

THE POLITICAL THEOLOGY OF BOB MARLEY

Instructor: Dr. Neil Roberts
Williams College
Tu/W/Th, 1:00-3:50 PM
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Winter 2013
AFR13/PSCI13/REL13
Office hours: W, 9:30-11:30am
Hollander Hall 213, x4772

Course description:

The Jamaican thinker Nesta Robert (“Bob”) Marley was one of the twentieth century’s foremost figures. During his short life, Marley became arguably the most visible member of the Rastafari movement and a critical voice in global discourses surrounding war, peace, human rights, freedom, and the role of religion in politics. This course brings together two sets of literatures that are currently experiencing a resurgence in intellectual inquiry: the first, scholarship on political theology and debates concerning tensions between religiosity and secularism in the public realm; and the second, the political philosophy of Rastafari. We will analyze documentaries, written texts, and audio-visual works on the life and times of Marley. This shall include the study of Marley before his conversion to Rastafari, the impact of the Wailers on his political theology, rebel music, messianism, the influence of non-state actors on state policies, the transformation in Marley’s thought after membership in Rastafari, Marley’s subsequent parting with the original Wailers, and the devotion of substantial time internationally in the latter years to Pan-Africanism and humanitarianism across color lines. Guest lectures by select scholars and personages with intimate knowledge of Marley, political philosophy, and religion in the public sphere will serve to enrich our collective experience. A goal of this Winter-Study is provide students with the context to ascertain the unique contributions of Marley to political theology, Rastafari, lyrical thought, and contemporary discussions in global politics over three decades since Marley’s untimely death.

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. As each meeting combines lecture and discussion, you should be prepared to engage in both collective conversation and smaller group activities. Throughout Winter Study, we will be connecting intellectual themes raised in various texts and documentaries to musical works. Thus, regularly utilizing services such as iTunes, Pandora, Youtube, and/or listening to music on CDs is strongly encouraged.

The following requirements serve as the basis for course evaluation:

- (1) Attendance (**25%**)
- (2) Participation (**25%**): this includes (a) contributing to class discussions collectively and in small groups; and (b) leading a single discussion on an assigned reading or audio-visual text.

- (3) One weekly reading E-post to Glow prior to class to which peers may respond (25%)
 (4) 8-page Final Paper (25%)

Required readings available for sale and on library reserve:

Colin Grant, *The Natural Mystics: Marley, Tosh, and Wailer* (W.W. Norton)
Course Reading Packet (available from campus printing services) = [CP]

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

Michael Barnett, ed., *Rastafari in the New Millennium: A Rastafari Reader* (Syracuse)
 Hank Bordowitz, ed., *Every Little Thing Gonna Be Alright: The Bob Marley Reader*
 (Da Capo)

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

Course policies:

Attendance:

It is paramount for you to attend the sessions in order for all of us to best be able to discuss and decipher the course materials and lectures. Attendance will be taken each class period and you will be required to attend the entire class session to receive full credit. In case of sickness or other legitimate reason for absence, it is your responsibility to inform Prof. Roberts in advance or as soon as possible after the class. Every absence after two instructor excused absences will result in the reduction of your overall grade by a third of a letter grade (e.g. an A becomes an A-, a B+ becomes a B, etc.). To earn full attendance credit, you must come to class prepared to discuss the readings assigned for that session and with the necessary materials, required books, articles, paper, and writing utensil.

Honor Code:

As an institution fundamentally concerned with the free exchange of ideas, Williams College has always depended on the academic integrity of each of its members. In the spirit of this free exchange, the students and faculty of Williams recognize the necessity and accept the responsibility for academic honesty. A student who enrolls at the College thereby agrees to respect and acknowledge the research and ideas of others in his or her work and to abide by those regulations governing work stipulated by the instructor. Any student who breaks these regulations, misrepresents his or her own work, or collaborates in the misrepresentation of another's work has committed a serious violation of this agreement. A full statement of the Honor Code is available at: http://dean.williams.edu/?page_id=1025.

Reading Responses:

Each student is required to submit a single reading response to at least one reading per designated week on the course Glow site. This response is intended both to help prepare you

for leading class discussion during the specified week and to process your opinions on the readings in relation to the feedback of your peers. ***All responses are due by 10:00am the morning of the class day that you choose to respond to readings (Tuesdays, Wednesdays, or Thursdays).*** Only responses posted by this time will count for the week's reading and participation. *Reading responses cannot be made up.* The response should be between *at least 275-300 words* and should analyze or evaluate the readings. I will monitor the discussion regularly, but not participate. No reading responses shall be due on that concluding class meeting when you submit the final written assignment.

How to Post Reading Responses to Glow:

- 1) Go to <http://glow.williams.edu> and log in with your username and password.
- 2) Click on this course and then the specific Discussion Forum listed by the Week for which you will be posting a response.
- 3) Click on Add a New Discussion Topic and enter your response, making sure to include a Subject heading for your post.
- 4) Click Post to Forum.

Schedule of readings by week:

Week 1

- **Vincent Lloyd guest lecture**
- **Primary Discography: early Wailers, TBA in class**

Session 1: January 3

Vincent Lloyd, ed., *Race and Political Theology*, Introduction [CP]

- First half of class: introductions and course overview
- Second half of class: guest lecturer; joint meeting with another WS class
- *Recommended:* Noel Leo Erskine, *From Garvey to Marley: Rastafari Theology*, Ch. 1 [CP]

Week 2

- **Primary Discography: *Soul Rebels, Catch a Fire***

Session 2: January 8

Michael Barnett, "Rastafari in the New Millennium: Rastafari at the Dawn of the Fifth Epoch" [CP]

"Messianism," in *Encyclopedia of Religion (Vol. 9)* [CP]

- *Recommended:* Barry Chevannes, "Millennialism in the Caribbean" [CP]; Michael Walzer, *In God's Shadow: Politics in the Hebrew Bible*, Ch. 10 [CP]

Session 3: January 9

Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" [CP]

Colin Grant, *The Natural Mystics: Marley, Tosh, and Wailer*

- In-class film: Perry Henzell (Director), *The Harder They Come*
- *Recommended*: Bob Marley website: www.bobmarley.com; Dickie Jobson (Director), *Countryman*; Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology* (selections) [CP]

Session 4: January 10

Grant, *The Natural Mystics*

Timothy White, "Songbird of 'Simmer Down': The Beverly Kelso Story" [CP]

Week 3

- **Dera Tompkins guest lecture**
- **Primary Discography: *Catch a Fire* (con't), *Natty Dread*, *Rastaman Vibration*, *Exodus***

Session 5: January 15

Anthony Bogues, *Black Heretics, Black Prophets: Radical Political Intellectuals*, Ch. 7 [CP]

Grant, *The Natural Mystics*

Mortimo Planno, *The Earth Most Strangest Man* (selection) [CP]

Session 6: January 16

Grant, *The Natural Mystics*

Clinton Hutton, "The Power of Philosophy in Bob Marley's Music" [CP]

- In-class film: Jeremy Marre (Director), *Rebel Music: The Bob Marley Story*

Session 7: January 17

King James Bible (selections) [to be distributed]

Vivien Goldman, *The Book of Exodus: The Making and Meaning of Bob Marley and the Wailers' Album of the Century*, Ch. 1 [CP]

Grant, *The Natural Mystics*

Week 4

- **Roger Steffens guest lecture: TBD**
- **Primary Discography: *Exodus* (con't), *Survival*, *Uprising***

Session 8: January 22

Rogers Steffens, “Bob Marley: Rasta Warrior” [CP]

Rogers Steffens, “Foreword—Bob Marley: Artist of the Century” [CP]

- *Recommended:* John Masouri, *Wailing Blues: The Story of Bob Marley’s Wailers*; Roger Steffens, *Bob Marley and the Wailers: The Definitive Discography*; Steffens personal website: <http://reggaesupersite.com/>.

Session 9: January 23

Michael Manley, “Reggae and the Revolutionary Faith...The Role of Bob Marley” [CP]

Rita Marley, “Remembering Bob Marley” [CP]

- In-class film: Kevin Macdonald (Director), *Marley*
- *Recommended:* Michael Manley, *The Politics of Change*; Rita Marley, *No Woman, No Cry: My Life with Bob Marley*; Chris Salewicz, *Bob Marley: The Untold Story*

Session 10: January 24 (**last class**)

No assigned reading.

- ****Final Paper due to Prof. Roberts: Thursday, January 24th by 5:00pm*
(Hardcopy, Hollander Hall Room 213 & E-version)***