caribbean, and the Pacific,” Ch. 11 in *CDB*

Discography: Alpha Blondy, *Jah Victory*; Bad Brains, *I Against I*; Blakk Rasta, “Barack Obama”; Bob Marley and The Wailers, *Exodus*; Daddy Yankee, “Gasolina,” Enur, “Calabria 2008”; Matisyahu, *Live At Stubbs*; Matisyahu, *Youth*; Nas, *Nas*; No Doubt, *Rock Steady*; Sean Paul, *Dutty Rock*; Pitbull featuring Lil Jon, “The Anthem”; Gwen Stefani, *Love. Angel. Music. Baby*; UB40, *The Very Best of UB40, 1980-2000*.

Week 13: Concluding Chant: Implications for Theorizing Agency

- Sessions 22-23: May 11 and May 14 (**Class Party and Course Conclusion**)

Horace Campbell, *Rasta and Resistance*, Ch. 8 & Conclusion

Barry Chevannes, *Rastafari*, Ch. 9

Rex Nettleford, “The Discourse on Rastafarian Reality,” Ch. 18 in *CDB*

Alexander Wendt, “The Agent-Structure Problem in International Relations Theory”

Discography: Bob Marley and The Wailers, *Uprising*; The Fugees, *The Score*

- Reading Period: May 16-19; Final Exam Period: May 20-25
- **Take Final Exam made available [TBA]; due: [TBA]**

Internet Resources:

Alpha and Almost Omega: A Rastafari and Reggae Bibliography:

<http://www.cs.chalmers.se/~harald2/alphaomega.htm>

Barbara Makeda Blake Hannah’s The Rastafari Page: www.geocities.com/maskel2001/

Bob Marley, The Wailers, and the Marley Family: www.bobmarley.com/

Discovering Rastafari (Smithsonian Museum of Natural History): www.mnh.si.edu/exhibits/

Frontline Books (publishes key Rastafari texts): <http://www.frontlinedistribution.com/>

House of Boboshanty Website: houseofbobo.com/

Liberty Hall (Garvey Institute, Jamaica): <http://www.garveylibertyhall.com/home.htm>

Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers and Project:

<http://www.international.ucla.edu/africa/mgpp/>

MySpace.com: profiles and audio-visual links to various Rastafari musical artists

Ras Adam’s Haile Selassie/Rastafari Links: web.syr.edu/~affellem/raslinx.html

Rastafari in Cuba: www.geocities.com/leondejudah/

Williams College Experiential Education Center: www.williams.edu/admin/deanfac/exped/