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No Cross, No Crown:
Identity Formation, Nigrescence, and Social Change Among Jamaica's
First and Second Generation Rastafarians

by

CHARLES REAVIS PRICE

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Anthropology in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, the City University of New York

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CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK GRADUATE SCHOOL

Abstract

No Cross, No Crown: Identity Formation, Nigrescence, and Social Change Among Jamaica's First and Second Generation Rastafarians

By

Charles Reavis Price

Advisor: Setha Low

This dissertation is a social and life history study of Black identity, religious conversion, and movement participation among first and second generation Rastafarians in Jamaica. The author approaches the topic by asking why and how do people become Rastafarians, a question hitherto unaddressed. It was determined that two broad factors influence individuals in changing their identity and becoming Rastafarians. One relates to specific experiences and general character dispositions. The other is the influence of antecedent ideas, events, and groups on Black consciousness, and how individuals draw upon these during identity transformation.

The study is framed by William Cross, Jr's, revised Nigrescence model. Chapter 1 reviews issues pertinent to identity, religious conversion, and social change. Chapter 2 discusses life history, research, and native anthropology issues. Chapters 3 and 4 are a social history of the development of Black identity and a Black moral economy, between the early 1700s and 1972. Slavery, indigenous religions such as Myalism, rebellions, Ethiopianism, faulty colonial policies, high expectations, and dashed hopes are key factors that contribute to the consolidation of Black identity and moral economy. Several watersheds in the development of Black identity and Black moral economy are explored in this context. Chapter 5 presents an overview of the development of the group identity of the Rastafari. Chapters 6 and 7 address Nigrescence and religious conversion experiences among the early Rastafari.

Twenty-seven life histories and field notes serve as the primary data. This research demonstrates that the revised Nigrescence model explains well the racial dimensions of why people become Rastafarians. Adding components from religious conversion theories enhanced the Nigrescence model's explanatory power in this specific case. Empirically, the study concludes that Rastafarian identity and ideology are not the products of poverty, relative deprivation, or cognitive dissonance. Their identity transformation is a result of concern with burning existential questions, specific encounters, and/or having a curious disposition. They draw from the ideas, symbols, and traditions already extant in their environment. A longstanding Black moral economy provides the context for individuals to resolve specific concerns in the quest for self-affirmation and community. The first and second generation Rastafarians became who they are for moral, religious, and humanistic reasons.

Preface

When people shared their life stories with me, I found there were no pathologies, no psychological deficits like cognitive dissonance, no hook to tie why Rastafarians are the people they are to poverty. On the contrary, these are serious people who embarked on a journey of discovery, self-affirmation, and community, while pursuing the grails of truth, justice, freedom, and righteousness. How many people do we know of such poignance? Probably not many. Thus, if there is anything about the Rastafari that separates them from their fellow citizens, it is their seriousness about morality, Blackness, and identity. Besides beliefs like the commitment to Haile Selassie, I, as God, it is their sense of accountability to the grand ideas of Blackness, truth, justice, freedom, and righteousness that essentially defines the Rastafari as a distinct people in Jamaica.

The early Rastafarians were not unique because of their concern with truth, righteousness, justice, and their expectation that a more humane world is in the making. Such concerns suffused an incalculable number of social movements, especially those described as millenarian, messianic, and revitalization-oriented. The sentiments expressed by the early Rastafarians reside in the hearts and minds of countless Jamaicans, but the sustained expression and practice of these beliefs—making it a part of self-identification—distinguishes them, eventually earning them begrudged admiration. Hence, the study of radical identities—personal and social—is a social question that must engage their ideas of ethics, morality, humanity, and visions of alternate forms of society and social relationships.

The questions “Who am I?” and “Where do I fit in the social order?” have consistently engaged Black people since their arrival in the New World. The experience of slavery was Black people’s holocaust, and in Jamaica the barbarity of the British and their Black allies toward Black efforts to challenge or escape slavery and colonialism meant there were many local holocausts. There is great irony in how literate Europeans who spoke highly of freedom and justice from the mid-late seventeenth century forward, without applying it to Blacks during and after slavery, helped create the “space” and need for Blacks to develop their own conceptions of morality. The irony lay in how Blacks used the same words, but unflinching defined them in far broader terms. Freedom, for instance, actually meant freedom

for all. Even though the slaves were sharply defined by their class and skin color, it appears they believed that all the races were equal and should be treated so, as this slave ditty from the early 1800s suggests: “One, two, three, all de same; black, white, brown, all de same...; all de same...” (Phillippo, 1971 [1843]:191). A theme that defines nearly 400 years of Black experience in Jamaica is a desire for a different world—one in which Black humanity, dignity, and self-worth is affirmed by the rules of the blueprint of the alternative communities and worlds they conceive. As Anthony Bogues incisively argues, “The official racist de-humanization of Blacks means that to achieve humaness a fundamental re-definition of self has to transpire...the struggle against racism requires the establishment of *humaness*” (1997:69, original italics). The early Rastafari were in the business of remaking the world with the materials they had at hand.

Acknowledgments

Graduate school should be a great experience, but for many people I know it has been more like a recurrent bad dream. I experienced numerous rude awakenings while in graduate school, such as learning that merit and hard work do not count for as much as the ideology of academia espouses. What gets you through and beyond are connections, being plugged into the “right” networks, and not thinking outside of a discipline’s box. I now understand in a visceral way that an important function of higher education is to reproduce and maintain the existing social order, regardless of rhetoric of inclusion, myths of meritocracy, etc.

Still, I made the most of the situation. Or, put differently, a host of people made my experience and life enjoyable during my graduate tenure. In fact, my trials introduced me to some of the most admirable people I have ever known. But before acknowledging those who helped me through the dissertation, I must begin with the Rastafari and Jamaican citizens who encouraged and supported me in this work.

The Rastafari community was generally receptive to documenting the lives and struggles of the elders as a contribution to Rastafari’s posterity. Several houses and mansions of the Rastafari Centralization Organization and its President were welcoming of me, and our work together has been earnest and rewarding. Brother Michael Cooke was generous with his home, time, friendly manner, and thorough knowledge of Jamaica’s history and landmarks. I am forever indebted to him for his suggestions about places to visit and people to talk to. Then eighty-six year-old Rasta Ivey was a constant companion of mine and her presence something unforgettable. When I saw her challenge the police during the 1998 Zeeks riots in Kingston, I saw history flash before my eyes. She had been at the same Parade Park in 1938 during the great Labor Rebellion, and probably many times after, confronting the Babylonians about their oppressiveness. Ras DaSilva, Ras Tony, Bully Dread, Ras Shudley, Sister Sappleton, Ras Historian, Ras Trevor Campbell, Brother Moses Christos, Queen Emma, Ras John, Docta Peppa, and the now-deceased Ras Sam Brown provided love, knowledge, and the comfort expected from the Rastafari community. Although there are many other Rastafari who made positive contributions, it is the aforementioned who were

part of my daily runnings.

Of those who supported me through proposal writing on through the dissertation, my advisor, Setha Low, is at the top of the list. Her energy, commitment, and loyalty never flagged, even when there were dark clouds as far as the eye could see. She is a testament to intellect, outstanding mentorship, tenacity, and the willingness to learn from her students. And I learned a lot as a result of working with her. We did not always agree, but we always found a resolution better than our earlier positions. I think if I had not worked with her I would not have completed the dissertation.

My other committee members have been outstanding in assisting in my progress and development. Joan Mencher is another who stuck with me from the proposal writing stage. She never hemmed or hawed when I needed one of countless letters of recommendation. Donald Robotham agreed to work with me around the time I began writing the dissertation. A sharp mind who can immediately pick out a flaw in an argument, Don was generous with useful, pointed advice and criticism. He repeatedly said, "Charles you *must* write a good dissertation." I hope I have met his muster, or least shown that I can maintain the high level work he expects. William Cross, Jr., became a committee member after I had begun writing, but his influence long antedated his actual presence. A fellow student told me of Cross, Jr.'s, Black identity research way back in 1995. It was 1999 before I took the initiative to follow-up the student's advice. But was he ever on target. Bill's research on Nigrescence was the theory and model I needed to frame my life history research. When I found out that Bill had accepted a position at the Graduate Center, I couldn't believe it. I searched him out, expecting a haughty scholar unimpressed by yet another graduate student saying, "I like your research and want to use it in mine." I couldn't have been more wrong. Bill, like my other committee members, has been encouraging and supportive, and is serious about mentoring young scholars. He too has been generous with his time and insights. Then, there is Colin Palmer, a historian. I met Professor Palmer by walking unannounced into his office to ask for a syllabus to one of his courses. We ended up talking for nearly 45 minutes. We have since continued to communicate and he dispensed useful comments about my research proposal that I believe helped to get it funded. Like my other committee members, he is

committed to the development of highly competent minority scholars. These scholars, their support and encouragement notwithstanding, are exacting. They are all well-recognized in their respective fields and their standards are high. Engaging them has been a challenge that has greatly improved my thinking and understanding. I thank them for doing their jobs so well.

On another level, Marilyn Gittell, a professor of political science and director of the Howard Samuels Center State Management and Policy Center, has made an incomparable contribution to my experience. By giving me an opportunity to become involved in policy research and grant writing, I learned skills I could not have acquired through any means other than by “doing.” She firmly believes in the ideal of ethnic and racial diversity and building community capacity and social capital, and is one of those admirable persons who practices what she preaches. Working at the Samuels Center not only provided income and great experience—it furnished resources (computers, printers, paper, etc.) and an environment that allowed me to write a dissertation.

Then there are my friends and associates whose contributions to my intellectual and social development are immeasurable and eternal. There are so many of them that it is unavoidable that some will not be named. Robert Saute, Greg Anderson, Terrence Blackman, Valentino Ellis, Robert Adams, and Jocelyn Sargent were adamant that I complete the dissertation, and they did what they could to help me do it. They read drafts of proposals and chapters, offered input on how to improve what I had done, and shared food when I was hungry and money when I was broke. Jocelyn and I would regularly meet to talk about our work and to support each other. To all of you I am pleased to be indebted.

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Magnet Fellowship, and Dean Harrison Scholarship were critical to my being able to complete the degree. Thanks go to Professor Ofuatey-Kodjoe, of the CUNY Graduate School Political Science Program, who served as a mentor throughout my graduate school stint. Sharon Lerner taught me much about writing while assisting me in applying for Fulbright scholarships. Serena Nanda, former chair of Anthropology at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, has been one of my strongest supporters. She was the first to hire me as a college instructor and took keen interest in my research and overall intellectual and spiritual progress, not to mention reading countless drafts of my writings. Thanks go also to Jennifer Disney for reading a draft of the dissertation.

Several people of the University of South Florida Department of Applied Anthropology must be acknowledged for their lasting positive impact upon me. Susan Greenbaum, my M.A. thesis supervisor, must be recognized for her lasting positive influence on my development. It was she who showed me the import of a good mentor to a student's scholarly development, especially those of us whose backgrounds do not properly prepare us for academia. She is the one who suggested the problem that could serve as a dissertation topic. Thank you, Susan. I thank Alvin and Barbara Wolfe for being generous with their time and company. It was greatly appreciated, then and now. Dr. Wolfe and I were busy-body types who regularly worked at our computer terminals late into the night. We always found a pretext for a break—typically to watch some game being played—that gave us a chance to converse and build a friendship. Thanks go to Gilbert Kushner for “toughening” me up in preparation for scholarly and applied pursuits, and to Trevor Purcell for taking me in as a brethren.

The people most important to *my* identity and well-being are outside of academia, and “thanks” can never encapsulate my gratefulness to them. My mother made it possible to pursue a Ph.D. by helping to raise my daughter, Courtney. Even though I am sure she often wondered what I was doing all those years in school, and “how long before you finish?” she never said it to me. Thank you, mom. My daughter, Courtney, is my biggest inspiration. Although she poked much good-natured fun at me over the years—calling me “the professor” or “Dr. Dread,” she is proud of me and my accomplishments and tells me so.

Moreover, through my experience, she has had the chance to consider options I would never have imagined at her age. I thank my closest friend, Robert Ingram, who never finished high school, for his positive encouragement. Outside of my daughter, Julie Russell was my biggest fan, and she too was proud of me throughout the graduate ordeal, even when I doubted what I was doing. She always said, "You'll finish. I know you will." Thanks, Julie.

I thank the ever-diligent Merline Henry for helping transcribe some quite challenging interviews, and the conscientious Elaine Perkins for applying her grammar skills to my prose.

Finally, I must thank the New York City Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA). One of the problems of being a CUNY graduate student is the number of jobs we must take in order to patch together the funds to survive. For many of us this meant shuttling through subterranean tunnels at all hours of the day and into the night. While such back-and-forth traveling is not conducive to completing a major research project, I read countless books and articles and edits and drafts while sitting (and often standing face-to-face with strangers) on the F and G trains. Thanks, MTA.

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[The] Drum is a part of Rastafari ritual. The drum is not Nyabinghi. Nyabinghi is a [ritual] practice of [the] elimination of White supremacy and their Black allies. The drum only strengthen you[r] heart toward Nyabinghi. Nyabinghi no play here yet. Nyabinghi play by certain dread and slaves who revolted, like all Tacki and Kuffi and Accompong and Nanny and all like Sam Sharpe. Them man play Nyabinghi that used to be played. It no play here yet. You no play Nyabinghi [unless you are prepared to face death]. You act Nyabinghi and play drums.... but you play your drums ...[to reach] higher heights... it strengthen our hearts toward Nyabinghi and it inspire us to higher heights.... Yea man. That is what is Nyabinghi. If them oppress you, you [must] get an upliftment, so you press it down [on them]..... (Ras Mas 1998).

OVERVIEW AND INTRODUCTION

Rastafari: Truth, Justice, Righteousness, and Black Identity

Rastafarians are living embodiments of Black history and this is forcibly expressed through their identity and ideology. Ras Mas has revealed an important part of the essence of the core identity of the early Rastafarians. Their central ritual, the Nyabinghi, is animated by the drum. The Nyabinghi is an affirmation of Black identity and the ceremonial exorcism of oppression; it calls for “death to White and Black oppressors.” It is a memorial to past rebellions and protests— efforts of past Blacks to liberate, affirm, and redeem themselves in an oppressive world— and a means of sustaining group identity. What Ras Mas is saying is that Africans like Tacky, Kuffi, and Sam Sharpe, who challenged White supremacy and its inhumanity— “played” Nyabinghi. They, and many like them, imperiled their lives in an effort to overthrow the slave and colonial system and attain the autonomy, independence, and humanity they knew they deserved. Their struggles shaped Jamaica’s history. In Ras Mas’s view, Rastafarians, so far, have only “acted” Nyabinghi; to play it means literally to go to battle against their oppressors. Hence, “it no play here yet.” However, as this work will suggest, the Rastafari, in constructing their identity, may have already played Nyabinghi.

How does a powerful sense of Black identity, morality, religion, and culture evolve to the point that it becomes an attractive option for remaking one’s self-identity and worldview? How does the past bear upon personal and group identity? How is the past used and interpreted by the group? These are some of the questions addressed by this study.

This dissertation focuses on why and how first and second generation Rastafarians took on an identity that until the 1970s was viewed by outsiders as outrageous and associated with lunacy. A secondary concern involves the dialectical forces that shaped Rastafarian

efforts to create their identity and culture. By tracing the emergence of Blackness as a source of identification, and the Black moral economy it is built upon, I show how these are the well from which Rastafarians have generously drawn their identity, ideology, and culture. Embedded in all of this is the heart of the subject: Nigrescence (becoming Black) and identity conversion. Coming to identify as a Rastafarian means that Blackness is a core identity-organizing element. Because of religiosity, we are also dealing with processes akin to religious conversion. The tacit thesis of this work is that Rastafari is a part of an entrenched cultural and historical tradition, but has not been recognized as such. This means that the process of people becoming Rastafarians is a mainstream process, not simply instances of deviance and millenarianism. The use of social and life history is paramount to showing this larger Black tradition of which Rastafari is a recent expression.¹

This research is based on the complementary approaches of social and life history. The primary data are ethnographic fieldnotes and 27 life narratives of Jamaicans residing in Kingston and St. Catherine's parish who became Rastafarians between 1931 and 1972.² I employ William Cross Jr.'s revised theory of Nigrescence (1995) and draw from the literature on religious conversion to frame why and how people become Rastafarians.

Who are the Rastafarians? The Rastafarians, as described by Leonard Barrett, are a

...messianic movement unique to Jamaica. Its members believe that Haile Selassie, former Emperor of Ethiopia, is the Black Messiah who appeared in the flesh for the redemption of all Blacks exiled in the world of White oppressors. The movement views Ethiopia as the promised land where Black people will be repatriated through a whole exodus from all Western countries where they have been in exile [in slavery] (1988:1).

Rex Nettleford offers a different and useful definition:

Rastafarianism, then, is a native-born and native-bred concentration of effort, drive and will to bring about fundamental transformation of an unjust society if not its total destruction...it has offered the Jamaican society, particularly the young in the sixties and seventies, an organic source of energy for a relevant and functional existence. It has also offered an approximation to a total world-view capable of replacing that other view of life which would make one at best into an object of hostile social and historical forces rather than a self-directed being, capable of creative thought and action" (Nettleford 1976:ix).

Finally, my definition adds a third dimension:

Rastafari is a combination of ideology (beliefs, values), identity (sense of self in relation to others and the world), and culture (practices, rituals, adaptive mechanisms [to violence, denigration of Blackness]) that carries the force of a tradition, and uses religion (recognition of Haile Selassie I, as God) and Blackness as core identity-organizing elements.

Together, these definitions draw attention to identity and social action at the personal and group levels and introduce us to our subject. The Rastafarians, originally a movement whose adherents tended to be poor, is now global in its presence, and the ideology and culture they developed now appeals to various classes and ethnicities. It is no longer a movement of poor, Black, dispossessed Jamaicans, although they remain the heart of the movement.

I

A complicated issue that I have wrestled with involves how to make sense of a Rastafarian's life history, to bring out in broader strokes not only why and how one becomes a Rastafarian, but how such a vibrant and diverse group can even exist. They do not rely upon recruiting mechanisms to replenish their constituency, and for much of their history they have been ridiculed and harassed by authorities and ordinary people. I realized there had to be something bigger, deeper, and more compelling in order to bring people into the faith, and outside of my own experience, I could not put my finger on it. Slowly, as I grappled with the issues and pieced together different kinds of information, I realized that the life histories, the emphasis on Blackness, and the developmental trajectory of Rastafarians as a group could not be thoroughly explained without identifying themes and groups similar to, and who developed prior to, the Rastafarians.

The movement began as a confluence of different movements and ideologies: Bedward; Garvey; Ethiopianism; the racialism of Bogle; Black secret societies such as the Masons; and even a White group, the Salvation Army, who sang of a coming "Lion of Judah who shall break every chain." These were pieced together by the first generation Rastafarians.

The thematic and social organization of early Rastafarian groups were similar to that of the charismatic leader Alexander Bedward and his camps. Bedward's racial rhetoric that condemned Whites, the band-like organization of his followers into camps, and his grand

prophecies of redemption all had parallels among the early Rastafarians. This suggested delving deeper into the past to find precursors to the social forms and ideas associated with Bedward. Paul Bogle and the Morant Bay rebellion (1865) provided explicit cues. Bogle rallied his followers, in preparation for their rebellion, to “Cleave to the Black” and threatened “death to White oppressors and their Black allies.”³ Bogle’s emphasis on race, plus the motifs of justice, freedom, deliverance, and redemption, associated with the rebellion, have analogues that appear in the thinking and experience of Rastafarians. Moreover, a principal Rastafari text, the *Holy Piby*, and early Rastafarian radicalism, can be traced to the Morant Bay area, where the 1865 rebellion occurred.

The rhetoric of Bedward and Bogle indicated that emphasis on Blackness long preceded the Rastafarians. I wondered, when did Blackness become a salient identification among Jamaicans? This question pushed Ethiopianism into the foreground, as it was a longstanding racial and religious ideology likely brought to Jamaica in the late 1700s by slave preachers accompanying their Loyalist owners fleeing the American Revolution, and by slave seamen traveling from America. Ethiopianism, as a factor contributing to a strong sense of Blackness, morality, and righteousness, and a core organizing element in Rastafarian identity and ideology, deserved substantial treatment. The Black preacher and insurrection leader Sam Sharpe furnished still another cue. Sharpe and other slaves held dear the ideals of freedom, righteousness, and justice, and defined these in an inclusive sense that dwarfed the definitions and implementation of the same concepts as used by Whites. From the slavery era forward, the Black experience in Jamaica has been infused with a vision of freedom and justice, at odds with a system that has variously enslaved, impoverished, and marginalized many of its people. The picture that emerges is that of a moral system defined by racial and religious symbols and concepts. This system was an economy since it went beyond ideas to include subsistence concerns and social norms and relationships. Thus, a social history of the Rastafarians begins with slavery and chronicles important watersheds in the lives of Black Jamaicans.

To provide a framework, I use the idea of a Black moral economy to conceive of identity as a material, social, and historical construct. Race, work, oppression, marginality, nature-land, and religion, are important components of some people’s identities. Moreover, ideas that are a part of a people’s vision of themselves, such as freedom, justice, and

righteousness, have their roots in the real world, no matter how abstract they may seem to observers. Ways of thinking about Black identity, given the long experience of Blacks with oppression, must be expansive, especially when dealing with poor people continually faced with mitigating exploitative arrangements. The idea of a Black moral economy presents my effort to move between the ways material existence, alternative and mainstream institutions, conflict, and ideas and symbols are expressed in group and personal identity, and how these perpetuate themselves over time.

Jamaica's development as a colony and nation based on its particular form of slavery is the starting point for conceptualizing a Black moral economy. Under this despotic arrangement, slaves developed alternative institutions to meet their basic needs. Courts, forms of exchange, provision grounds, flexible family structures, and so on. An idea of shared identity— Black— also grows out of the slave experience, as do core beliefs about religion, justice, liberation, and righteousness. Blacks under slavery and independence defined and gave meaning to thematic concepts such as truth, freedom (autonomy and independence), and righteousness, by drawing from their own experience and analysis, the King James Bible, and Ethiopianism. These concepts were implemented through religion and the Black moral economy, both of which permeate a range of institutions and social relationships. Definition of these concepts has changed little over the past 150 years, and they are central to the identity, ideology, and rhetoric of the Rastafari.

Conflict, which is rife in Jamaica's history, served an important function in group and personal identity by enhancing solidarity, even if ephemerally, and by re-defining "us" and "them" distinctions. These are not always racially-defined boundaries, as my discussion of Pre-Encounter Blacks in Jamaica attests (class, religion, and even notions of beauty and aesthetics can be sources of boundary creation). But it is race, class, conflict, religion, and personal and group identity that I focus on in this work.

Apprenticeship, rebellions, colonialism, brutality at the hands of the authorities, dashed hopes, and prophetic expectations are all a part of what make Rastafari a viable and dynamic identity. Hence, Nigrescence and conversion, as these relate to Rastafari, are a part of engaging and remembering the past, as well as a means of understanding the present and the future. As the Rastafarian Movement Association incisively wrote more than two decades ago, "*Rasta is a modern antique*" (n.d.). Nigrescence theories, plus religious conversion

theories, help pinpoint the environment-specific occurrences that combine Blackness and religion in ways that can be used to redefine a person's identity when their worldview has been challenged and new perspectives and sense of self are being considered. By adding social history, this work becomes an account of ethnogenesis and movement formation, and an investigation of a particular form of Black identity. As such, this is not a study of culture, per se, but of cultural and identity formation, movement genealogy, and movement participation.

Too many anthropological studies of identity, including recent accounts of Black identity, such as *Blacked Out* (Fordham 1996) and *Orpheus and Power* (Hanshard 1998), fail to engage those disciplines and researchers who have made the study of identity their central focus. One result is that non-anthropologists rarely cite anthropological studies of identity because of incompatibilities in concepts and method. Dismantling these barriers require drawing from these traditions, researchers, and the central concepts of identity, and then employing them in anthropological ways, such as through ethnography, field research, and the social and life history approach this work is based on. Hopefully this strategy will have the effect William Cross Jr., has sought, which is to use conceptual terms and approaches readily subject to operationalization (2001:21).

II

The making of and participation in an alternative life world rooted in blackness ultimately begins inside a person, but is an organic part of the birth and growth of a new group and identity. These changes do not automatically happen as a result of experiencing injustice and oppression. Something must catalyze a person to change his/her racial self-conception, racial reference group orientation, and world view – an “Encounter” – although sometimes the subconscious groundwork has already been laid because the process of change incubates in any given person before the external changes are noticeable. The person must take to heart in a fundamental way the challenge to their identity and world view, leading them to become seekers attempting to develop a satisfactory Black identity and worldview. Although the process may appear self-initiated, it is likely tied to various social influences, and possibly even macro-level changes. For instance, the Depression, the natural disasters that preceded and occurred during the Depression, and the difficulty of making a living for so many Jamaicans of that era, presented a conundrum: Why were most Black

Jamaicans having such a hard time? Why were Whites and Browns still in control of a predominantly Black society, nearly a century after slavery ended? While existing world views and identifications such as Pentecostalism, Garveyism, or Marxism were sufficient explicative frameworks for some, this was not the case for others, such as those who took up the faith of Rastafari. The distinctions between those who convert and those who do not are the Encounter and general character dispositions, such as an inclination toward intellectual curiosity. But this is more than an individual-level process, although it is expressed through particular persons: it is a cultural and historical process shaped by a variety of changes that have origins within and outside of the society.

The account I offer clarifies the catalytic and socialization processes involved in becoming a Rastafarian and in becoming Black. As *seekers* of truth, justice, and righteousness, first and second generation Rastafarians developed their identity through several modes: an Encounter; observation and listening (such as at street meetings); engaging the past through reading (especially the Bible), discussion, and reflection; and, eventually, through participation in formal and informal associations, and rituals such the Nyabinghi. Becoming a Rastafarian in Jamaica is facilitated by the pervasiveness of Ethiopianism in conjunction with a Black moral economy, and the idea of a Black, redeeming, Messiah who will mete out justice to the wicked oppressors—in this case Whites, Blacks, and other minorities who contribute to Black oppression. It is this environment that helps explain why the *Gleaner* newspaper's November 1930 issues and the June 1931 issue of *National Geographic* that carried stories of Haile Selassie I's coronation, lead so many Jamaicans to wonder about the new Black King.

III

Despite nearly fifty years of research and writing on the Rastafari, the most fundamental aspects of the movement remain a mystery. What drew the earliest members into the faith? What kept them in it? Numerous efforts have spewed forth a litany of partial and often misleading explanations. Some say it is poverty and the desire to escape its drudgery which gave birth to and sustains the movement. Others claim it is the great esteem placed on Blackness in a society that has always devalued Blackness that fuels the movement. While there is some credence in each of these perspectives, each is sorely insufficient and requires grounding. Furthermore, the focus on Rastafari beliefs and practices

obscures people's agency and experiences and why and how they became the people that they are.

The oral history approach has facilitated a "bottom-up" account of the development of Rastafari, while social history reveals links between antecedent groups and events and the rhetoric and ideas of the early Rastafarians. All of the interviewees became Rastafarians before 1970. This is significant because they became Rastafarians before the identity became popularized through Michael Manley's 1972 election and the influence of Bob Marley and reggae music. They became Rastafarians under conditions very different from the those of the late seventies onward.

The life narratives bring into relief many important facets of Rastafarian history. The activism of first and second generation Rastafarians can be described best by the term "political," which many scholars and Rastafarians reject, for different reasons. Scholars have painted a picture of Rastafarians as apolitical, because they generally refuse to sanction the corruption, graft, cronyism, and never-to-be-fulfilled promises of politicians. Such academic conceptions are based on the narrow view that registering to vote, and voting, define political participation; from this perspective the Rastafarians are apolitical. However, being "political" includes demonstrating, marching, debating socialism, communism, and capitalism, and taking leadership within local communities. This, many of the Kingstonian Rastafari have done. They do not call this political activity and scholars overlook, or are unaware of, this part of their lives, the research of Chevannes (1989, 1994) and Hill (1983) notwithstanding. This is a part of the story that remains to be fully told. This activist tendency existed from the birth of Rastafari and continues to survive as small band-like groups carry the tradition forward.

IV

Some of the most fascinating questions and issues that Rastafarians pose for understanding the Black experience have been ignored by scholars and popular observers. For example, Rastafarians have outlived nearly all similar Black movements without building conventional resource-intensive organizations. They have also developed cultural and ethnic-like attributes in a short span of time. Thus, they are a model for understanding the formation and development of social groups. Over the span of four decades, their ideology became known the world over, and in a similar timespan Rastafarian communities and

networks have spread throughout the Caribbean, Europe, the Americas, Africa, and even Australia. How does one explain this? Neil Savishinsky (1993), for example, has laid the cause upon the diffusion of media, especially electronic media. Fundamentally, this explanation carries weight because writings and music are mediums that facilitate the dissemination of Rastafarian ideology and culture. But again, this is insufficient to understand how they come to be who they are. Media diffusion, outside of a few news reports, magazines, and pamphlets, was unimportant to first and second generation Rastafarians coming into the faith. They required direct or indirect contact with other Rastafarians. Therefore, the importance of media diffusion to identity formation and conversion are recent phenomena.

V

On a fundamental level, I have been interested in developing the argument that groups like Rastafarians are reactions to capitalist development as it plays out in social life: its inequalities, injustices, and an absence of vision of a more humane world structured by universal principles of righteousness and justice. This can be juxtaposed against capitalism, which is based on private ownership of property, the buying and selling of human energy and brain power, of an accumulation-driven mode of development, of written contracts, where the powerful and financially well off derive the greatest benefits which they monopolize in this life and beyond (through inheritance for example). The early Rastafarians critiqued society – its institutions, leaders, and administrators– because there was no compelling vision of justice, liberation, or a better world for Black people.

Finally, I must discuss my idiosyncratic usage of terms and style. I capitalize the racial terms “Black,” “White,” and “Brown,” when referring to groups and individuals, regardless of whether noun or adjective. Also, I use these terms to refer to an enormous category of different people. I realize this erases the tremendous amount of variation within the category, and that our ideas about race are not supported by good science. While science cannot validate race as a salient categorical marker of differences between groups, it is a cultural and social fact. The terms Black and White still resonate throughout the world as signifiers of distinct phenotypical, social, and cultural attributes. Regardless of the

inadequacy of, and problems created by, racial categories, *many people continue to define themselves and others in racial terms, based on what they interpret to be the "proper" physical, social, and cultural characteristics.*

Jamaica: Geography and Demography

To spend time in Jamaica makes clear how the past shapes contemporary consciousness. In September 1998 and again in April 1999, the past manifested in the present: Jamaicans took to the streets and shut their nation down through protest, just like in 1938 and 1968. Today it is high prices and the influence of foreign debt on the national budget, and yesterday it was colonialism and unemployment, American and European imperialism, class and color discrimination, and police brutality. The threads that tie the past to the present remain strong, and today's high prices, debt, and government ineptitude are tied to the imperialism and colonialism of yesterday.

Contemporary Jamaica consists of fourteen parishes, which are subdivided into three counties: Cornwall, Middlesex, and Surrey. It has a population of more than 2.6 million people, 90 percent of whom are Black, and is the third largest island in the Caribbean archipelago (after Cuba and Hispaniola). Jamaica has a tremendously varied topography and climate. There are lush rain forest-like areas in the Northern parts of the island, formidable mountains that loom in the central-eastern parts of the island, hills scattered nearly everywhere except in the coastal plains, and patches of desert in some southern reaches of the island. There is the typically sweltering and dry heat of Kingston, and the cooler, damp climate of Manchester parish. Numerous rivers and springs flow throughout the island, and the island's harbors are among the most inviting in the Caribbean.

Chapter Sketch

The dissertation is divided into three parts. Part one presents the framework for conceptualizing social identity, Nigrescence, social identity and social change, and religious conversion. Chapter two furnishes a discussion of research-related issues. Part two includes chapters 3-5, which present the social history that provides context for grounding Black identity in Jamaica, and highlight core elements that the Rastafari incorporate into their identity. Part three includes chapters 6-8, which draw directly from the life histories to address Nigrescence and identity formation among the Rastafari.

Chapter 1 provides a discussion of generic theory and a theoretical framework for

understanding identity in terms of social change, Blackness, and religion. William Cross Jr.'s, revised Nigrescence Theory and the literature on religious conversion are analyzed with the aim of providing context and explanation for a social and life history approach to why and how people become Rastafarians.

In chapter 2 I address issues of utility, method, and analysis, as these relate to oral-life history research, Nigrescence, and religious conversion. I devote substantial attention to issues surrounding native anthropology because I am a member of the group being researched.

Chapter 3 traces the emergence of Black identity and a Black moral economy. After detailing the elements of a Black moral economy in Jamaica, I focus on watersheds in Black people's experience between 1655 and 1864. Because I focus on watersheds, the selection of time frames does not always match conventional divisions of Jamaican history. The chapter emphasizes uprisings, poor colonial policy, religion, and charismatic individuals, as these shaped people's consciousness, sense of group identity, and imagining of utopian possibilities. I point out how a mix of slaves from different regions of Africa slowly come to share an identification we can call Black, and the lineage of their conceptions of truth, justice, freedom, and righteousness, which often were tied to rebellions and planter and colonial policies.

Chapter 4 continues the approach of chapter 3, focusing on the period between the Morant Bay rebellion and Prime Minister Michael Manley's first term. By now there are definite ideas of Blackness and they commonly carry a moral and religious quality exemplified in the personages of several charismatic leaders, and in rebellions and protests. Ethiopianism played an important role defining Blackness and attention is given to it, Alexander Bedward, and Marcus Garvey. This helps clarify, for example, how during the early 1970s, Michael Manley could be so successful in using Rastafarian symbolism to appeal to Jamaica's grassroots.

Chapter 5 presents a detailed account of Ethiopianism, what scholars have written about Rastafari up through the eighties, and the development of the Rastafari between 1930 and early 1970s. I specify what Ethiopianism is and how it manifested in America, South Africa, and Jamaica, and how it coheres in Rastafarian ideology and identity. By drawing on life history interviews and news paper reports, I show how social forces outside of Rastafari

were as important in shaping their identity as were their efforts to create and define themselves. Confrontation was an especially important factor. This chapter transitions into the ethnographic and life history analysis of chapters 6 and 7

Chapter 6 focuses on the “why” aspects of identity conversion. I apply a slightly modified Nigrescence model to the experiences and processes involved in a person taking on a religiously-oriented Black identity. Emphasis is placed on the first two stages of my appended version of Nigrescence theory: Pre-Encounter and Encounter and Seekership.

Chapter 7 focuses on the “how” aspects of identity conversion using the Nigrescence and religious conversion frameworks of Immersion-Emersion, Internalization, and Internalization-Ongoing Commitment. The importance of commitment to the new identity and group are treated, as are hazards to commitment.

The conclusion, chapter 8, assesses the study in general and the utility of the Nigrescence model in making sense of Rastafarian identity. It is concluded that the model can explain the assumption and development of Rastafarian identity without modification, although incorporation of some elements from religious conversion theories spotlight the “why” of identity transformation as people are rarely empty vessels to be filled and persuaded to change their beliefs and identity simply because there are compelling alternatives.

ENDNOTES

1. Thanks to Don Robotham for pointing this out.
2. I use the convention of a generation equals 20 years. The first generation are those who became Rastafarians between 1932 and 1952, and the second generation between 1953 and 1973.
3. A rough paraphrase.

**PART ONE:
IDENTITY, NIGRESCENCE, AND RELIGIOUS
CONVERSION- THEORY AND METHODS**

CHAPTER ONE

SOCIAL IDENTITY, BLACKNESS, AND CONVERSION: IDENTITY FORMATION AND CHANGE

“I myself was one of those [underprivileged ghetto] youths [of the late 1950s] who accepted the Rasta Faith, as in it I saw something to identify with; it gave me a feeling of belonging and a brighter perception of the future because it helped me to understand the past in a way impossible before” (Jah Bones, 1986:41)

Prophetess Esther, born into a rural Black Christian household in 1927, began hearing voices at the age of nine during classroom instruction. At first it was only one voice—that of Jesus Christ—and it told her how special she was. The young girl, more anxious than frightened, could not wait until after school to tell her father about the voice. The father listened patiently to the entire story and then lovingly told his daughter that there was nothing wrong with her. He said that she was special, just as the voice had said, and that she should listen to the voice; it would not steer her wrong. As time passed, a second spirit-voice began speaking to young Esther. This one said he was Haile Selassie, a king, and that he was communicating with her from Ethiopia. Both voices said that they wanted their children of the African slaves to return home to Africa. As Prophetess Esther grew into womanhood, she continued communicating with the spirit voices and often had visions. Slowly, she pieced together the ideas, knowledge, and practices of the Rastafari. She identified with them so strongly that she saw her job as that of gathering the children of Africans exiled to the West. Prophetess Esther learned the norms, culture, and tradition associated with the devotees of Selassie I—the Rastafari—and has focused her life around dreams and teachings of Rastafari.

Brother Yendis, born in Kingston in 1934 to two poor, hardworking parents, was nominally religious as a young man. Yendis’ mother, a borderline Catholic, did not force her religious beliefs and practices upon him, although he occasionally attended church. His father had little interest in religion. What both parents shared during the 1940s was their disdain for the Rastafarians—who they thought of as dirty heathens who occasionally stole young children for evil purposes. One day while traveling with his father, Yendis saw a male

Rastafarian approaching, pushing a handcart heavily laden with cargo. He watched as a police officer, for no apparent reason, motioned over the Rastafarian and then overturned his cart, destroying some of the man's goods. Yendis and his father went over to aid the man. They silently helped the Rastafarian reload the cart. Yendis was struck by how dignified the man was; his countenance and posture seemed royal, and he maintained his dignity despite intimidation and humiliation. From that point forward, Yendis closely watched every Rastafarian he could identify, and he noted that nearly all of them appeared to be highly principled, intrepid, and devoted to a Black God who so many others despised and disparaged. Yendis was driven to find out about this Black God and King. Fifty-odd years after his initial encounter, Yendis is one of the most respected leaders of the organized arm of the Rastafarian movement.

Sister Esther and Yendis were not born as Rastafarians; but, through two vastly different experiences, each “grew” into a forcible racial and new religious identity. This chapter provides a theoretical framework for understanding why and how people become Rastafarians through a discussion of social identity and change, Black identity, and religious conversion.

In this chapter I provide a summary that discusses social identity. I aim to provide an account of the core elements of individual and group identity, how these elements cohere in a social context, and why and how they change over time. Next, I treat the Nigrescence models, focusing on Cross Jr.'s revised model. This is followed by a review of the study of religious conversion. Equally, conversion theories are models of identity formation and change. They converge with the Nigrescence accounts because both offer processual approaches where an “Encounter” phase is pivotal to identity change; they diverge from Nigrescence models because they focus on religiosity. The two approaches together furnish a multifaceted explanation for why and how people become Rastafarians, and how they maintain or fail to maintain commitment to the new identity and community.

The centrality of the Encounter experience to conversion of all types must be emphasized. Whether a dream, vision, critical insight, or a real-world experience, the Encounter experience is a primary catalyst to identity conversion. For instance, even in the case of White Southern racial conversions (from racism or racial indifference to sympathy for or empathy with Black people) it is specific Encounters that initiate a searching of one's

soul and a critical perspective on the larger society (Hobson 1999). The change in personal identity has social roots, and is social identity that I now turn attention to.

THEORIZING SOCIAL IDENTITY

Prior to the 1980s, the concept of identity was most commonly associated with psychology, and to a lesser extent, sociology and philosophy (Gleason, 1983). Since then, concepts of identity and identity formation have taken a central position in the work of scholars in the humanities and social sciences. Much of the diffusion of the identity concept is related to issues raised by postmodernist claims about changes in the nature of the social world and their critiques of modernist thinking.

The Dialectics of Social Identity

A person's identity is a storehouse of information about him/her self and the social and natural worlds. This identity is used to navigate social life. A person's sense of self and of relationship to others changes over time (Erikson, 1982), especially since the 1900s (Gleason, 1983). Some Psychologists agree that personal identity consists of universal features such as self-esteem, anxiety, introversion or extroversion, and so on, which vary along a continuum from high to low. Taken together, individual and group identity are a subjective sense of self that establishes who and what one is based on a ranking of roles, relationships, obligations, and motivations. Applied to others, identity is the objective and self-relational definition of others through assignment to categories and the drawing of boundaries.

Rastafarian group identity has been greatly shaped by more than 40 years of discrimination and persecution. Rastafarians have developed strong we-them boundaries signified by cultural, linguistic, ritualistic, symbolic, ideological, and phenotypical expressions. They further differentiated themselves through heightened group camaraderie, egalitarianism, and the solace of seeing themselves as a chosen people recognized by a Black Messiah come to redeem Black people.

The social construction of experience of the world can be very different for Blacks and for Whites, and this transfers to identity. Some aspects of Black and White identity are shared and universal, while others are specifically identified with Blackness or Whiteness.

For Black people in the New World, slavery, colonialism, and socially-sanctioned discrimination have been powerful influences that have framed how they define themselves and others, and vice versa. In terms of identification and identity formation, these experiences separate Blacks and Whites. There may be variation in the way these deep-seated institutional phenomena affect how Blacks and Whites identify themselves, but Whites in the New World have not known bondage nor looked to religion for solace and explanation of and redemption from their predicament.¹ Stephen Butterfield nicely summarized this point in his *Black Autobiography in America*: “Black writers offer a model of the self different from white models, created in response to a different perception of history and revealing divergent, often completely opposite meanings to humans actions” (1974:2).

Older social scientists understood that individual identity develops out of the interaction between a person’s development and his/her experiences in the social world. While individuals were seen being able to exercise agency, social circumstances always provided relative limits. Marx, for example, made this a central part of his perspective.² William James, in his 1890 *Principles of Psychology*, suggested that identity is constituted in terms of the self as “knower” (I) and “known” (me), pinpointing the relationship between subjective-internal and objective-external forces that shape identity. Early on, we see a recognition that identity formation is not the product of one set of processes, internal or external. We are who we are because of biography and society.

Charles Cooley developed a concept of primary and secondary groups (1905)³ and put forward the idea that modern society increasingly emphasizes secondary over primary relationships. Secondary relationships are rooted in civility while primary ones are based in duty and obligation. The point is that at the beginning of the twentieth century it was assumed that obligation and duty as foundations of identity were being supplanted by more pliable identifications rooted in increasingly differentiated roles. However, Cooley’s model of the “looking glass self” still holds—our sense of self and identity develops out of how other people react to us and how we interpret these perceived reactions.

The idea of a self-identity constituted of internal and external processes is also associated with George Mead. Like James, Mead’s (1934) “I” was the actor trying to shape others perceptions of self, while the “me” was the part of self that others see when they look at the “I.” The “I” tries to shape the “me” in relation to what the “I” and others think.

Mead was concerned with people's subjective experiences and how different people come to share common definitions of reality. Symbolic interaction presupposes that the same symbol can be differently interpreted and that even people who share an understanding of a given symbol or idea will, over time, differently interpret it.

W.E.B. DuBois' idea of double consciousness made contestation and conflict a centerpiece of the identity of Black Americans. DuBois showed that some people's sense of self is torn by feeling like an outsider and that double consciousness can hide part of a person's sense of self from him or herself. Double consciousness highlights the relationships between internal psychic conflict, social conflict, and how people cope with these. Furthermore, DuBois pointed to the cognitive dissonance that individuals often face: attempting to reconcile expectations and ideals with realities and possibilities.

The Dialectics of the Reference Group

Reference groups are commonly conceived of as in- and out-groups. The in-group is the one to which a person considers him/herself affiliated with, while out-groups serve as a positive or negative frame of reference to which a person does not consider him/herself a member. Reference group theory (RGT), as exemplified by Riesman (1950), is predicated upon the view that identity formation hinges upon individuals' dependence on others for validation (or negation) of the self presented. RGT focuses upon identity formation in terms of "other-directedness." Although humans are dependent upon others for self-identification, Irene Thomson suggests that this can also be a source of estrangement because it fosters conformity which can lead to unhappiness because the person is not being "authentic" (1985).

The most fundamental aspect of ethnicity is self-identification—how one sees oneself in relation to other groups and the one with whom the person identifies. Next is the degree of attachment or sense of "belonging" one has in relation to their group. These are tied to group pride, cultural knowledge of traditions, values, and history, and participation in group-related activities. A significant part of self and group identity, especially attitudes, aspirations, grievances, and ideology, are shaped through self-appraisal in relation to other individuals and groups (Merton, 1968:40, 296).⁴ While the number of possible references are unlimited, at a given time most people draw only from a few (Runciman, 1966:15). This means that

context and social history are important to understanding identity.

Race also provides reference group functions. Janet Helms defines race as a “type of group or collective identity based upon people’s belief that they share a common racial heritage with a particular racial group” (1990:3). Race is not the same thing as culture or ethnicity, although for Black people the two (or three) are often conflated, whereas Whites are rarely studied as a race and instead are approached in terms of ethnicity. For Cross, Jr.:

Having a Black identity means that the reference group functions of one’s identity are grounded in one’s behavior. Being Black is important to one’s well-being, one’s purpose in life, and one’s sense of connection to other Blacks. One’s feelings of being wanted, accepted, appreciated, and affiliated is deeply rooted in Black people, Black culture, and the general Black condition (1995:119).

At the same time, race is a social category that has no scientifically demonstrable basis because there is more variation within racial groupings than between them. But its social force as means for categorizing, ranking, and stigmatizing of people is undeniable.

While the theorists cited recognize the dialectical and dual (personal/group) aspects of identity formation, two important distinctions must be made. Social identity theory and identity theory are not synonymous. Both identity theory and social identity theory focus on how individual behavior and social structure influence identity formation, but differ in their level of analysis, attention to intergroup influences, the relationships between social roles and groups, and the importance of the social environ to identity formation (1995). Both theories recognize the self as being a inter-related products of society and not atoms “...independent of and prior to society” (Hogg et al. 1995:255). Identity theory is micro-sociological, and explains role-related behaviors” while social identity theory grows out of social psychological attempts to address group processes and intergroup relations. Identity theory has affinities to symbolic interactionism, treating the person as a configuration of identities, each being tied to salient roles (hence more roles, more identities). Hence identity theory is really role identity theory and is not concerned with cognitive processes such as self-categorization and stereotyping which are important to self and group identification. From this perspective a person’s sense of self is tied to their different roles, and a person being labeled or self-defined as a part of a given role category. These categories are “...organized hierarchically in the self-concept with regard to the probability that they will form the basis for action” (1995:257). It is here that commitment comes to bear upon identity: the more important the role (and

related identification) the greater the commitment. Hogg et al. argue that "Commitment to a particular role identity is high if people perceive that many of their important relationships are predicated on occupancy of that role. The consequence of vacating such a role is loss of a social network that is psychologically important..." (1995:258). Social identity theory, on the other hand, explains identity in terms of social categories (e.g., nationality; race; ethnicity; religion; etc., and not roles) to which one belongs and feels that they are a part of. It thus accounts for self-definition and labeling by others. Instead of roles, social identity theory focuses on group membership and what this entails in terms of behavior and socio-cultural prescriptions, perception, and stereotyping. Social identity theory addresses discrimination, group boundary maintenance, and group belief structures (i.e., the nature of relations between one's own group and others). It requires defining what out-groups are important to the group being investigated.

Social Identity and Social Change: A Macro Perspective

Prior to the twentieth century, for most people identity was ascribed and relatively fixed. Individuals were born into a community, and who they "became" depended upon that community and the family's religious, occupational, and territorial ties. People continued the work of their fathers and mothers and rarely ventured outside the boundaries of their community. Given the rapidity at which change now proceeds, attitudes, ideas, and social relationships predominating in Jamaica between the 1930s and 1960s are significantly different from those of the last decade of the twentieth century. The forces and experiences that shaped the identity and ideology of first and second generation Rastafarians are different from those affecting third and fourth generations.

Social and personal identity tend toward a dynamic equilibrium, but this can be upset by influences outside of and within the person. External factors, aside from out- and in-group influences, include economical, political, and technological changes, with the diffusion of print and visual media being critical stimuli. These provide gateways to information and experiences that a person might not otherwise have access to in his/her local environment. Internal influences are many and range from mental health problems to a quest for self-affirmation. Some see a relationship between identity and stable or poorly integrated social systems (Bankston, Forsyth & Floyd, 1981:280). Stability provides for identity equilibrium

while poorly integrated systems and/or social changes foster anomie and counter identities. Somewhere in between is the Encounter—an experience that disrupts a person's (or group's) identity complex, creating a perturbation that normally will return to a dynamic steady state.

Some have argued that macro-level changes affect identity because they weaken a person's world view paradigm. The general argument is that intrusive extra-local forces (such as disruption of trade networks, traditional means of subsistence, and/or cultural and religious beliefs and traditions) leave people at a loss for explaining what happened to them and why, and how to resolve the challenge. One result is that the person has to reformulate their world view and sense of self in order to better understand the change. This perspective has been especially applied to religious conversion and the appearance of millenarian, messianic, and revitalization movements (e.g., Barber 1941; Wallace 1957; Lanternari 1963; Fisher 1973; Horton & Peel 1976). Explanations of this order are more persuasive in accounting for changes in group behavior. The impact of extra-local change may or may not influence an individual's identity conversion, and the life history is one way contextualize to the why and how of identity transformation. Accordingly, a thorough explanation of identity transformation should be based on both group and individual analysis.

Changing of identity outside of the normal development across the life span is far from common. "The predictability and stability functions of one's identity serves as filters against rapid and dramatic identity change. The person's identity filters incoming experience so that the information 'fits' into his or her current understanding of him- or herself and the world in which she lives. Therefore, any fully developed identity ...is difficult to change" (Cross, Jr., 1995:104). Cross, Jr's, observation is critical given post-1980s accounts that focus on shifting, fractured, contested, and unstable identities. Christopher Lasch's *Minimal Self* (1986) offers a striking example of the post-industrial mind-set that came to dominate how social identity is thought of:

In times of trouble everyday life becomes an exercise in survival. People take one day at a time. They seldom look back lest they succumb to a debilitating 'nostalgia'; and if they look ahead, it is to see how they insure themselves against the disasters almost everybody now expects. Under these conditions, selfhood becomes a kind of luxury, out of place in an age of impending austerity. Selfhood implies a personal history, friends, family, a sense of place. Under siege, the self contracts to a defensive core, armed against adversity. Emotional equilibrium demands a minimal self, not the imperial self of yesteryear (1986:15).

Writing during a period of political uncertainty (the 1980s) when the contours of an impending spurt in the growth of a high-tech, information-based society was on the horizon, Lasch's effort to critique the ascending post-modern *and* conservative oriented views of identity deserves some sympathy, even with its Western and class biases:

The hope that political action will gradually harmonize industrial society has given way to a determination to survive the general wreckage, or more modestly, to hold one's own life together in the face of mounting pressures. The danger of disintegration encourages a sense of selfhood neither "imperial" nor "narcissistic," but simply beleaguered (1986:16).

Lasch contends that both the optimists who see a new healthy self and the pessimists who see a fragmented, besieged self are all wrong:

The current concern with "identity" registers some of the difficulty (uncertainty of self and the world) in defining boundaries of selfhood. So does the minimalist style in contemporary art and literature, which derives much of its subject matter from popular culture, in particular from the inversion of experience by images, and thus helps us to see that minimal selfhood is not just a defensive reaction to change, but arises out of a more fundamental social transformation: the replacement of a reliable world of durable objects by a world of flickering images that make it harder and harder to distinguish reality from fantasy (Lasch, 1986:19).

Lasch's argument is important, but he errs by implying that the changes in society and identity equally influence all people and classes. Poor people and nations do not have unrestricted access to an ever-growing range of role options that are available to those of working, middle, professional, and elite classes. Hence the fluidity, the distance between "fantasy and reality," is bound to be different. Furthermore, a strong religious outlook provides a future, whether on earth or in the netherworld.

This study does not assume a troubled, besieged, fragmented, minimal self that so many of the postmodern-influenced expositions on identity and identity formation focus upon. Such claims are based on White, Western, professional understandings of self and identity. Equally important, much of what is known about identity development is drawn from the studies and experiences of White and middle class people. The poor are rarely the basis for understanding social identity.

Postmodern and poststructural understandings of the individual and society posit a post-industrial society in which filial, territorial, occupational, and cultural ties are radically different from the "modern" and "stable" identity rooted in one or two territorial locations,

a life-long job, and lasting religious and social affiliations. Although the complexities of identity can be magnified by the increasing number of roles available to a person and because of technologies that facilitate access to information and to travel, these changes are not equally applicable to all, especially older generations and the poor.

Jonathan Friedman (1993; 1994) offers a global perspective on social change and identity that treats identity, ideology, and social class as interconnected. Changes in politico-economic relationships, especially commerce and the centralization and fragmentation of accumulative processes and social systems, affect people's interpretation and perception of themselves and others (1993; 1994). Similarly, Samson argues that because psychology focuses on the individual, it misses how pervasive changes like globalization effect identity and perception (1989). Samson notes how social identification has changed since the Middle Ages (1989), and like Friedman (1993), he acknowledges how major social transformations ultimately affect a person's sense of self, place, and relationship to others. Samson challenges researchers to approach the study of identity in the "postmodern world" by examining the individual's attachments, commitments, goals, and purposes (1989:914, 918).

Finally, Baumeister shows how changes in self-identity correspond to social and technological changes, and how the process is uneven in its spread and how it effects different classes (1986). Baumeister argues that in the Middle Ages there was little evidence that people, outside of the clergy, had a sense of self-identity. People's identities tended to be ascribed and conceived of as preordained. It was industrialization, the rise of a middle class, and colonization of foreign lands that allowed the emergence of a self-identity that is discovered through self-actualization. But this sense of self is far from being universally held, even in highly industrialized nations.

In sum, the study of social identity and groups must account for change and be able to locate its sources.

THEORIZING NIGRESCENCE AND BLACKNESS

William Cross, Jr., identifies three distinguishing functions of a Black identity: defense against the "negative psychological stress resulting from having to live in a society that, at times, can be very racist"; provision of a "sense of purpose, meaning and affiliation"; and furnishing "psychological mechanisms that facilitate social intercourse with

people, cultures, and human situations located outside the boundaries of Blackness” (Cross, Jr., 1995:117). This definition is consistent with other Black identity theories that focus on why and how Black people define themselves (e.g., Helms, 1990).

Black people derive their sense of “Blackness” through socialization, beginning in infancy through early adulthood. Family and friends play a great role in socialization into Blackness, as do institutional and historical factors. As William Cross, Jr., shows, some ostensibly Black people reach adulthood with an identity that reflects deracination, mis-education (their self-esteem may be strong but they hold stereotypic views of the group), or racial self-hatred.⁵ Hence, there is a range of identity configurations for Black people. However, deracination, assimilationism, mis-education, and racial self-hatred are the forms of experience and identity that make racial conversion a possibility, and Nigrescence Theory (NT) describes the process through which a person moves from deracination, mis-education, and racial self-hatred to high salience on Blackness. This is a re-education and re-socialization experience since an already extant identity that places little emphasis in being Black is converted into one where race and Black culture are preeminent. Cross, Jr.’s, Nigrescence model was originally called “The Negro-to-Black-Conversion-Experience” (1971).

Nigrescence, as defined by William Cross, Jr., is the “psychology of becoming black,” making it a model of metamorphosis (Cross, Jr., 1995:95). In Nigrescence, a single part of a person’s identity—Blackness—is singled out, transformed, and then reintegrated into the person’s full identity complex. In sociological terms, the self is reorganized around a new core identity (Bankston, et al., 1981:282). The separation allows the person to make sense of that part of the identity, but it must be reintegrated into the total identity complex at some point. Fully developed Nigrescence provides an ego defense mechanism that helps the individual anticipate racism by learning to focus blame on a system or institutions instead of the self and a potential religious orientation that diminishes the need to demonize Whites by displacing racism and oppression onto evil (Cross, Jr., 1995:118). In this way, Blackness serves a mental health function.

While personal identity exhibits a tendency toward stability and against change, it is not uncommon for a person to come to see his/her everyday identity as inadequate or “not who I really ought or want to be” (Bankston, et al., 1981:281). Such people search for new

referents, which may lead to breaks with the existing identity.

Early Formulations of Nigrescence Theory

There are few models in social science developed largely by Black researchers that speak specifically to Black experiences. Typically, it has been the interpretation of White researchers, using White experience as the baseline, who have developed models that are applied to the experience of non-Whites. Or it has been Black and White researchers who developed an archetype of Black identity as a cluster of pathologies resultant from using Whites as a primary reference group, assimilation of White values and aesthetics, and an inability to recover from the holocaust of slavery. That Black people affirmed themselves and made positive achievements under oppression was rarely explored.

The earliest formulations of Nigrescence reflected the efforts of psychologists to comprehend why and how some Blacks in the United States came to assert a pro-Black identity, when the scope of the phenomenon, before 1968 (Cross, Jr., 1993), was confined to small, scattered, Black nationalist groups. Sherif & Sherif (1970), Cross (1971), and Hall, Freedle, & Cross (1972) were among the first to publish scholarly research on this topic. Later, Bailey Jackson developed a four stage Black identity development theory (1976).

Janet Helms argues that theories of Black identity have two strands: a Black client-as-problem (BCAP) and Nigrescence (1990a:9). The two approaches grew out of different concerns and have different implications. The BCAP approach was based in a desire to investigate the claims that post-Civil Rights Blacks were unpredictable and unruly, that they behaved violently toward Whites, and that there were no studies of the strengths of Black personalities (Helms, 1990a:10). Nigrescence, on the other hand, zeroed in on the processes by which Blacks come to affirmatively define themselves and move away from neutral or anti-Black conceptions.

Cross, Jr., sees the Nigrescence model as applicable to Black identity today and yesterday (Cross, Jr., 1995:95). Accordingly, he suggests the model could be applied to Nat Turner, the Virginian slave who led a major slave revolt, to the intellectual W.E.B. DuBois, or Black nationalists like Marcus Garvey (1995:95). All developed a strong racial consciousness as a result of certain experiences. Nat Turner changed from a humble into a racially-conscious and rebellious slave; W.E.B. DuBois' pre-Fisk University outlook did not

entail strong racial consciousness; and Marcus Garvey, prior to traveling abroad, held a perspective that can be characterized as believing Blackness to be a stigma. More recently, Cha-Jua used the Nigrescence model to show how C.L.R. James initially had a low salience toward race attitude, but gradually became a radical Black nationalist as a result of specific experiences (1998). While Garvey, DuBois, and James are of Caribbean ancestry, the Nigrescence model is based primarily on the experience of Black people in America, and its applicability to those outside of the U.S. remains to be tested.

Five stages characterize the Nigrescence process (Table 1.1). Pre-Encounter, Stage 1, refers to the existing identity, the one that is changed. Stage 2, Encounter, captures the phase during which an individual has experiences that make him/her feel a need to change. Immersion-Emersion, Stage 3, is the period of transition from the pre-Encounter identity to the new one. Stage Four, Internalization, is where the person begins to integrate the new identity into their existing personality and social networks. Stage 5, Internalization-Commitment, defines the phase during which the individual has become comfortable with the new identity to the point that he/she can integrate issues that are not “Black only” issues (e.g., political activism) into the identity and personality complex. Helms has asserted that Cross, Jr.’s, model needs only four stages, since there is so little to differentiate stages four and five that they could be collapsed into one (1990a:31), but this was prior to the revised model. Cross, Jr., explains that most change occurs in the person’s world-view, ideology, and reference group, not in general personality type or basic self-concept. Helms sees the stages as bi-modal, whereby individuals are either passive or active during the metamorphosis (Helms, 1990a:19).

Personality characteristics such as shyness, extroversion, leadership orientation, and poor or strong self-confidence do not change much, if at all, because of the shift to an emphasis on Black identity. Intuitively, it seems that self-esteem would be enhanced as a result, but research suggests self-esteem does not have to change because of Nigrescence; the person does not become more “unified” because of the Nigrescence experience (Cross, Jr., 1993; 1995).

The Pre-Encounter Black was originally thought to have low self-esteem, high anxiety, lower ego integration at the individual level, be more likely to express an assimilationist and status quo perspective, and to be anti-Black and anti-African. For

TABLE 1.1: The Five Stages of Nigrescence

Five Stages of Nigrescence	Abstractions: Attitudes and Characteristics Associated with the Stage	Substantive Behavioral & Attitudinal Manifestations
1: Pre-Encounter	Low salience to race attitudes; view of Blackness as a social stigma; anti-Black attitudes.	The low salience individual does not emphasize being Black, but does not deny it either; or he-she might be anti-Black
2: Encounter	Encounter = experiencing an event, dream, or insights related to Blackness. The Encounter must be personalized; it must change a person's perception and attitude.	The Encounter is the origin of a person's search for information about Blackness; attends meetings or gatherings related to Blackness.
3: Immersion-Emersion	Erasure of the old identity while building the new one; the person has not yet changed, but has decided that he or she must change; beration or denigration of the old self. Anger, anxiety, anomie, common.	Early manifestations of the identity can be shallow, quixotic, overly dramatic or crude; the person has not been deeply socialized into the new perspective and identity, and may lack detailed information about appropriate norms.
4: Internalization	Dissonance is resolved and the individual reaches a new dynamic equilibrium, comfortable with who he or she now is; the core of the person's self is reconstituted and it is the group referent and world view that have changed, not the personality.	The new identity is internalized and appears a "natural" part of the person's self; general defensiveness and simplistic thinking fades; Blackness becomes one of many salencies as the person considers other issues as a part of Blackness.
5: Internalization-Commitment	Not much difference between stage 4 and 5 except that stage 5 is about long-term commitment to the new identity. If the person maintains their Black identity across the life-span they may "recycle" through Nigrescence as new life challenges arise	The person commits to Black issues and causes, often by participating in Black-oriented cultural and political organizations.

Sources: Cross 1971; Cross, Jr. 1993; 1995; 2001.

instance, Sherif & Sherif argued that it was Black people's sense of shame that made possible the expression of Black pride and self-confidence (1970). Bailey Jackson drew on the concept of "negromarchy"⁶ to describe those Black people who are confused about their self worth, deriving it from external and not internal sources (1976:158). Even Cross's pre-Discovery stage one (now Pre-Encounter) emphasized denigration of Blackness (1971). It is

now established that the main issues for the Pre-Encounter Black are deracination, mis-education, and socialization into a Eurocentric world view. Thus, the change consequent to the Encounter is in world view and group referent, not personality. The middle stages (Encounter and Immersion-Emersion) have held up to rigorous experimental and theoretical examination, while the accounts of the Pre-Encounter and Internalization stages needed revision. Overall, studies of Black identity “confirm the theory’s overall validity” (Cross, Jr., 1995:95).

Stage models such as those of Nigrescence and conversion capture recurrent processes and their sequences. Erik Erikson, for example, developed an eight stage model of identity-related changes an individual experiences during the course of his/her life (1968; 1982:25-34). Stage models pinpoint the themes and patterns that characterize each phase (Rambo, 1993:17), but there are no neat or once-and-for-all transitions between stages. Sometimes individuals “spiral” back and forth between stages (Rambo, 1993:16) as additional challenges may cause re-cycling through some stages (Cross, Jr., 1995:95). For example, new questions that challenge the identity may arise, and the challenge may or may not be resolved. If it is resolved a new plateau is reached.

Stage One: Pre-Encounter

The Pre-Encounter identity is a Black person’s

...first identity [and is] shaped by early development. This identity involves years of socialization grounded in experiences with one’s family, extended family, neighborhood and community, and schools, covering the periods of childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood. It is a tried and fully-tested identity that serves the person day in and day out. It helps the person feel centered, purposeful and in control by making life predictable (Cross, Jr., 1995:104).

Three general attitudes define the Pre-Encounter stage: low salience to race; social stigma; and anti-Black. The low-salience individual does not emphasize being Black, but does not deny it either. The sense of self, well-being, and purpose in life are not tied to Blackness, but other things, such as career, religion, political affiliation, life-style, and status. “As long as their Pre-Encounter attitudes bring them a sense of fulfillment, meaningful existence and an internal sense of stability, order and harmony, such persons will not likely be in need of any type of identity change, let alone movement toward Afro-centricity”

(Cross, Jr., 1995:98). Cross, Jr., reports that “Research suggests that the Pre-Encounter stage incorporates bi-modal trends in which some people are classically self-hating, but the majority are not. The majority show low salience for race but apparently derive mental health benefits from group identifications not necessarily connected to Black culture” (1995:97).

Pre-Encounter Blacks do not oppose or criticize Black people, Black studies, or Black nationalism simply because of self hatred, low self-esteem or anti-Blackness. A “cultural bias” prevents them from according legitimacy to other histories, experiences, and life ways outside the Western, White experience. “The most damning aspect of miseducation is ... the development of a world view and cultural-historical perspective that can restrict one’s knowledge about, and one’s capacity to advocate, the cultural, political, economic and historical interests of Black people” (Cross, Jr., 1995:100).

The person with a social stigma attitude sees race as a stigma or problem. This attitude can co-exist with a low salience toward race. Such people may have a mild interest in Black causes, but not because they want to further Black interests or learn about Black history. They are likely to know little about Black history and culture. Rather, they express a “need to defend oneself against Blackness as stigma” or to “destroy the social stigma associated with Blackness” (Cross, Jr., 1995:99). The problem for these people is that Blackness can intrude as a stigmatizing force upon their lives and activities; thus, they oppose the stigma without an interest in Black culture, history, or causes.

For the anti-Black Black, Blackness is a negative referent. It refers to everything he/she finds problematic with Black people. There is not much difference between the anti-Black Black and the rhetoric of White racism. The anti-Black Black feels no sense of Black community, finds ludicrous the idea of Black culture, and is estranged from most other Blacks who are not anti-Black. The anti-Black Black will likely hold a positive racial view of White people. He or she believes Black people are their own worst enemies. Like other Pre-Encounter Blacks, the anti-Black Black “exhibits varying levels of mis-education, a Eurocentric cultural frame of reference... ‘race image’ anxiety, a race-conflict resolution model that stresses assimilation-integrationist objectives, and a value system that gives preference to non-Afrocentric priorities” (Cross, Jr., 1995:99). The anti-Black Black is the epitome of racial self-hatred.

Stage Two: Encounter

The Encounter phase consists of two major processes: the experiences of the Encounter and personalization of the experience. The experience can be physically tangible, such as witnessing an event, or it could be a dream or a series of insights. But the experience has to be taken to heart by the person. The event(s) must change the person's perception and attitude. "An Encounter must personally affect the individual in a powerful way" (Cross, Jr., 1995:105).⁷

The Encounter need not be negative, as in the case of experiencing a racist event. It may, instead, revolve around exposure to powerful cultural-historical information about the Black experience previously unknown to the person. Or we can use the examples of Prophetess Esther and Brother Yendis: "Personalizing the Encounter may challenge the person to radically rethink his or her conception of Black history and Black culture" (Cross, Jr. 1995:105). The Encounter can be so compelling that the person begins a search for Black identity.

The Encounter phase can arouse anxiety, anomie, confusion, and anger for the individual. It is a very powerful experience to realize that "one's frame of reference, world view, or value system is 'wrong,' 'incorrect,' 'dysfunctional,' or more to the point, 'not Black or Afrocentric enough'" (Cross, Jr., 1995:105). This phase becomes more anxiety-producing as the person will soon be faced with constructing and testing the acceptability of his or her new ideas about the world as a part of developing the new identity: "The person will seek out new information or attend meetings in order to assess whether he or she should submit to metamorphosis" (Cross, Jr., 1995:105). The person enters a phase that may be referred to as *seekership*, which has a parallel in the religious conversion process (see below). The two approaches converge in identifying dissatisfaction as a factor driving seekership and identity transformation. The seekership aspect of the Encounter stage sheds light on how "new" information can transform a person's world view and identity. Gayraud Wilmore underscores this point in reference to Black slaves who learned to read, especially those who came into contact with information different from what they already knew: "A whole new world was opened up and with it a new self-esteem, a new consciousness of identity and destiny" (1998:264).

Helms wonders whether the Encounter lasts long enough to be considered a stage

(1990a:24). However, because a person mentally re-visits the Encounter and personalizes the experience, it is reasonable to treat it as a distinct phase. Equally important is the possibility that the person can become “virtually identity-less” during this period (Helms, 1990a:26). Each person experiences and personalizes their Encounter differently. What is common to the experience is its identity-disintegrating nature.

Stage Three: Immersion-Emersion

In this phase the person engages the work of erasing the old identity while building a new one. The person has not yet changed, but has decided that he or she must change. He/she is moving from the familiar to the uncertain, and in the process, will berate or denigrate the old self. This may take the form of a denial of the old self, or at least its import, given the new concerns. Because the person is not yet sure about how to become what he or she wants, the early manifestations of the identity can be shallow, quixotic, overly dramatic, or crude. The person has not been thoroughly socialized into the identity and lacks detailed information about norms appropriate to what he or she wants to be.

In effect, the new convert lacks knowledge about the complexity and texture of the new identity; consequently, he or she is forced to erect simplistic, glorified, highly romantic and speculative images of what he or she assumes the self will be like. This state of “in betweenness” can cause the person to be very anxious about whether he or she is becoming the “right kind of Black person” (Cross, Jr., 1995:106).

During the Immersion-Emersion stage, the convert goes beyond the view of Whites as oppressive and begins to see Blackness as superior to Whiteness. The person runs the risk of becoming a racist (by reducing Whites to a set of inherent attributes) unless he or she attributes superiority to morality and persistence under oppressive conditions and not biology. New Black converts may occupy themselves with “demonizing” White people and White culture. This is a part of group boundary development, and a person’s effort to appear deeply committed to the new identity. It also provides a way to disguise low competence in the specificities of a given Black identity.

It is important for the Immersion-oriented Black to seek out those individuals and groups who represent what he or she plans to be. Otherwise, he or she might not be able to fully develop the new identity and resolve crises associated with the situation. As Cross, Jr., explains, “...most converts will seek and find the social support of others by joining certain

organizations and groups. The groups joined provide a counterculture to the identity being replaced...by entangling the person in membership requirements, symbolic dress codes, rites, rituals, obligations and reward systems that nurture and reinforce the emerging 'new' (Black or Afrocentric) identity" (Cross, Jr., 1995:109).

Re-socialization involves a quest for information and gradual participation in group activities. The person submerges his or herself in Black culture and history. He/she attends cultural and political meetings that focus on Black concerns and may even join these organizations and drop their Pre-Encounter associations (see Cross, Jr., 1995:107). The Immersion is fueled by anger (at White people), "guilt" (for the Pre-Encounter identity and attitudes), and a growing sense of pride linked to the new identity (Cross, Jr., 1995:107). Immersion entails a turn inward toward Blackness and away from the White world and Pre-Encounter relations and beliefs. It is a kind of renunciation (see discussion of religious conversion and commitment below). It is a plunge where previous Pre-Encounter relationships are severed, sometimes meaning family and friends, just as the case might be for the convert to an unconventional religion.

The anxiety and zeal that characterize the Encounter and Immersion is typically supplanted by a more "in-control" and vigilant person of the Emersion phase. The emotional intensity of the Encounter and Immersion phases cannot be maintained indefinitely (Cross, Jr., 1995:110). The establishment of a new identity equilibrium can be attributed to personal growth, a better grasp of the "new" norms, values and behavior, and cultural information associated with the new identity. The person in the Emersion phase begins to pay more attention to the behavior of role models.

The Nigrescence process is not guaranteed to proceed smoothly and uniformly; there can be unfavorable outcomes. The person might not move beyond the Encounter stage or may never internalize the new identity. He/she might become confused, regress, or never fully fathom the norms, history, and intricacies of the new identity. If the individual suffers too much anxiety or trauma along the way, and not enough information and cues are absorbed from the appropriate sources, the person may abandon the undertaking (regression). The revised Nigrescence model establishes fixation as a possible negative outcome. Those persons who experience very painful circumstances, such as violence or extreme poverty, are most likely to fixate on some form of "evil White people" philosophy.

Cross, Jr., suggests that to remain in the mode of the “evil Whitey” is indicative of a lack of growth and development. This point is thorny because it suggests that those who are poor and suffer the greatest oppressions are likely to fixate, while “those who can move in and out of oppressive Black situations or who have greater access to insights that point to more progressive attitudes (e.g., college students, the Black middle class, scholars, securely employed working class Blacks, etc.) will tend to escape the debilitating effects of reactionary hatred” (Cross, Jr., 1995:112). The life histories of the Rastafari bring this assertion into question as nearly all of them are exceedingly poor, but did not fixate.

Stage Four: Internalization

Having gone through anxieties and uncertainties, searching out information and like-minded people, the convert slowly internalizes the new identity. The previous phases were a process of reconciling conflicts, erasing the old self, and solidifying the new self. By the Internalization phase, the new identity outwardly manifests as a natural part of the person’s identity repertoire. “For the settled convert, the new identity gives high salience to Blackness, with the degree of salience being determined by ideological considerations. At one extreme are certain nationalists whose concern for race leaves little room for other considerations, but for others, Blackness becomes one of several or many saliences” (Cross, Jr., 1995:113). There is great variability in how people express Blackness.⁸

The Nigrescence model projects three psycho-dynamic functions of the internalized identity: “to defend and protect a person from psychological insults that stem from having to live in a racist society”; “to provide a sense of belonging and social anchorage”; and “to provide a foundation or point of departure for carrying out transactions with people’s cultures and human situations beyond the world of Blackness” (Cross, Jr., 1995:113).

Having gone through the turnings of the first three stages, “the successful resolution of one’s racial identity conflicts makes it possible for the person to shift attention to other identity concerns such as religion, gender and sexual preference, career development, social class and poverty, and multiculturalism” (Cross, Jr., 1995:113). What he/she incorporates into the Black identification depends on many factors, not limited to social class, geographical location, level of education, and the constraints and opportunities of the person’s environment.

Dissonance is resolved during the Internalization phase as the person reaches a new dynamic equilibrium, comfortable with who he or she now is. Anger and rage at Whites and oppressive systems are substituted with critical analysis and contemplation. The change from stage three to four can be a transition from “unrealistic urgency that can lead to dropping out (of the Nigrescence transition) to a sense of destiny that enables one to sustain long-term commitment; from anxious, insecure, rigid, pseudo-Blackness based on the hatred of Whites, to proactive Black pride, self-love, and a deep sense of connection to, and acceptance by the Black community” (Cross, Jr., 1995:113). The Internalization phase is crucial to continued identity commitment. “One of the most important consequences of this inner peace (of the Internalization phase) is that the person’s conception of Blackness tends to become more open, expansive and sophisticated. As general defensiveness fades, simplistic thinking and simple solutions become transparently inadequate, and the full complexity and inherent texture of the Black condition mark the point of departure for serious analysis” (Cross, Jr., 1995:114).

Emersion and Internalization imply a host of attendant changes in social networks, cultural preferences, how children are socialized, and how solutions to causes of social problems are interpreted. A person’s world view and reference group orientation are changed. These are the things that make the person feel reborn or new rather than simply “changed.”

There is variability in how high salience for Blackness manifests. It can be categorical as for some Black nationalists, or a black-oriented bi-cultural or multi-cultural identity that shares space with other modes of identification such as religion. Some Black nationalists may discourage bridging with other ethnic groups and races, favoring working with their own. However, Pan Black movements may require bridging for many reasons. Cross, Jr., (1985, 1991) sees bridging as favorable because it facilitates absorption of new ideas and technologies, and that rigid, provincial identities do not deal well with change. Even if a person holds a Black nationalist perspective, the Cross, Jr., model suggests they are likely to become more flexible, allowing for a more highly faceted view of people of other races (1995:120).

Stage Five: Commitment and Internalization

There is not much difference between Cross, Jr.'s, stages 4 and 5, except "substantive interest and commitment" (Cross, Jr., 1995:121). Stage five is simply about long-term commitment to Black identity. There is always the possibility that the person will not maintain commitment to the Black identity that he/she worked to create. If he/she does, it is likely that commitment will take tangible form by participation in associations, organizations, ceremonies, and causes concerned with Black-oriented and/or social justice issues. Even those who develop and sustain commitment to their Black identity can "recycle" through Nigrescence as a "person searches for new answers and continued growth in his or her thinking about what it means to be Black. Depending on the nature and intensity of the new Encounter, recycling may vary from a mild refocusing to passage through full-blown Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, and Internalization stages" (Cross, Jr., 1993:221).

Cross, Jr.'s, Nigrescence model provides a penetrating framework for understanding the behaviors associated with the move from low to high salience on Blackness. The discussion then moves to religious conversion and identity transformation.

RELIGIOUS CONVERSION

Religious conversion theories provide another perspective on why and how people become Rastafarians. Theories of religious conversion are explicitly about spirituality within a theological framework, unlike Nigrescence models, which are largely secular (although Cross, Jr., claims the conversion experience is at root "spiritual"). Both perspectives are important to broadening and fine-tuning an analysis of the identity and ideology of a group for whom Blackness and religion are primary reference points.

Religion meets basic human needs by alleviating doubt, inner conflict, and uncertainty, while influencing social action. It provides affiliation, community, and values; it helps people interpret their experiences, problems, and successes; and it furnishes a framework for understanding the world. It provides ready answers to existential questions—Why are we here? What is my purpose in life? Why is there injustice?—and mechanisms for coping when other institutions fail to meet basic needs.

Like Nigrescence, religious conversion is a problem-solving and re-socialization

process. As a part of religiosity, it too can help solve or resolve the mysteries of human life, meaning, and destiny (Rambo, 1993:2). There are many types of conversion, and rarely is the process instantaneous. Like Nigrescence, there are distinct stages; and people sometimes cycle between them. The experience of religious conversion is mediated by personality, culture, family, peers, social change, and various institutions. Most religions have a model (explicit or implicit) of what constitutes an authentic conversion.

Defining and Conceptualizing Conversion

Snow and Machalek contend that too many accounts of conversion focus on causes without clearly conceptualizing the phenomena being studied (1984:168, 173). They note that conversion entails changes in identity, “one’s universe of discourse,” “rhetorical indicators,”¹⁰ membership and role statuses, world view, and values. They argue that these are too often confused, conflated, or ignored as a part of conversion (1984).

There is no firm consensus on how to define conversion, nor what constitutes the conversion process. For instance, Thomas Robbins (1988:66) claims that conversion is a process of socialization and requires no specific concept, while Walter Clark suggests that conversion could be understood simply as religious growth (1969:188). While these perspectives are useful, they neglect *why* people change their outlook in ways that are different from a reality into which they were already socialized. By canvassing different definitions, one may see some of the central factors involved in conversion and identity formation.

Clark, a psychologist, defines conversion as “*that type of spiritual growth or development which involves an appreciable change of direction concerning religious ideas and behavior. Most clearly and typically it denotes an emotional episode of illuminating suddenness, which may be deep or superficial, though it may also come about by a more gradual process*” (1969:191, original italics). Meredith McGuire, a sociologist, defines conversion as a “transformation of one’s *self* concurrent with a transformation in one’s basic *meaning system*. It changes the sense of who one is and how one belongs in a social situation. Conversion transforms the way the individual perceives the rest of society and his or her place in it, altering one’s view of the world” (1992:71, original italics).

Anthropological definitions of conversion grow out of focus on how small-scale

societies absorb world religions like Christianity and Islam. Anthropologists typically forego using a single definition of conversion and resort to generalized descriptions. “The most necessary feature of religious conversion...is not a deeply systematic reorganization of personal meanings but an adjustment in self-identification through the at least nominal acceptance of religious actions or beliefs deemed more fitting...conversion implies the acceptance of a new locus of self-definition” (Hefner, 1993:17). Issues such as subjective motivations to convert are rarely searched out.

For this study, religious conversion is defined as an adoption of a religious perspective that originates within the person as a result of insights, study, emotional or other psychological factors, and from external influences such as peers, witnessing an eye-opening event, experiencing a tragedy, or social change. The experiences influence the person’s outlook and sense of self, making it likely they will consider new frameworks that help them understand what is happening. The conversion may or may not last indefinitely, and any explanation for the outcome must be based on an understanding of the relationships between a person’s biography and his/her social environment. The conversion can have a non-religious origin and can be dramatic, but gradual change is the likely norm. *Seekership*, is the term applied to the person searching for satisfactory explanations to, and interpretations of, fundamental questions about life, truth, righteousness, and justice, within a religious framework. The Seeker has not internalized the new identity and it is not unusual for him/her to investigate different faiths during this phase. Lofland and Stark’s research suggests that it is Seekership combined with a “turning point” that makes conversion most likely, if not imminent (see 1965:870). Turning points are life or role transitions that create gnawing anxiety, insecurity, and tension within the person and cannot be easily resolved. Unemployment, the uncertainties associated with moving to a new location, failure (business, work, school, actualizing plans), and loss of close social ties can beget turning points.

Subjective Factors that Motivate Religious Conversion

There is widespread consensus that crisis or tension of some kind generally precedes conversion (Bankston, et al., 1981: 286-287; Rambo, 1993:44), which is consistent with Nigrescence. Those who are satisfied with their world view, social institutions, religion, and

personal lives are unlikely to convert. Anthropologists have convincingly demonstrated this in their studies of indigenous people's early reactions to missionary efforts to convert them to Christianity (e.g., Hefner, 1993; Barker, 1993; Yengoyan, 1993). By outlining a group's economic status and issues of social deprivation, researchers have drawn attention to the importance of the socio-economic context as a part of better understanding conversion (Yengoyan, 1993:234). In this vein, Barker presents an anthropological understanding of conversion that recognizes three phases in how indigenous groups come to accept world religions like Christianity (1993:206-207). First, missionaries are able to only reach those who are estranged from their community. In a second phase, natives come to associate the new religion with access to power and wealth and then pursue that religion more for these reasons than anything intrinsic to the religious cosmology. In this phase "foreign" religion can co-exist with the native's indigenous beliefs and culture. This is sometimes described as syncretism. Finally, there is a period of "reform" when the foreign religion is sufficiently familiar to enough people that they begin to use it to interpret their own experiences. Humphrey Fisher made nearly the same claim for traditional Black African religionists who convert to Christianity or Islam (cf. Fisher, 1973; 1985).

Doubt, conflict, and uncertainty are emotional and psychic states that typically precede conversion and these have religious and secular roots. Psychologically and personally speaking, neuroses, martyr complexes, paranoia, unmet needs (for community, identity), protracted frustration, repeated failure, or even personality attributes such as temperament and an inclination toward introspection or being emotionally sensitive provide the psychic framework that makes religious conversion a possibility. Religion itself can provide the incentive to convert, as exemplified by the person seeking something "deeper" or different from what the status quo religions provide. Another way religion arouses inner tension involves how it provides core ideas about suffering, redemption, catastrophe, and evil. Such ideas make some people sensitive to injustice, inhumanity, and what they perceive as evil:

Genuine conversions may not often derive from the excitement of the gospel tent, but a profound experience may be derived from a sense of inadequacy, incompleteness, and evil-doing. In proportion as people are made clear-sighted and sensitive to spiritual truth they begin to sense that growing gap between what things are and what they ought to be. It is in this discernment that dividedness of self and

the seeds of conversion are sown (Clark, 1969:174).

A charismatic person can also create inner tensions for others by planting seeds of doubt or confirmation (in the minds of Seekers), or he may even precipitate the search process.

Aside from psychic and emotional factors, the subjective origins of the inner tensions preceding conversion can grow out of conflicts between religious beliefs and doubts about certain aspects of them; between competing loyalties to different religious ideas, institutions, or traditions, or competition between secular and religious loyalties (Clark, 1969:148). When a person's meaning system is unable to interpret certain experiences or answer certain questions, the person is likely to become a Seeker, someone who "actively looks for a satisfactory alternative belief system." If the system is adequate to their concerns, then "they have no desire to seek alternative meanings for their lives" (McGuire, 1992:77). Robbins adds that "A pattern of Seekership preceding conversion appears to be associated with stigmatized communal groups in which participation entails discontinuity of social roles. However, 'the Seekers' described in the case studies are not anomic fanatics frantically chasing after meaning, but rather people who seem curious about religious and/or occult matters" (1988:82). Then there are those who see conversion itself as a form of deviancy (e.g., Parrucci, 1968).

Everyone experiences tension—including persistently nagging ones—and there are many possible solutions to tensions and crises. Religious and Nigrescent conversion are only two. Alternative resolutions include getting medical or psychological attention, political action, or changes in lifestyle (Lofland & Stark, 1965:867). That there are alternatives begs finding out why religious resolution is pursued. One strong possibility is that the convergence of tension and religious conversion is most likely to be found amongst those whose "previous socialization has been predisposed to a religious perspective" (Clark, 1969:209; similarly, see McGuire, 1992:77). Lofland and Stark's widely cited study showed how prior religious experiences relate to conversion, often in the form of the convert initially being socialized into a religious faith and then becoming dissatisfied with it (1965).

There is a growing perspective that assumes some people's personalities or proclivities are such that they tend to be inquisitive Seekers pursuing "self-transformation" (Snow & Machalek, 1984:180). These people are especially likely to experience religious

conversion. Such people tend not to be disposed toward religion as a coping strategy to alleviate immanent tensions; instead, they are of the type inclined toward a “journey for personal and spiritual development and meaning” (Snow & Machalek, 1984:180).

In studying conversion, it is imperative that the experience be approached from the subject’s perspective. This helps restrain the analyst from superimposing his or her model upon the subject. Although the study of conversion narratives poses methodological confounds, there are ways to neutralize these concerns (in Chapter 2).

Social Motivations to Convert

There are social influences that can motivate one to convert. By social I mean those influences outside of the person. These can range from the influence of peers to macro processes such as migration, colonization, and economic transformation. The macro context must be brought to bear upon the analysis of conversion because religion and how it is practiced depends on historical and contemporary institutional and cultural factors (see Chapter 5).

Friends and kin can influence a person’s conversion. Willfully or unwittingly, they introduce the potential convert to ideas and feelings of which he or she might not have been aware. They provide the new convert with a glimpse into the norms, values, and beliefs of the new faith. By virtue of being familiar to the new convert, they potentially legitimate the new faith and provide a ready-made network. Friends and family can provide a convenient path into the social network affiliated with the “new” religion. Or they can facilitate the convert erecting boundaries that cut them off. Intimates may view the convert’s transition from the familiar and “values” to the strange and unfamiliar as indicative of the person having been manipulated, fooled, or brainwashed into accepting new beliefs (McGuire, 1992:75). They may become less supportive of the new convert, or the new convert might reject them as a part of creating a new identity and relinquishing the old.

Social change can be a factor involved in conversion, especially mass conversion. The best examples are the massive conversions of native groups to Islam and Christianity from the 1800s onward. The major positions are exemplified in the exchanges between Robert Horton (1971; 1975), Humphrey Fisher (1973: 1985), and Horton and Peel (1976). Horton (1971; 1975) and Horton and Peel (1976) argue that traditional African religious

cosmologies are folk theories that explain and predict. They have two orders: a local community-oriented supervised by lesser spirits and a extra-local, world-oriented order administered by a supreme being.

The local order is most important to traditional religionists because it pertains to daily affairs, thus the supreme being remains remote. However, the intrusion of extra-local influences such as trading, commerce, missionaries, etc., make the supreme being more important. As the local order is penetrated, the idea of monotheism becomes more appealing. It is during these periods of change that world religions like Christianity and Islam make their greatest advances. But even then, what the Africans do is selectively integrate what they want into their two-tiered cosmologies.

Fisher argues differently. He claims conversion to Islam and Christianity in Black Africa can be explained by three trends: quarantine, mixing, and reform (1973; 1985). Under quarantine, only a few people like traders and refugees are world religion converts in the indigenous context. They, for the most part, are not proselytizers; thus, the faith does not spread. As conversion spreads, due to a number of factors, the indigenous mix the world religions with their own, even though ostensibly they may seem to be full converts. This leads to a period of reform where the world religions attempt to restore a pure orthodoxy. This cycle can repeat itself indefinitely.

These debates seem overly convoluted and pedantic. The core concerns for this study are: first, it is not unusual for people to selectively adopt elements of a new religion and integrate them into their prior cosmological framework and, second, both arguments implicitly suggest that in the early stages of contact a seed is planted by virtue of natives coming into contact with the world religions—it provides the hint of an alternative identity path.

As earlier discussed, macro-level analyses of conversion such as those of Horton, Peel, and Fisher, help shed light on group processes more than individual actions and decisions. The extension of a group's social world through contact with new ideas, people, technologies, and relationships may be related to changes in group cosmologies. Indeed, if the changes are rapid and sweeping, groups may need new theories that explain what has happened. How this meshes with the way people change their world view and identity may not be apparent because it is difficult to illustrate how individual cases shed light on

aggregate processes.

Studying Conversion

Part of the explanation for the growing influence of sociologists upon the study of conversion might be related to the decline in the interest of theologians and psychologists in the topic as a research interest (Robbins, 1988:64). Sociologists often emphasize the peer relation aspect of conversion because of their focus on cults and recruitment into cults. However, many sociological approaches to conversion focus on commitment and recruitment issues which are not congruous with groups that do not fit the mold of “cults” and “new” religious movements. Narrow focus on recruitment and commitment to the exclusion of other concerns, such as motivations to convert, complicate the study of conversion by introducing concerns that may not be relevant to all types of conversion (Robbins, 1988:63).

Some argue that conversion is simply socialization into a new religious role and identity. However, this trivializes the extent of change. Not only does a person learn new norms, values, and cultural practices, he/she takes on a new world-view and identity that supplants at least parts of an existing identity; and they claim this to be a special and unique experience (Kilbourne & Richardson, 1988:16). What is more, the convert’s audience—fellow adherents and acquaintances—recognize the new convert in ways that socialization alone does not require.

Kilbourne and Richardson have conceptualized conversion studies as either old or new paradigms (1988). The old paradigm emphasizes passivity and impersonal, but potent, forces working within or upon the person, facilitating conversion. The new paradigm emphasizes agency, volition, and Seekership. The new paradigm does not dominate thinking about conversion, but it is influential and growing. Still, the new paradigm is biased toward middle-class professional experiences, as it derives much of its content from studies of new religious movements and cults.

Studies of religious conversion can be understood by categorizing them according to the degree of agency granted the convert and level of analysis (Kilbourne & Richardson, 1988). The degree of agency concerns the extent to which the convert is active or passive before and during the conversion process, and the level of analysis points to whether the

researcher is focused on intra-individual (subjective aspects, e.g., predispositions, biological or mental states, etc.) or inter-individual level factors (external influences, e.g., peers, social networks, social roles, anomie, etc). The active agent seeks change while the passive person believes that they are acted upon by supernatural forces. An inter-individual analysis focuses on how people are influenced by peers or even strangers and whether they are active or passive in this process. The approaches are illustrated in a 2 x 2 typology (Table 1.2).

Research into conversion began at the end of the nineteenth century. From the first studies through the 1950s, there was a tendency to emphasize the mystical and dramatic aspects of conversion. This research was carried out mostly by psychologists, psychiatrists, missiologists, and theologians. G. Stanley Hall argued in 1881 that conversion was a maturation experience and a redirection of life, that it was tied to adolescence (Gillespie, 1979:17), and that it involved a move toward altruism. Edwin Starbuck, a pioneer in the psychology of religion, placed the cause of conversion in the individual's efforts to move away from sin and toward righteousness.

Alfred Underwood and psychologists of his time thought conversion to be a "*distinctively adolescent phenomenon*," that it occurred earlier among women than men, and that it "unified the unhappy and divided soul" (1925:116, 132, original italics). Underwood argued that the fear of God is a motivation to convert and that there are three major conversion types: the intellectual type, which is about clarification of thought, new insights, and a move away from unhappiness; a moral type, driven by a desire to move away from sin and depravity; and an emotional type, based purely in the love of God, which has nothing to do with clarity or morality (1925:144-148). This underscores the importance of temporalizing and contextualizing the conversion experience. Underwood's observations may have been appropriate to the early twentieth century when religion had a stronger and less divided hold on people's thinking about themselves and the world.

William James, in his *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1895), treated conversion as a unifying experience and did not differentiate between gradual and sudden changes in identity. Anton Boisen argued that conversion is an alternative to schizoid states as a part of the resolution of personal issues,¹¹ particularly inner conflict, disharmony, and a "keen awareness of ultimate loyalties and unattained possibilities" (Boisin, 1936:ix). In Boisin's view, conversion serves a problem-solving function by aiding mental reorganization (1936).

George Coe differed from his contemporaries in that he offered a broad, variable definition of conversion. He saw five aspects to conversion: 1) it is a voluntary change in attitude; 2) it can be the renunciation of one religion and the adoption of another; 3) it is a means of “salvation”; 4) it is a way of becoming “religious” through one’s own volition, without family or community influence; 5) it is a sharp shift from one world view to another, usually interpreted by the individual in ethical terms as a move to a higher plane (1917).

Table 1.2: Kilbourne & Watson’s Typology of Kinds of Conversions.

		Active	Passive
<i>Level of Analysis</i>	<i>Intra-Individual</i>	Intellectual or Self	Mystical Belief Change
	<i>Inter-Individual</i>	Experimental Social Drift	Revivalist Socialization Deprivation Coercive

Source: Kilbourne & Richardson (1988:3).

Leon Salzman expanded the understanding of conversion by pointing out that it included an “incubation period” and “precipitating event” (Gillespie, 1979:31). He too saw conversion functioning as a problem-solving process, making his view somewhat consistent with fundamental aspects of NT. Gordon Allport also saw conversion as an integration and re-integration (unification) process (1950:13-20). Like Allport, Pitirim Sorokin treated conversion as a rearrangement of ego-values and group affiliation (1954). Walter Clark, notwithstanding his emphasis on tension and its effect on the unconscious, remarks that “no conversion ever occurred without a history,” by which he meant that one should investigate factors such as familial influence, religious training, suggestion, and peer or other influences (1969:204-207). Yet, narrow and passive interpretations dominated during this period, such as Kildahl’s hypothesis that rapid converts were less intellectual than those slowly socialized into a religion (1965:40).

By the mid-1960s sociologists were beginning to make their mark upon the study of conversion by giving attention to factors outside of the person. Using a life history approach, Lofland and Stark aimed to understand why and how people came to convert and join a

cult.¹² They studied how people converted to a small millenarian religious cult in a large U.S. West Coast city (1965). Based on their research, they developed a seven stage “value added”¹³ model that postulates that a convert has to go through six stages to become a nominal convert, and does not become a total (committed) convert until engaging in the activities associated with stage seven, when the intensity of interaction within the new group increases. Tensions were an important aspect of the convert’s experience (they perceived their tensions as acute and enduring), as were frustrated aspirations. These tensions occurred within religion-as-solution-to-the-tension context. The person became (3) a religious Seeker who (4) experienced a “turning point” in life that led to (5) developing emotive ties to those of the new faith. Finally, (6) ties to the pre-conversion life diminished in importance while those associated with the new one increased (Lofland and Stark, 1965:874; see Robbins, 1988:79).

Lofland and Stark point out that the conversion process does not have to proceed in a pre-determined or fixed, but that an extension of their model should be able to account for the factors that bring different stages-conditions into existence (1965:868). They proposed that there were two kinds of converts: “verbal converts,” who profess belief, go through the six stages, but not the seventh, and are accepted by adherents as genuine, despite not being active in the group; and “total converts,” who pass through all seven stages and go beyond verbal commitment to intensely participate in the group. For total converts, commitment and ongoing group attachment became important concerns.

Lofland & Stark locate the origination of conversion in “predisposing factors” (millenarian expectations, fundamentalism, hallucinatory experiences)¹⁴ and “situational contingencies” that precipitate unrelenting tension, although they point out that tension alone is not a singularly sufficient condition for conversion (1965:864).¹⁵ Prevalent themes in the biographies of Lofland & Stark’s converts were confounded aspirations, the unsettling adjustments associated with geographic relocation, and dissatisfaction with status quo religions. The experience of tension and dissatisfaction with oneself and/or the world are commonly identified characteristic associated with identity transformation

Max Heirich tested some of the widely held theories about conversion by carrying out an empirical study of conversion to Catholic Pentecostalism using a control sample similar in background to that of the converts (1977). He sought to find how relevant to

conversion were stress, external influences (e.g., community disintegration), socialization,¹⁶ sex roles, and schooling. He isolated each variable to see which, singly or together, best explained religious conversion. Two-thirds of his control group experienced personal stress, and more of them than converts were involved in some kind of role change (Heirich, 1977:664).

Heirich concluded that socialization was the most influential factor in converting when persons respected by the convert offered them feedback (1977:668). Also, spending less time with regular companions during Seekership appeared to facilitate conversion (1977:668). Heirich closes with three provocative statements: researchers should do more than chronicle the “route” that conversion takes; they should address “what lies behind the religious quest and response to it” (1977:673); and conversion can be approached by asking “What circumstances destroy clarity about root reality?” or “How is an alternate sense of grounding asserted in ways that lead various observers to take it seriously?” (1977:674). As with most studies of conversion, Heirich’s subjects were White, many were college students or graduates, and he limited the range of questions he explored. His conclusions provide useful hypotheses for further research, but applying such findings to a group so different from his sample—such as a Black, Africa-oriented, less-formally educated religious group that does not rely on recruitment—requires caution. Still, Heirich’s suggestion for inquiring into what destroys clarity about root reality is addressed by NT’s Encounter stage.

Thomas Robbins argued that conversion has four primary forms, each with its own motifs: mystical, experimental, affectional, and revivalist (1988:68-69). Mystical conversion exemplifies the long-held idea of a religiously-oriented epiphany that results in an emotional, dramatic, and sudden experience that leads to conversion. Participation in organized activities follows. Little social pressure is involved, although the conversion can be preceded by a considerably lengthy period of stress (p.68).¹⁷ Experimental conversion pertains to calculated decisions to participate in a movement or religious group before or while accepting their world view. This is the “convert-in-process”(Robbins, 1988:68). The affectional conversion motif highlights peer influences and interpersonal bonds as facilitators of the conversion process. This type of conversion is generally gradual and of low intensity. The revivalist conversion motif concerns change of religious outlook within an emotionally-charged and enraptured collective or group context.

NIGRESCENCE & RELIGIOUS CONVERSION: A SYNTHESIS

The revised Nigrescence model provides a substantive explanation for why and how people become Rastafarians. However, because the converts-in-process are pursuing racial *and* religious consciousness in the process of reformulating their identity and world view, minor modification of the model that addresses religiosity significantly enhances its explanatory and demonstrative scope. For Rastafarians, it is the venerable ideology of Ethiopianism that unites race and religion with identity and culture. The modifications are reflected in my own model which tweaks Cross, Jr.'s, revised Nigrescence paradigm by explicitly addressing religiosity and spirituality. I added analytic components that bring attention to motivations and experiences outside of the Encounter, in addition to accentuating commitment and ongoing group attachment issues. This makes the model speak directly to group identity maintenance and movement formation and participation concerns. Also, I emphasize the Encounter phase by allowing it to include a period of searching that precedes a firm determination to change one's identity and RGO. I have categorized the Nigrescence-religious conversion processes into five phases: Pre-Conversion and Pre-Encounter; Encounter and Seekership; Conversion: Immersion and Emersion; Post-Conversion and Internalization; and Commitment and Ongoing Group Attachment (see Table 1.3; the dotted lines represent the permeableness of the stages, that there are no rigid boundaries). This expanded version of the revised Nigrescence model, as sketched out here, assumes sufficient background research has been carried out in the form of social and/or life history and participant observation.

Stage 1. Pre-Conversion & Pre-Encounter. The person may or may not be religiously-inclined and hence may or may not seek conversion as a solution to his or her perceived concerns. During pre-conversion there may be conflict build-up centered around making a choice between competing values. These concerns and conflicts foster anxiety, insecurity, and doubt. It may be during this phase that the big questions about life, God, and justice become consuming of the person's attention, but this is more likely to occur as a result of an Encounter. As Cross, Jr., (1995) emphasizes, there are psychological (and social) mechanisms that work to resist significant changes in beliefs, values, and behaviors. Gillespie observes that indifference may be the greatest barrier to religious and identity conversion (1979:94).

Stage 2. The Encounter and Seekership. Stages 2 and 3 are fraught with tension.

Fundamentally, the Encounter of religious conversion is not that different from the experiences described by the revised Nigrescence model. However, the Encounter and experience preceding religious conversion will be interpreted within a supernatural and religious framework, even where Blackness remains a core concern, as with the Rastafarians. The Encounter will intensify any pre-existing conflicts, anxieties, discontentment, and doubts. There is the likelihood that existential (big) questions will come to occupy the person's thoughts during this stage, although this and Seekership can occur prior to an Encounter in this model. After the initial Encounter, the person begins the process of personalizing it by mentally revisiting and analyzing the experience. The person may not yet have a glimmer of an alternative identity path and at this point is unlikely to have taken a firm stand on the need to change his or her identity and reference group. This may be a period of anxiety because so many things are up in the air.

Seekers may experiment with different ideas, approaches, and sources of information, although they may not recognize it this way. They are seeking *THE TRUTH*, which is defined by the Seeker in racial and religious terms. Bankston, et al., remarks that the state of Seekership "flows from recognition of failure (of the existing identity to satisfy ego) and contains in it by definition, some problem-solving orientation(s) which sets parameters on the form Seekership takes" (1981:287). Heirich confirms this in noting that "about a third of the Seekers (in his study of conversion to Catholic Pentecostalism) turned to teachers, religious advisors, or other persons they trusted for reactions" (1977:668).

Stage 3. Conversion: Immersion & Emersion. By now the person is fully engaged in Seekership, and is in the process of converting, although he or she may not see it as such. At the same time they are beginning to feel the results of conversion: he or she may begin to feel or believe that they are different because they now have a inkling of what they see as a better or necessary change; but this a false sense of security at this point. There are many sources of tension facing the convert-in-process, especially the demons of the old identity and a lack of clarity on the various norms, history, and cultural meanings associated with the new RGO. They are likely to be thinking of conversion as a solution to perceived tensions and may feel successful in this regard. Parts of the person's self are being, or have been, re-organized and new elements have assimilated in ways that imbue the person with a new set

of lenses and model with which to interpret life, history, culture, and the mysteries of the world. The person has begun work of denying or destroying vestiges of the old self, but may continue to grapple with the demons of the old identity, while affirming the new. At the same time, there are degrees of conversion—from partial or “fractional” to full—from intra-religious, such as movement from Protestantism to Catholicism or outright “reality shattering” experience that manifests in a distinctly different identity (cf. Bankston, et al., 1981:283). During the early parts of this phase, the person is often in a defensive mode and may be highly romantic and/or overly aggressive about their new identity and RGO. On one hand, peers are likely questioning the person’s identity change, which may draw the budding convert’s ire. While on the other hand the person’s defensiveness may be a reflection of their poor grasp of the depth of the new identity. Plus, he or she may feel anger and resentment at Whites, Pre-Encounter Blacks, and at being mis-educated. By the end of this phase, the person has gained confidence in his/her decision to change, and this manifests in a calmer countenance.

Stage 4. Post-Conversion and Internalization. The dichotomy between conversion and post-conversion is largely heuristic. In real life, the convert must create and maintain subjective and external conditions that support commitment to the identity.

Although the convert feels new, whole, and a new identity equilibrium has been reached, his/her tensions and crises are still not over. Commitment—to the new identity and the group associated with it—becomes a central factor determining the permanence of the identity. Nonetheless, the new identity is now a part of the person’s total identity repertoire; he or she must now wrangle with how to participate in and contribute to the maintenance of the group.

Conversion does not guarantee commitment to the new identity nor does it insure that the change in outlook will last indefinitely. Commitment can become an issue, especially in pluralistic, mobile, thoroughly capitalist and individualistic societies (Lasch, 1984; McGuire, 1992:81; Rambo, 1993:22). As emphasized, temporal and social contextualization of the conversion experience is critical to understanding the process as a whole. Converts have different motives at different points in time, and social mores and values change as time passes. For instance, Hobson persuasively contends that religion played a greater role in the reasons why White writers renounced racism or racial indifference during the early 1800s

rather than in the late 1800s (1999:8). This may well be explained by the secularizing impact of the industrial revolution in the United States. Recent technological and politico-economic changes associated with globalization likely make easier what recent sociological accounts describe as people having multiple conversions or who develop conversion careers. People in mobile, high-tech, capitalist societies are more likely to experiment with religious and other identities as a form of personal development. In such cases, acquisition of an elaborate knowledge of group history and culture, and interaction with thoroughly enculturated RG members, may not be of great important to these persons.

Stage 5. Commitment and Ongoing Group Attachment. Social and psychological mechanisms help a person maintain commitment to his/her new beliefs and reference group after conversion. Commitment entails participation in and willingness to contribute to the group. It is thought that deviant or dissenting groups are especially reliant upon commitment mechanisms (McGuire, 1992:82), but this claim too is a reflection of sociological focus upon new religious movements and cults. Not all dissenting and alternative groups require investments and sacrifices of time, money, and material goods.

The person must have a stake in the new identity and group. They must perceive a reward for participation. Rosabeth Kanter (1972) has identified six social practices central to group maintenance, and these factors are important to the maintenance of the person's new identity, influencing whether he or she remains committed to the new group. For groups to survive in the modern world, both the individuals and their group must provide for 1) sacrifice; 2) investment; 3) renunciation; 4) communion; 5) mortification; and 6) transcendence (1972:76-123).

Sacrifice entails a person giving up something as a part of their membership in the group, increasing a person's motivation to continue association the group. Sacrifice does not have to be financial. It may include abstinence (from sex, certain foods and drinks, etc.), maintaining simplicity or austerity by foregoing comforts and luxuries. Investment, again, does not require financial commitment, but points to the stake a person has in the group. Investment includes time and energy (and material donations in some cases). For the person to leave the group would mean a personal cost (and loss). Renunciation pertains to giving up those relationships that challenge allegiance to the group, or that spread out the person's commitments in ways that cause maintenance of the group to not be the primary concern.

TABLE 1.3: Five Phases of Religious Nigrescence

Five Phases of Religious Conversion and Nigrescence	Abstractions: Issues And Characteristics Associated with the Stage	Substantive Behavioral & Attitudinal Manifestations
I. Pre-Conversion & Pre-Encounter	Religious and racial understanding likely, but not necessary; person may already be experiencing tension, a sense of incompleteness, dissatisfaction; or misinformation person may have a "curious disposition."	The person may or may not seek religious and/or Black identity conversion as a solution to perceived concern. Current actions fail to resolve tensions. Relatively low stakes in maintaining current identity.
II. Encounter & Seekership	The person has an experience that leads to transformation and pursuit of information. The event must be personalized and might exacerbate already existing tension. Conflict may be centered around making a choice between competing values, facilitating anxiety, insecurity, doubt, and dissatisfaction with society.	Exploring change in group referent; big questions, and the uncertainty that accompany such considerations; a general feeling of discontent. This is a period of incubation for the new identity, although it could start earlier. The person is a <i>Seeker</i> ; he/she begins the process of learning, watching potential new RG's.
III. Conversion: Immersion and Emersion	Vague feelings of illumination, romanticism, aggression early on; Person may see conversion as a solution to tensions. Seekership intensifies as the person seeks information about the new RG; begins disengaging old ties; tensions often tied to the person not yet feeling a part of the new group, but needs to show it; The new identity is congealing.	Conversion is in process. Whites and Pre-Encounter Blacks demonized early on. The convert feels imbued with a new outlook and values; the demons of the old identity remain a threat; Because the person does not have to be competent in the new norms and symbols, this phase can create new tensions; family and friends may become estranged.
IV. Post-Conversion & Internalization	A new identity equilibrium is reached, person feels superior; a sense of wholeness. The new identity becomes a normal part of the self. Feels need or requirement to participate in the new group, denial of the old self, and draws new social and psychic boundaries.	The real-world distinction between conversion and post-conversion is blurred; social ties related to the new beliefs become important; the convert sees the world in a different way. Commitment issues can lead to more tensions. Old ties and identity de-emphasized.
V. Commitment & Group Attachment	Need or requirement to continue interaction with the new group, competing interests in mobile & individualistic societies can make commitment difficult, creating inner conflict.	Person must derive rewards & a sense of community from group; out-group contacts limited; a sense of moral and cultural superiority; competing interests a source of tension, conflict.

Sources: Clark, 1969; Kanter, 1972; Gillespie, 1979; Bankston, 1981; McGuire, 1992; Cross, Jr., 1976; 1993; 1995; 2001.

This may mean severing links to out-groups, increasing the person's dependence on the in-group and lessening the possibility of loss of investment and sacrifice for the in-group. Renouncement is typically first directed toward the "outside world" and then toward family and dyadic relationships. Renunciation strengthens in-group boundaries. Communion is one way in which community is created and maintained. It is a primary means by which a person feels intimately connected to the group. Comradeship is built through maintenance of group homogeneity, sharing and egalitarianism, communal work, regular group interaction, and ritualism. Dance, prayer, and song are common forms of ritual expression. Persecution also facilitates community and boundary maintenance. The fact that one has enemies or faces threats outside the group binds the group together against out-group threats by giving heightened meaning to being a part of the group. Mortification points to how the person's new identity is based on the significance given to being a part of the group. A person's self-esteem and purpose become tied to his/her new group commitments as their old identity is buried. Mortification revolves around "openness," "trust," and "regaining one's sense of basic humanity" (Kanter, 1972:105), a process akin to Internalization in how it becomes possible to incorporate other salencies into the identity and RG relations. Still, mortification requires sanctions against deviance, a systemic means by which members of the group can critique each other, acknowledge spiritual differentiation (recognition that some are more spiritually experienced than others), and de-individuation, all furnishing a means by which to further reinforce group identity and norms. Finally, transcendence grows out of all the discussed social practices, as the person feels him or herself to be a part of a larger, spiritual universe, based in righteousness.

Transcendence is built upon tradition, a sense of mystery, and conviction in these.

An important part of maintaining commitment to the new identity, beliefs, and reference group entails denying the validity (or even existence!) of the pre-conversion self. This entails cutting off or limiting interaction with those outside of the new reference group. New social and psychic boundaries are created and interaction with out-group members is limited or eliminated. The new boundaries might revolve around feelings of the superiority of the new beliefs and reference group and the inferiority and despicability of out-groups. Also, ritual and the sharing of work and possessions congeals commitment.

SUMMARY

This chapter provides a framework for approaching Rastafarian identity in its treatment of social identity in terms of Nigrescence, religious conversion, and social change.

The revised Nigrescence model provides an illuminating paradigm for explaining the way in which a person comes to be a Rastafarian. Because of the religiosity of the Rastafari, I add components from theories of religious conversion and group sociology to the Nigrescence model. In particular, the religious conversion theories get directly at motivations and influences to convert, especially where the supernatural is involved, while group sociology draws out commitment and maintenance issues. This is important as stages 4 and 5 of the revised Nigrescence model have not been elaborated as intricately as stages 1-3. Both NT and religious conversion models face the problem of separating the initial motivations that led to conversion from the full convert's account of the process which is offered in retrospect. As I propose, participant observation, the life history, and the social history, are means by which to address these concerns. They provide background and contextualization that ground a person's experience in the material reality in which conversion occurs.

ENDNOTES

1. Possible exceptions include the Irish who were colonized by the British, and some might argue that indentureship prior to and during early slavery is tantamount to slavery.
2. Individuals can make history, but rarely under the conditions of their own choosing.
3. Primary groups are characterized by face-to-face interaction, strong ties and group identification, differentiated relationships, and a tendency for such identifications to endure. Secondary relationships require less face-to-face interaction, have weak ties of personal identification, superficial relationships, and are ethereal and short-lived.
4. Runciman notes three types of reference group: comparative; normative; and what can be called a negative one, although he does use this term. The comparative reference group is the one a person contrasts with his own. The normative reference group is the one from which a person takes her standards. The negative reference group is still used for comparison, although the focus is usually on perceived inequalities between the person and the group in question (1966:10-12). However, there are problems with the sociological conceptions of reference group. For one, there is the assumption that "...some similarity in status attributes between the individual and the reference group must be perceived or imagined, in order for the comparison to occur at all. Once the minimal similarity obtains, other similarities and differences will provide the context for shaping evaluations" (Merton 1968:296). This assumes complementarity and conformity where it may not exist, as with Rastafarians who never focused on similarity of attributes with Whites outside of both being human beings. While Merton (1968) and Runciman (1966) recognize there are negative reference groups, they do not explore these in detail.
5. Correspondence with William Cross Jr., 1/17/01.
6. Coined by Charles Thomas 1971 in *Boys No More*.
7. "In the course of a year, let alone a lifetime, just about every Black person is exposed to information or some sort of racist situation that has the potential of an 'Encounter,' but unless the person, for whatever reason, personalizes the Encounter, his or her ongoing worldview or attitudes about 'race' may go unchallenged...." (Cross Jr. 1995:10*)
8. Personal Correspondence with William Cross Jr., 1/17/01.
9. Personal communication, December 11, 2000.
10. Snow & Machalek (1984) argue that if one's universe of discourse changes, i.e., where a formerly peripheral or absent discourse becomes central to the convert, then empirically this should be indicated in the convert's rhetoric (speech and reasoning). They identify four rhetorical indicators: biographical reconstruction; adoption of a master attribution schema; suspension of analogical reasoning; and embracement of the convert role. Biographical reconstruction refers to how some aspects of the convert's past are abandoned and others recombined and redefined. Adoption of a master attribution concerns how a new or formerly marginal understanding comes to inform all of the convert's understandings of self, others, and the world. Suspension of analogical reasoning describes the convert's tendency to see their experience and new worldview as so unique that they refuse to equate or compare it to anything else (analogy). Embracement of the convert role means going beyond nominal conversion to the person actively working on behalf of the group. They argue that these four indicators are sufficiently empirical and straightforward to indicate that conversion has occurred (Snow & Machalek 1984:174).

11. Boisin developed his theory while recuperating from a mental breakdown. He felt that the identity and personality transformations associated with mental illness and religious conversion were similar in their causes and resolutions, mainly inner conflict and disharmony. Boisin provides a revealing autobiography, showing how he used his illness and recuperation in a mental hospital to develop and test his theory. Although he pinpoints what he took to be the root of his mental illness and pursuit of religious experience— anxieties over sexuality that stem from his childhood— my reading finds his life choices as setting him up for the kinds of failures, pressures and anxieties that drive the crises which enkindle conversion. Falling in love with a devout Christian woman, he decided to enter the ministry. She later spurned him, leading him to “...nine years of wandering,” all the time hoping to be reunited with her (Boisen 1936²). After nine years they were reunited, only then succumb to mental breakdown. All the while he was grappling with what he felt to be a slow “...call to a church...” he then became self-absorbed in this “call” that he could not sleep through the night (see the introduction to *The Exploration of the Inner World*).
12. The presentation of the biographies and interactions of the subjects were fascinating and sometimes made for sardonically comical reading.
13. The activities and processes associated with each stage accumulate, “adding value.” They argue it is the accumulation of experiences of the seven phases that lead to full conversion and commitment.
14. Lofland & Stark note that three important, typically assumed pre-disposing factors among pre-converts— fundamentalist Christianity, millenarian expectations, and hallucinatory experience— were not central factors in the biographies of the converts they studied (1965:869).
15. Lofland and Stark offer some examples of types of tensions associated with conversion: “...longing for unrealized wealth, knowledge, fame, and prestige; hallucinatory activity for which the person lacked any successful definition; frustrated sexual and marital relations; homosexual guilt; acute fear of face-to-face interaction; disabling and disfiguring physical conditions...a frustrated desire for a significant, even heroic, religious status, to ‘know the mind of God intimately,’ and to be a famous agent for his divine purposes” (1965:865).
16. Under the heading socialization Heirich focused on birth order, and familial and social network influences.
17. Some believe mystical conversions function to alleviate guilt..

CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGY, FIELD RESEARCH, ORAL HISTORY, AND NATIVE ANTHROPOLOGY

It is easy for us to lose ourselves in details in endeavoring to grasp and comprehend the real condition of a mass of human beings. We often forget that each unit in the mass is a throbbing human soul...it loves and hates, it toils and tires, it laughs and weeps its bitter tears, and looks in vague and awful longing at the grim horizon of its life.... (W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 1982:169, New Library Edition).

This chapter discusses the research hypothesis, specifies the methods used, discusses the utility of and considerations involved in life history research, and addresses issues of import in using oral histories and conversion narratives. I close with an examination of the issues involved in carrying out research among people one strongly identifies with. My experiences and allegiances as a Black man had a strong bearing on my choice of a research topic. I, like the interviewees, am a Rastafarian. This is significant in that anthropologists have intensely debated how to define native anthropology, whether native anthropologists offer a perspective different from non-native anthropologists, the extent to which this affects how interviewees proffer answers, and how the interviewer asks questions and draws conclusions from the data. The native anthropology issue shall be further discussed below.

Again, this study is not focused on cultural practices and behaviors. It is about how group and individual identity are created and perpetuated; how customs, adaptations, events, processes, and milieu interact to make the emergence and existence of distinctive socio-cultural identity and group possible; what motivates individuals to enter into and become identifiable group members; and how group boundaries are created and defined.

The above quote by W.E.B. Du Bois emphasizes the need to see the forest and the trees at the same time. I addressed these concerns through how I conceptualized the research project. On the one hand, I am concerned with group identity and social change, and use social history to portray these. But groups are composed of individuals whose experiences and positions within the group are different. Equally important is the point in time when a person becomes a member of the group. To focus only on one aspect obfuscates social reality. I used the life history to elicit a person's formative experiences with

a larger social context. In studying individuals and small groups, it is too easy to see difference and uniqueness everywhere. It is also easy to get lost in the details. Conversely, in studying groups, it is equally easy to overlook the individual and her/his daily trials, tribulations and triumphs. Focus on the group can lull us into categorization and homogenization, sometimes at the cost of seeing differences. I have tried to keep the different aspects of identity—personal, group, and societal—in mind in writing this dissertation.

Most of the primary data used for this study were collected in the cities of Kingston and Spanish Town, and the rural communities of Linstead (St. Catherine's Parish) and Bath (St. Thomas Parish). These data were collected mainly during August of 1996, between March and late November of 1998, and during the Spring of 1999. Oral life narratives of 27 first and second generation Rastafarians (6 females and 21 males), all of whom became Rastafarians before 1970, are the basis of this work. The fact that these individuals became Rastafarians before 1970 is important because they precede the popularity brought to Rastafari ideology by musician Bob Marley, and through the 1972 and 1976 electoral campaigns of the People's National Party (where Rastafarian symbols and language figured prominently).

Besides tape recorded semi-structured interviews I collected other data. These include field notes drawn from participant observation, and archival data (e.g., local newspaper stories from the 1930s onward, letters, photographs and pamphlets). I sought to elicit personal background information from the interviewees regarding their upbringing, life experiences, and perspectives, in order to detail the process of why and how one comes to be a Rastafarian.

Study Rationale

The study of identity typically has been the focus of psychologists and, to a lesser extent, philosophers and sociologists. I sought to conduct an ethnographic study of identity formation and social change. The question I ventured to explain was why individuals become Rastafarians and to illustrate the factors involved in their becoming Rastafarians (identity formation).

This research provided an opportunity to collect life histories of elder Rastafari for

posterity, and a chance to address basic research questions. I hypothesized that individuals became Rastafarians in order to enhance their self-esteem since Rastafarians hold a positive view of Black identity and culture. The hypothesis was not confirmed. As outlined in Chapter 1, the failure to confirm the hypothesis is consistent with the revised Cross, Jr., model of Nigrescence (Cross, Jr., 1995) – development of an assertive Black identity may or may not enhance self-esteem. The addition of components drawn from theories of religious conversion and group sociology fortified the revised Nigrescence model by drawing attention to what motivates people to change their identity and the challenges they face in maintaining their identity commitment. The oft-cited motivation for becoming a Rastafarian was a pursuit of “truth,” “justice,” and “righteousness.” This search, or quest, for answers to identity and theological concerns is consistent with the revised Nigrescence model and many theories of conversion. It is the social and oral history, though, that helps to make sense of why people would be driven to address such concerns, and why they found dissatisfaction in the institutions and world around them.

Much of the recent scholarship on identity and globalization (rapid social change, e.g. deregulation, corporate expansion, increased international travel, diffusion of information and images through high-tech media, etc.) is hermeneutic and theoretical, and is not based upon empirical findings. In reaction, I proposed an empirically-based field study of identity formation and globalization among a group who posed problems for the study of identity. I asked, “Why would a person become a Rastafarian, given the fact that Rastafarians held a pariah social status in Jamaica well into the 1970s?”

A secondary question asked how globalization had influenced Rastafarian identity. This question had two assumptions: that social turmoil and rapid change precipitated people’s pursuit of traditional beliefs and practices as they sought to cope with the “intrusion” of disorienting influences. Similar reactions characterize the behavior of countless indigenous groups throughout the world during the spread of capitalism and European colonization. These reactions are labeled as millenarian, messianic, natavistic, and revitalization movements. The data did not support this presupposition. Social change was and is a factor that comes to bear identity transformation in some situations, but it was only a part of what drew or pushed people into the Rastafari movement. The second assumption was that globalization would make maintaining commitment to the identity and group more

difficult. The data confirmed this, but with qualifications.

The research clarified how the impact of transformations associated with rapid social changes like globalization depends upon factors such as age, income, where people live and work, and which goods and services they consume. Such distinctions are not made clear in the literature on globalization and identity. Poor people who live in remote areas –countryside or marginalized ghettos– may be only remotely affected by globalization. For instance, some of the elders I met did not use telephones, and not one had access to satellite television or a computer.

Third, the study sought to challenge the view that Rastafarian identity and ideology are responses to conditions of poverty and relative deprivation. Although the Rastafarians emerged from among Jamaica's rural and urban poor during a period of change and social turmoil, this is insufficient to explain the generation, growth, and maintenance of a new group identity and ideology. More relevant are the longstanding ideas, rhetoric, and practices that I describe as a Black moral economy.

The data indicate that other prevailing assumptions about Rastafarians should be challenged, such as the view that Rastafarians are apolitical. Interviewees, such as Rasta Ivy, an 86-year-old female Rastafarian (at the time of the interview), were militant activists who protested colonialism, racism, and classism. Others favored socialist and communist ideas, even though they held allegiance to the staunch anti-communist Marcus Garvey. And many have busied themselves creating associations and organizations under some of the most pressing conditions, even though observers harp on their acephalous qualities and individualistic tendencies.

FIELD RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGY

Semi-Structured Interviews

A semi-structured interview guide was employed to facilitate comparison of the individual life histories. The guide was divided into two parts. The first part directly addressed identity issues by asking about where individuals grew up, about their childhood, family, and work memories. It also asked when and how the narrator came to be a Rastafarian. The second part of the guide addressed ideology and social change from the perspective of the individual.

The number of interviewees drawn upon (27) in this study is consistent with other projects that utilize the life history approach. Chevannes (1994) interviewed 30 Rastafarians, most of whom became Rastafarians during the 1930s. Freeman (n.d.) collected life histories of 27 Vietnamese about their lives before, during, and after the fall of Saigon (the Fall was a watershed event in their lives). Atkinson interviewed 25 “elder tradition bearers” in one of his studies (1998). Luborsky also assembled 27 life histories in his study of senior citizens (1983). Kelly, in her study of contemporary Yaqui women, collected 25 life narratives, 4 of which she used to portray the diversity of experience in that community (1978). Kaufman gathered the life histories of 60 white, middle class seniors (over the age of 70) in her study of identity and aging (1981).

Participant Observation

Through participation in and observation of various activities, I was able to corroborate much of the information offered to me by the interviewees. I attended meetings, the yards and homes of interviewees, rituals, and public activities, some of which I helped to coordinate. For example, in June, 1998, I helped organize a public ceremony acknowledging Leonard Howell’s “Earthday” (birthday). In August, I helped organize Rastafari Emancipation Day activities. Both events took place at the National Park, Heroes Circle, in Kingston.

Field Notes

I compiled field notes based on my observations and experiences. On a nearly daily basis, I debriefed myself by writing about my experiences and analyses in a field research notebook. My intimate thoughts and feelings were written in a personal diary. The field notes turned out to be an excellent supplement to the tape-recorded interviews.

Sources of Archival Data

Much of the archival data come from Jamaican newspaper stories and letters to the editor between the early 1930s and the present. Newsletters, correspondence, books, and photographs constitute the archival data used. The newspaper articles provide insight into how the public perceived Rastafari, while the newsletters provide a lens into what Rastafarians find important to emphasize and express.

THE LIFE HISTORY APPROACH

Discussion

Because the life histories provide most of the primary data, I take some care to discuss why they are useful, how they have been used, and what some of the issues are that were raised in using them.

The life history is an approach that seeks to fabricate and convey the totality of a person's life. Smith suggests that "the sequence of events an individual passes through a culture during the course of a life is one view of that culture...cultures can be read through lives" (Smith, 1994:296). The life story can aid in comprehending how and why people make certain major life decisions (Sloan, 1992), like changing their social identity. But it can never completely capture the totality of a person's life, even though researchers sometimes strive to be as exhaustive as possible in the research. *Life narratives should not be taken to mean they are a complete account of a life*. Conversely, a life history can be drawn from fragmentary accounts (Crapazano, Ergas & Modell, 1986:27). Life histories often show that what is common to humankind is usually greater than what makes each person particular. For many reasons, some information about a person's life will be missed or omitted in the finished life history.

The life history is a particular type of oral history:

Oral history is the recollections and reminiscences of living people about their past...oral history is subject to all the vagaries and frailties of human recall; yet, in this respect, it is not substantially different from history as a whole, which is often distorted, subjective, and viewed through the screen of contemporary experience. The materials of oral history are the raw data of historical scholarship—history as primary sources with the warts, wrinkles, and inconsistencies still in place. Rich in personal triumph and tragedy, it is a history of the common person, the undocumented but not inarticulate" (Sitton, Mehaffy & Davis, Jr., 1983:4).

Oral history facilitates writing history upward from the perspective of ordinary folk, families, and small communities. It is beautifully compatible with anthropology since both rely on an insider's account, and oral history often requires field research because the interview will likely take place in a setting familiar to the narrator.¹

Life history is a general and over-arching term that encompasses many classificatory approaches and types: the biography; the autobiography; life stories; case histories; personal documents; life writing; personal testimony; first person narratives; and personal narratives.

Crapanzano argues that the autobiography is different because it does not depend upon telling a life story to an interrogator and that it is the teller's own story (1977:4). But singling out the autobiography as radically different from the biography blurs the numerous similarities the two genres shares. Much life history research fits within the definition of biography, despite trendy academic classifications such as "life story" and "personal narratives."

The life historical approach allows a person to give a subjective account of his/her life and experience in his/her own words. The verbal accounts elicited are different from the information derived from structured questionnaires. The former allows for freer form because the narrator has license to mold the story in relation to the context in which it is evoked (Crapanzano, Ergas, & Modell, 1986:26). The life history has many possible uses as a mode of humanistic and social scientific inquiry and is used by researchers in many different research traditions. It presents the means to look differently at old questions and problems. However, there is no standard methodology and theoretical model that informs oral history. Yet, as historians developed their use of oral histories, they looked to sociology for methodological guidance, facilitating convergence between the two (Bertaux & Kohli, 1984).

The life history has shown itself important to shedding light on the experience of individuals who are a part of marginalized groups, and where records and documents are scant or non-existent. It is useful to studying identity formation over the life course because it supports the capacity to contextualize what motivates identity re-definitions that occur alongside new experiences, as for example, among converts to a new religion (Snow & Machalek, 1984:176). In psychology, the biographical approach has proven useful to researchers interested in identity and life-span development, a counterbalance to the psychometric orientation of many of the discipline's subfields. Also, it has proven useful to the study and administering of therapeutic interventions.

Anthropology and the Life History: Early Works and Issues

The life history approach has been highly conducive to anthropological research. Anthropologists were using personal documents like the biography and autobiography before they were consciously aware of it (Gottschalk, et al., 1945:ix). For instance, salvage ethnography was based upon recording the memories and experiences of elder cultural

tradition bearers. But prior to 1925, anthropologists had shown little direct interest in the life history, although the genre had already long established itself before then, especially the autobiographical approach. In 1926, Paul Radin published *Crashing Thunder*, which is seen by Langness as the beginning of “truly rigorous work in the field of biography by professional anthropologists” (1965:7). But Radin was criticized by Dollard (1949) for a lack of analysis and synthesis and a failure to show the “growth of a life” (Kluckhohn, in Gottschalk, et al., 1945:87). Radin was charged with being overly romantic, allowing his “literary and impressionistic admiration [to reign free] rather than by a laborious theoretical construction of *Crashing Thunder*’s life experience” (Kluckhohn, in Gottschalk, et al., 1945:87). From the mid-1920s into the 1940s, there was a flurry of anthropological activity that drew upon the life historical approach, much of it based upon autobiographical and biographical accounts by Native Americans, and oriented toward illuminating cultural traditions and to humanizing these people in the eyes of others. Edward Sapir made a significant initial contribution to the use of the life history in anthropology through his culture and personality approach. This was because the culture and personality approach was especially concerned with individual behavior, and the life history provided a productive way to understand the individual. Cora DuBois’ *The People of Alor* (1960) gives example to life historical and culture-personality research during this time. She especially relied on the autobiographical approach in her effort to understand modal personalities (i.e. central tendencies in the personalities of a group of people understood through cross-cultural comparison).

During this period, the number of lives investigated for a research project was typically small, usually between one and five individuals. Two problems with using such a small number of cases are a limited understanding of culture change and range of diversity of experience within a group.

Impetus to make anthropological life history research more rigorous methodologically and clearer in purpose and aims came indirectly from sociology. In 1935, the sociologist John Dollard published *Criteria for the Life History* (1942). Although the book had greater impact on sociologists, the issues raised soon drew the attention of anthropologists. Gordon Allport, a psychologist, criticized Dollard for creating criteria that were too arbitrary. According to Allport, Dollard did not state the purpose of his criteria, plus they are biased toward “Freudianism” and “culturism” (Allport, 1942:30)

Dollard's ideas were influenced by Thomas and Znaniecki's *The Polish Peasant In Europe and America* (1958). Their work perhaps had the greatest influence on making the life history a credible approach to understanding social structure, social change, and the individual experience of these (see Allport, 1942:viii). Despite the monumental scope of Thomas and Znaniecki's research and analysis, they have been criticized on nearly the same grounds, first by Allport (1942) and later by Herbert Blumer (1949). Both argued that Thomas and Znaniecki did not establish the representativeness of their sample, nor did they prove their methodology was appropriate. They did not check reliability against independent sources, and the validity of interpretations drawn were questionable, appearing imposed rather than induced. Blumer argues that it is clear the "letters [used by Thomas and Znaniecki] get their significance from the introductions and footnotes [supplied by the authors] rather than vice versa" (1949:32). The essence of this charge is that the social scientist must take care not to impose his/her view on the data; rather, the data should speak to how to conceptualize and explain. Nonetheless, Thomas and Znaniecki attempted to diversify their data sources, drawing from court records, newspaper articles, and more than 750 letters written by, or to, emigrant Poles.

The Social Science Research Council and Life History Research

Allport helped to broaden interest in life history through his work with the Social Science Research Council-sponsored Committee on the Appraisal of Research, and his *The Use of Personal Documents in Psychological Science* (1942). Personal documents include biographies, autobiographies, letters, diaries, questionnaires, and similar media. Such documents reveal "individual experience which reveals the individual's actions as a human agent and as a participant in social life" (Allport, 1942:vii).

A subsequent SSRC-sponsored Committee on the Appraisal on Research led to a second important publication, *The Use of Personal Documents in History, Anthropology, and Sociology*, which aimed more specifically and critically at anthropologists (Gottschalk, Kluckhohn, & Ansell, 1945). Kluckhohn noted the growing anthropological interest in life history research and argued that it was too superficial and methodologically deficient (1945). For Kluckhohn, anthropological life histories, given their small samples, were too shallow to furnish penetrating insight into the person's life and how individual lives relate to those of

the larger group. He argued there was poor representation of age and gender groups and that there was no way to tell how representative a given life history was of the larger group. The anthropological life histories for Kluckhohn up to that point were “too limited to objective events.” He believed they did not “give even the shadow of a life—merely the partially outlined skeleton” (Gottschalk, et al., 1945:102); moreover, means for making cross- or intra-cultural comparisons were sorely lacking (1945:103). These criticisms pointed to the subjectiveness derived from the anthropologist’s judgement as to what are the different roles, statuses, and factions within a group, and which individuals typify these. Kluckhohn also pointed out that the accounts were largely descriptive and that little information about methodology and socio-cultural context was offered in these early anthropological life histories. Recently, Brettell reiterated Kluckhohn’s criticisms by asking whether the individuals chosen by anthropologists are typical or are representative of a given culture (1982:6). More recently, the SSRC convened another committee to investigate the life history approach. The committee’s charge was to address issues of interpretation and elicitation as they relate to personal testimony or first person narratives (Crapazano, Ergas & Modell, 1986).

Uses of the Life History

In the 1950s and 1960s, anthropological classics based on the life history approach were published. Examples included Oscar Lewis’s *Five Families* (1959), *Pedro Martínez* (1964), and *Children of Sanchez* (1961), and Sidney Mintz’s *Worker in the Cane* (1960). In *Five Families*, Lewis used the autobiography in conjunction with other approaches, such as the family case study, to gain insight into personality, values, social change, and community and social structure (1959). *Pedro Martínez* was notable because it provided graphic autobiographical detail about how the Mexican Revolution affected peasant life, values, ideas, and notions of social justice (1964). Later anthropologists have used the life history in many ways. What has been consistent is the tendency to rely upon a small sample as a segue into culture and history. Shostak’s (1981) exemplary biography examined Kung San culture and social change through the experience of one woman, Nisa. Domitila’s autobiography, *Let me Speak!: Testimony of Domitila, A Woman of the Mines* (1978), presented a compelling story of a female activist and leader of mine workers’ wives affected by state and capitalist subjugation (1978).

Brettell (1982) used the life stories of three Portuguese women to provide in-depth perspective to the social and familial impact of international migration, especially when women (as opposed to men) are the migrants. Brown's book, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn* (1991), explores how Haitian migrants to New York City maintain their religious practices and social networks, as well as how they are altered in the new environment.

By the late 1970s, some anthropologists had become concerned with methodological and epistemological issues that long-plagued anthropological life history research—the influence of the researcher upon the information elicited and how the final account is presented. Brettell sees this as a “recentering” of anthropology as a result of a reflexive awareness, plus the acknowledgment that culture is not equally shared by all members of a cultural group (1982:xv). Kelly focused on four Yaqui women to discuss Yaqui history and culture from a woman's perspective and to counter the anthropological tendencies to use the life history to focus on individuals who are of high status, older males, and to not contextualize informant-researcher relationships (1978:3-7). Haskins has argued that the life history was largely a disembodied document “separated from the context of elicitation and presented with few references to the researcher or his/her relationship to the subject” (1985:147). While this might characterize life histories carried out by anthropologists prior to the 1970s, it is not applicable to other kinds of life histories. Theodore Rosengarten, for instance, provides great detail about how he met the illiterate sharecropper Nate Shaw, where interviews took place, what they talked about during interviews, and how he edited the voluminous transcripts for *All God's Dangers* (1974). Anthropologists like Crapanzano (1977; 1980) used the life history to problematize how the interviewer shapes the story being told, how the interviewer and narrator are changed as a result of the experience, and how the interviewer reconstitutes the story. While these were major dilemmas for anthropologists, other researchers have long understood that conducting life history research “forces self-examination that changes both the self and quite possibly the life [of interviewer and interviewee] as well” (Smith, 1994:288).² Below, I furnish details on my relation to the interviewees and the research.

ANALYZING LIFE HISTORIES

The life story approach to life history best describes the research conducted for this

dissertation. The life story interview is based on using the words of the person telling the story (Atkinson, 1998). The end product is typically a first-person narrative where the researcher takes a seat in the background, to the extent that this is possible. This makes the life story a primary document that is a result of cooperation between the researcher and the narrator. The life story is typically a “short, or mini, autobiography, with one person having guided another through the telling of his or her story in his or her own words, although in some cases it may become a full-length assisted autobiography” (Atkinson, 1998:2). The life story approach is especially compatible with ethnographic and field research and understanding “self-formation,” “human experience,” and how we “‘construct’ our lives” (Atkinson, 1998:4). It has much in common with other anthropological approaches, especially with respect to interpreting the role of tradition bearers and their understanding of themselves and their culture.

In the word of Atkinson, a life story is “*the story a person chooses to tell about the life he or she has lived, told as completely and honestly as possible, what is remembered of it, and what the teller wants others to know of it, usually as a result of a guided interview by another*” (1998:8, original italics). It recognizes that there are numerous versions of a given life story, dependent upon the questions asked and the class, race, ethnicity, and religion of the narrator and interviewer, among other concerns. People sometimes tell the same story differently at different times and to different audiences, as the below section on native anthropology illustrates. To be aware of this at the outset helps to identify potential biases. The life story is a way to grasp how the “self evolves over time or at least in seeing the subjective perspective on that” (Atkinson, 1998:11).

As an approach, or method, for understanding individual lives and really connecting with another’s experience, there may be no equal to the life story [or life history in general] interview. People telling their own stories reveal more about their own inner lives than any other approach could. Historical reconstruction does not have to be the primary concern in a life story; what is important is how people see themselves at this point in their lives and want others to see them (Atkinson, 1998:24).

This allows the researcher and narrator to focus on “what is most personally meaningful to the teller...providing clues to what people’s greatest struggles and triumphs are, where their deepest values lie, what their quest has been, where they might have been broken, and where made whole again” (Atkinson, 1998:14).

Sloan notes that it is possible that the life history may make no sense to the interviewer; it may seem incoherent (1992:63). He argues that some people organize their life stories around discontinuities and watershed events, not “rationally” structured accounts, although they may desire to order their lives when they contemplate their stories through retelling past experiences (1992:73). In either case, the perceptive interviewer can find insight into the narrator’s life and experience since even incoherent narratives reflect what comes to the mind of the narrator.

Grounding the Theory in the Data

Two ways of approaching data analysis are to begin with a theoretical perspective and use it to explain what the data “say” or fail to “say,” or to use the themes and patterns identified in the data to develop “low-range” theory. The two are not mutually exclusive. I did not discover the Nigrescence model until after data collection, but I studied it before beginning data analysis. Still, the themes and patterns in the data were identifiable on their own. For example, after only a few interviews I noticed that it was a specific experience that coincided with the interviewee’s move toward identity transformation and move toward Rastafari. Despite grounded theorist calls to suspend applying developed theory to the data, my dual approach fit Strauss & Corbin’s suggestion that the theorist should always be “scrutinizing the literature for received theories that might possibly be relevant to the emerging theory developed largely through the continuing conversation with ‘the data’” (1994:280).

Strauss & Corbin (1994) offer a model for analyzing data that fits well with the life history-story approach: “Grounded theory is a *general methodology* for developing theory that is grounded in data that is systematically gathered and analyzed. Theory evolves during actual research, and it does this through continuous interplay between analysis and data collection” (Strauss & Corbin, 1994:273, original italics). In this perspective, theory is defined as “*plausible* relationships proposed among *concepts* and *sets of concepts*” (Strauss & Corbin, 1994:278, original italics), with plausibility being increased through additional research. Grounded theory is developed directly from the data, although, as suggested, already existing theory can be used to interpret the data. If existing theory is used it can be modified as the data suggest, as I have done with NT. Likewise, grounded theory can be used to construct

theory of different levels, even though development of substantive theory is most common (Strauss & Corbin, 1994:274). The primary consideration is to match theory against data and vice versa, throughout the research process. Grounded theory that can indicate outcomes and the conditions related to a given outcome allow assertion of predictability where similar conditions obtain—one can expect similar outcomes. Grounded theory requires the understanding that qualitative research is based upon interpretation and that social change may necessitate modifying or abandoning a theory:

To say that a given theory is an interpretation—and therefore fallible—is not to deny that judgments can be made about the soundness or probable usefulness of it. All interpretations, whether or not they have features or status of theory, are temporally limited...they are always provisional, they are never established forever; their very nature allows for endless elaboration and partial negation...as conditions change...this affects the validity of theories...[and] their relation to contemporary social reality (Strauss & Corbin, 1994:279).

Grounded theory connects multiple perspectives of actors with “processes of action/interaction that in turn are linked with carefully specified conditions and consequences” (Strauss & Corbin, 1994:280).

An important criticism of grounded theory is the assumption that a researcher can and should be able to analyze data such as fieldnotes independent of the “analytic processes and theoretical commitments of the ethnographer who wrote them” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995:144). Grounded theorists argue that researchers should minimize, if not suspend, reliance upon already developed theory because this aids in the development of theory rooted in the primary data. But this is unrealistic because data are “products of prior interpretive and conceptual decisions. Grounded theory slights the process whereby data are assembled, processes that build concepts into the data from the start in the very process of *writing* fieldnotes” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw 1995:167, original italics). Analysis should permeate all phases of the research.

In analyzing the life histories and field notes, I relied on the qualitative techniques of coding and identifying patterns and themes in the narratives, categorizing the themes and patterns, and then weaving them together to form a new narrative. I combined formal theory (Nigrescence and religious conversion) with my own substantive explanations, based on patterns and issues discerned in the data.

Reliability

According to Bertaux & Kohli, an ethnographic approach to life history should depend upon collecting data until a point of saturation is reached (1984). Saturation refers to the conditions where the different accounts offered begin to show consistent patterns (even though there is always uniqueness in the life experience of people). Saturation occurs when at some point each additional life history confirms the legitimacy of the interpretation given to the data. Some French researchers approach life history research by continually modifying and adjusting the questions in an effort to be more precise and effective in getting the data they want (similar to grounded theory). They do this without undermining validity and their ability to generalize.

While pursuing the point of saturation, the researcher must be sensitive to identifying negative cases—examples that do not fit the established patterns. If attainment of saturation and identification of negative cases is done well, the researcher can generalize without using systematic or random sampling. The life history is an appropriate means of developing and testing theory, as long as they are conceived of as “interpretations rather than as scientific explanations” (Bertaux & Kohli, 1984:215). It is important, though, to be aware of the methodological issues raised by research that relies on people’s memories of the past. This way they can be addressed when designing a research project and when time comes to analyze the data. Some of the issues related to studying conversion narratives are discussed in the next section.

Methodological Issues in the Study of Conversion

People's accounts of conversion are the primary data for analysis, and the starting point for understanding the process. But self-reported accounts should not be approached uncritically (Beckford, 1978:249). In recounting their conversion experiences, people rarely separate their retrospective account from what was actually happening to them before and during Seekership, making it difficult to ascertain what experiences and feelings were most important in the phase leading to conversion (McGuire, 1992:73). Robbins argues that "Converts' retrospective accounts, like apostates' accounts, tell us more about the converts' current experience and orientation than about his or her past...much of the literature on conversion confuses retrospection and introspection...and therefore treats convert's accounts as explanations of conversion rather than as phenomena requiring sociological explanation" (1988:66). To ask about conversion experience means that what one is likely to get is a biographical reconstruction that emphasizes tension and resolution of that tension (Robbins, 1988:82; Beckford, 1978:250). Snow & Machalek also believe a convert's account of conversion says more about their current experience and ideas than about the past and that the researcher must not confuse retrospection and introspection (1984:177). Hobson's analysis of White Southern writers makes the point that while they are converts, they are still "writing of a time before conversion and thus they place the center of consciousness in the mind of younger versions of themselves" (1999:6). What is more, converts are likely to further elaborate their accounts over time, because people redefine their identities and biographies as their experiences change (Snow & Machalek, 1984:176). So, it is prudent to understand these accounts as provisional, especially if the focus is on the causes of conversion. At the same time there are means of minimizing the methodological issues conversion accounts may present.

Because there is no single conversion type, an encompassing theory that can account for the various conversion experiences has not emerged. This is compounded by how conversion researchers differently approach the topic. For example, some emphasize agency, and others, a particular level of analysis (see Table 1.2). Hence, studies of conversion are rarely carried out in a manner conducive to replication or toward accurately ascertaining the degree of identity transformation.

Still, there are ways to address these methodological concerns. First is the

acknowledgment that studying religious conversion relies on subjective interpretation of past experience. Second, use of family and friends' accounts of a person's conversion, plus the researcher's perspective, can help to correct this methodological issue by moving it "two levels...from the 'real' event"(Robbins, 1988:67). Third, participant observation helps to put into context the answers people give by supplying data that combines the experience of the subject and the observer. And, finally, life and social history provide context for the person's experience within a larger context of change.

Clark claims that questionnaires alone do not get at the heart of the conversion experience (1969:213). But as Kilbourne & Richardson (1988) illustrate, they are useful for identifying what are independent variables. The life history approach offered by Lofland & Stark (1965) is tremendously insightful because the convert's background information is collected within a life-span context. This makes it possible to identify crises and tensions without focusing only on conversion. Consequently, the most comprehensive approach to studying identity and conversion would be a combination of the life history (using a semi-structured interview guide), social history, a questionnaire, and participant observation.

NATIVE ANTHROPOLOGY

In this section, I treat my role in the research and the issues it raises. An important part of carrying out the life narrative interview regards the role of the author in getting the story. This involves more than having good interviewing skills. I was what is referred to as a native anthropologist. That is, I consider myself a member of the group with whom the research was carried out. I believe this is an important consideration vis-à-vis the study of pro-Black groups. Langellier (1989:266-271) persuasively demonstrated how politics and identity play into the formation and exchange of personal narratives like life histories. The gender, ethnicity, religion, and race of the storyteller and audience (I was *the* audience in most of the interviews) sometimes has great impact on what and how the story is told. This concern speaks to how the interviewer is perceived by the interviewee. Is he/she seen as one of them? Or an outsider? Or someone who *should* be one of them or at least sympathetic to their agenda and outlook, but deemed assimilated and foreign? Such questions may not be familiar or important to non-minority scholars who take the outsider role as given or who do not have a well-informed understanding of intra-minority group issues, one of which

involves the relationship of the professional, highly educated, in this case Black, to others of his/her "race" and local community.

DuBois's talented tenth agenda and Booker T. Washington's assimilationist perspective are only two illustrations of how Black intellectuals conceive of relating to others whose class origins, credentials, and experiences are drastically different. For Black researchers whose program involves people with whom they strongly identify, the issue of relationship and appropriation is usually a running subtext. Those being studied want to know why. They ask, "What will you do with the information?" "Who are you working for?" "Who will control the information?" "What do you stand to gain?" These are questions familiar to most anthropologists, regardless of their identification and relationship to the subjects of inquiry. Barry Chevannes, a Jamaican who has written extensively about Rastafarians, observed the same issue: "And one of the questions with which I most frequently have to deal with is this: 'what good will come from your research?' 'Exactly how will it benefit me and others like me?' Often, potential respondents will not co-operate unless this question is satisfactorily answered" (1978:250).³

Well into the 1960s, some anthropologists still believed that a native could be trained to carry out anthropological research and to get information and insights unobtainable by the outsider (i.e. White researcher). The classical counter-argument is offered by Langness: "It is possible to be too close to your subject matter even though you [the outsider] cannot completely cross the cultural boundaries and thus be blinded to that which is obvious even to others who do not know the people so intimately" (1965:34). The claim is that the native is too close to his or her own culture to be able to critically investigate a given concern.

Let us briefly examine the debates around native anthropology as it relates to this research.

The Native Anthropology Debate

Delmos Jones, an African American anthropologist, was among the first to address the issues from a professional and insider's perspective in "Towards a Native Anthropology" (Jones, 1973).⁴ Jones described the insider as "the person who conducts research on the cultural, racial, or ethnic group of which he himself is a member" (1973:449). He went on to define native anthropology as "a set of theories based on non-Western precepts and

assumptions in the same sense that modern anthropology is based on and has supported Western beliefs and values” (1973:449). I substitute the “non-Western” with “historically discriminated-against minority groups” since the term “non-Western” complicates an otherwise straightforward issue.⁵

Jones made several arguments relevant to this study: 1) all anthropologists are familiar with the outsider research perspective, but few with the insider research perspective; 2) there is no reason to assume that a “person working among his own people cannot maintain the degree of objectivity desirable” (1973:449); 3) that native anthropology does not offer a better perspective, but an alternative to the way research is normally conceived and conducted—because the insider and outsider may interpret the same data differently; 4) regional and class-based differences ensure no native anthropologist can expect to be fully competent in all aspects of a particular group’s culture and experience; and 5) the insider also faces difficulties in accessing and working with his or her community, but these are often different from those of the outsider.⁶

Gwaltney, in *Drylongso*, echoed many of Jones’ concerns about Black people (in America) not being well-understood and of their mistrust of social scientists:

Traditional Euro-American anthropology has generally failed to produce ethnographers who are capable of assessing Black American culture in terms other than romantic, and from my belief in the theory-building and analytic capacities of my people...I share the opinion commonly held by natives of my community that we have traditionally been misrepresented by standard social science (1993:xxii).

The same can be applied to other groups in the diaspora.

Insider and outsider, as used here, are as much about experience and self-identification as about race, culture, and ethnicity. To be Black or Indian and conduct research among Black or Indian people does not automatically make one a native researcher, as the Pre-Encounter phase of the Nigrescence model implies: There are a range of attitudes, values, and world views with a racial, ethnic, religious, and other groups. Self-identification and experience must be specified if the native anthropologist role is to be well-understood. Did you grow up and/or live among the kinds of people you now “study?” In what ways do they see you as one of them? Does advanced education or your class position make you an outsider, despite strong insider identifications? How familiar are you with regional variation?

Fahim & Helmer (1982:xiv), like Jones (1973), emphasize the issues of objectivity

and caution the indigenous anthropologist to be extra objective and cautious in analysis so that subjectivity and bias are minimized. Fahim & Helmer are enthused about the “new perspectives” that will be offered by indigenous anthropologists a result of their likelihood of seeing what is missing from the abstract models. This is an advantage that offsets other shortcomings.⁷

Charles Carnegie, a Jamaican, approaches the native researcher issue in terms of national identification (1992). Carnegie contends that foreign influences and concerns divert research focus away from study of marginal groups in Jamaica, and that a strong native research tradition is needed to maintain a balance between local, national, and internationally-oriented research (1992:20). For Carnegie, “A native ethnographic practice must ultimately seek to disentangle those ‘habits of thought’ embedded in local cultural experience that both constrain and might contribute to the building of a sturdy local intellectual tradition” (1990:20).

Susan Greenbaum, a white female anthropologist, offers another perspective on “native anthropology.” Greenbaum and some of her colleagues have earnestly worked to recruit and train “native ethnographers.” Greenbaum argues that there is a need to train native ethnographers

...whose cultural origins are similar to the communities they study....[and that] more recent demands for cultural self-determination has forced a radical new way of thinking about ethnicity, and about researching ethnic communities. Thorny epistemological questions have been raised about interpretation of values and traditions, and about whose voices should be heard. It seems both advantageous and just to nurture applied anthropologists whose own upbringing offers them a natural source of empathy and understanding for the communities in which they work (1994:2,3).

Like Jones, Greenbaum realizes that some communities such as African Americans and Rastafarians, are especially leery of social scientists, and that sometimes common identifications are a reasonable way to address these community concerns. For the applied and basic anthropologist, reliable data cannot be collected without willing cooperation from the community, and cooperation may hinge upon acceptance; without these, progressive social changes may be blocked. In some cases, acceptance is facilitated by an individual's or community's perception that the researcher is one of them.

Kirin Narayan (1993) stretched the native anthropology debate in a postmodern

direction, splitting hairs and avoiding the fundamental points discussed above. She argues

...against the fixity of a distinction between “native” and “non-native” anthropologists. Instead of the paradigm emphasizing a dichotomy between outsider/insider or observer/observed, I propose that at this historical moment we might more profitably view each anthropologist in terms of shifting identifications amid a field of interpenetrating communities and power relations. The loci along which we are aligned with or set apart from those whom we study are multiple and in flux (Narayan 1993:671).

Narayan discusses how education, gender, class, race, and other factors may be more important than the cultural identity associated with insider and outsider status. She finds that what

...we must focus our attention on is the quality of relations with the people we seek to represent in our texts: are they viewed as mere fodder for professionally self-serving statements about a generalized Other, or are they accepted as subjects with voices, views, and dilemmas—people to whom we are bonded through ties of reciprocity and who may even be critical of our professional enterprise (Narayan 1993:672).

In a swift move, Narayan has sidestepped the enduring points made by Jones (1973), Fahim & Helmer (1982), and Gwaltney (1993). She has trivialized the fact that natives are sometimes pleased to find people whom *they* identify with conducting research. The essential issues are not about who is “most inside,” or who has the highest “quality of relations with the people we seek to represent in our texts,” which her argument implies.⁸

Narayan evades the core issues and posits a straw man argument, critiquing the weakest parts of the native anthropology debate. She argues that globalization (as discussed by anthropologists)—global flows of trade, politics, migrations, and mass media—has minimized the “accepted nexus of authentic culture/demarcated field/exotic [because the] locale has unraveled” (Narayan 1992:672). But the political aspects of globalization remain unaddressed in her critique (e.g. the economic liberalization project and class struggle) and she assumes it to have minimized the most basic of human desires and antipathies, such as vicariously placing hope, aspiration, and even disappointment in others who appear like oneself. Narayan shirks the following questions: Did the people she conduct fieldwork among consider her one of them, one of their own bound by the norms they live by? When she moves among them is she easily distinguished by them as different, even though she is of Indian ancestry? If she said nothing, would she be seen as an Outsider? These are the

fundamental issues that the native question rides upon. Class, race, and gender are important, but not automatic separators. For instance, an African American or Jamaican could grow up in a given community, move away, affect middle-class mannerisms, and return “home” to find that he or she *is* different, or that he or she does not feel different, but the community perceives them as different. Or, the person might possess characteristics and ties that allow him or her to fit comfortably into the local social order.

It is not that Narayan is wrong to raise the issues she does. What is misleading is how her apparent sense of confusion, anxiety, and uncertainty color her narrative and take us away from the basic issues:

I invoke these threads of culturally tangled identity to demonstrate that a person may have many strands of identification available, strands that may be tugged into the open or stuffed out of sight. A mixed background such as mine perhaps marks one as inauthentic for the label “native” or “indigenous” anthropologist; perhaps those who are not clearly “native” or “non-native” should be termed “halfies” instead...two halves cannot adequately account for the complexity of an identity in which multiple countries, regions, religions, and classes may come together” (Narayan, 1993:673).

The idea of multiple and “shifting” identifications may be new to anthropology, but not to sociology. The idea of multiple roles and performances in this role is not new, and the more educated one is, the more likely he or she is to have multiple roles. Recent technological and media developments open up even more role and identity opportunities. In comparison, poverty-stricken people typically have access to fewer roles and sources of identification.

Jones read and indirectly replied to Narayan’s critique (1994)⁹ by saying that the “relationship between the ‘native’ anthropologist and the native population is not self-evident, although it is often made to appear that way” (Jones, 1994:1). Jones further defined the fundamental issue as imperative that “native” anthropology address social justice and social equality, and that it not replicate mainstream anthropology. Jones too suggests that Narayan has avoided the political implications of her argument by not acknowledging how issues of power and class division relate to the aims of the native anthropologist (1994:2). Jones argues that

...all relationships involving research are problematic, socially and politically complex, and require difficult choices. My argument is that if these choices are based on sentimentality as opposed to political considerations, they risk reinforcing inequality. The “native” anthropologist must be seen in relationship to a native population, but

the population must not be viewed as a homogeneous and cohesive entity. It is composed of diverse interests (1994:3).

Jones' comments point out how experience, perspective, and politics-power are primary concerns, not how many identities one has, nor how many times one returns to the field. For Jones, the native anthropologist *should* be biased in favor of his or her social group, and *should* know whose interests are being served by this bias.

Rastafari and the Native Researcher

Most of those who have researched Rastafari in Jamaica are White, non-Rastafarian, and non-Jamaican. This has important ramifications. I was told stories about other researchers. These stories carried a strong element of ridicule and sarcasm toward the researchers, which has included historians, sociologists, political scientists, linguists, and others. One leading elder, in moment of supreme caricature, stuck out his chest, placed his hands on his hips, and affected a "yankee" accent as he mimicked a researcher from California: "I want to thank you, elder. I finished my thesis. I am an expert. I have my thesis (sic) in Rasta-ology" (Brother Yendis, 1998). The elder did not show the researcher his contempt for his apparently unconscious arrogance and selfishness. I later asked the elder what he thought about foreign researchers and he replied by saying that there is a role for them to play: they help to spread the "news" of Rastafari.

For me, stories about self-interested researchers made my burden and responsibility heavier. Not only did I have to contend with the residue of every inept and selfish researcher who had gone before, I had to make my aims clear and different. I thought of the enduring joke about how anthropologists saturated Native American communities to the point that they had become a part of Native family structure. Researchers seemed to me to have had a similar bearing upon Rastafarians in Jamaica, especially Kingston. Nearly all of the authors of the dissertations on Rastafarians I had read I heard about from one or another individual.

At the same time, I got the impression that the Rastafarians I met were pleased to see another Black person—a Ras¹⁰ at that—doing work normally done by Whites and non-Rastafarians. My experience echoes Jones' point: the "general reaction was a feeling that research among black people by a black social scientist was a very good thing" (1973:453). Moreover, I perceived a prevailing (but generally implicit) sentiment that "enough research

has already been done, period. People with this attitude think that action is what is needed now” (Jones, 1973:453). Jones added that these people were the least cooperative and were not helpful to his research agenda. Gwaltney points out that Black people do want to see the story “told right,” but that “if it is determined that a prospective field investigator is just another one of that phalanx of fatuous hucksters and junketing assessors who prey or groove upon us, he or she will be politely but effectively disregarded” (1993:xxiv). A person can be publicly embarrassed by those who sense, wrongly or rightfully, that one’s research is not in the best interests of the community.

Like Jones, my experience was that many people were proud of me: Black in a way that they identified with; energetic, youthful, and an example of what others can do. Even when I encountered resistance, I usually would later find the stubborn individual to be interested, but acting disinterested. One particularly cantankerous elder Rasta, an Indian, told me bluntly that what I was doing was useless, that the past was irrelevant: “Them things there [history] already done; I don’t deal with the past. I man live in the present. What you a look back for? You backward? Rasta people is forward people. I don’t look back” (Brother Bags, 1998). He refused to answer questions such as, Where you born and grow (i.e. tell me where you grew up)? and Did you attend school? Yet, he talked non-stop. On the evening I decided to discontinue working with him, he was particularly cantankerous and had gathered several people to listen to his rantings, which were indirectly aimed at me. Understanding that getting berated is sometimes a part of gaining the confidence of some Rastas, I let him rant. He talked non-stop for nearly three hours, imbibing about two ounces of ganja¹¹ in the process. What I realized was that he wanted a soapbox and I was providing it, and he wanted to tell the story he felt was important, even though his story was tangential to the kind of “structured” life story I held ideal. Nonetheless, I did learn much from him about Rastafari in the 1950s, and even more about Rastafarian ideology and factionalism from the perspective of an elder in the movement. Also, I learned that a life story does not have to proceed chronologically; a testifier can begin in the middle or at the end of their life as Brother Bags did, and move to and fro in no discernible pattern. The researcher has the burden of making the story coherent (with the assistance of the interviewee if possible).

Dissertation research was irrelevant to the Rastafarians I worked with. I tried to be honest and up-front about what I was doing. Although my motives were truly genuine and I

viewed the dissertation as only a part of my aim to document the history and struggles of the elders through oral narratives, and to later create an archive for this important part of the history of the African Diaspora, the dissertation part only elicited silence or passionate suggestions about what Rastafarians need. It was clear to me from the first day that a dissertation was not important to them. They wanted other things from me and in general were warm and supportive of the idea of documenting the lives of the elders and using this to support the Rastafari centralization movement. A few had desires of their own—believing that I could tell their stories and skills to the world—but for the most part, the central issue was that I put Rastafari and the movement *first*, and that what else I did was okay within the boundaries of reason. I had no problem with these desires and felt emboldened because I had a mandate that coincided with what I needed to do.

I did not maintain an objective “distance.” All of the elders I interviewed saw me as a “Bredren” (comrade), not a researcher, and I never thought of them as subjects or interviewees. Although not a native in the strict sense (i.e. born in Jamaica), I was never treated as an obvious outsider. As result, I think, “people have revealed deeply personal things to me...but I would be dishonest and disloyal to reveal such information” (Jones, 1973:454), and I have no intention of making public everything I know.

As an in-group member, I am obligated to follow the Rastafarian norm that recognizes the group’s interest overrides strict self-interest. I knew what Rastafarians would typically expect, including myself, of one of *our* own: The “we,” the “I n I,” must be perpetuated and promoted on a plane equal to, if not above, the individual’s interests. I found that using the tools of the same society that Rastafarians condemn is okay as long as Rastafari is put first.

I feel strongly that there are some aspects of the Black experience that may not occur to many non-Black anthropologists, and this makes native anthropology of enduring importance. Jones makes this point well:

Anyone who has experienced the many institutional barriers which are constructed to keep members of one’s own group in their places is more apt to view the various parts of a system as being at war with each other than as working in harmony.... There is no escape from the idea that outsiders and insiders view social reality from different points of view and that no matter how hard each tries, neither can completely discard his preconceptions of what that social reality is or should be ” (1973:455).

Unlike Crapanzano's (1977:5) initial "neutral" encounter with Tuhami where they allowed themselves to "create" each other without cultural expectations, I walked into relationships where there are ground rules about expected behavior, and little room for negotiation. I had some latitude to "customize" the relationships, but this had to be balanced against the ground rules. I began the research as an outsider not because I was not a Jamaican. I was an outsider because I had to gain the confidence of people who did not know me and were not sure of my motives: Why would he want to know why people become Rastafarians? Every Rastafarian must already know why one becomes a Rastafarian. What will he do with the information I give him?

Some elders were concerned with what I would do with their life histories. Mostly their concerns were that I use their stories to further the movement and not my self interests. Rasta Ivey became vexed with me one day as we traveled on some mundane business. She remembered some old Rastafari chants and began singing them. She asked "Where the tape [recorder]?" I had not brought it with me. She had come to realize how important it was to record information that might forever be lost, and wanted it saved for others to draw from. Another elder, Brother Woks, saw me on the street one day and said he remembered some things he remembered after his interview that he wanted to add and clarify. These elders wanted to contribute to the archiving of the group's history. Still, the reticence, when it occurs, is understandable. At least one Jamaican Rastafarian had carried out historical and life history research, like myself, and left to America with all the information, where he has published several papers and manuscripts. The main criticism of this Rasta was that he did not give back to the movement, suggesting that he was out to gain attention for himself, not the movement.

The Strengths and Difficulties of Carrying Out Native Research

The following illustrate some of the strengths and difficulties of being a native researcher:

- The group the researcher identifies with thinks the researcher already knows everything they know and sometimes balk at answering questions they expect him/her to already have answers to.
- It has been argued that native researchers run the risk of assuming they know the answers to questions and they do not ask and/or fail to recognize certain phenomena or events as

important because they are so familiar with their own culture. This is an over-generalization. A good research proposal, for instance, should identify the questions that must be asked.

- The researcher's responsibilities and obligations as a group member take priority over other roles, including the role of researcher (this does not mean that one does not maintain high and ethical research standards).
- The native researcher should seize any opportunity to organize and be an advocate for the group. Because of my identification and my concern with the plight of poor people and my inclination toward helping people organize, I was an advocate involved in the movement.
- The native researcher will often find he or she will not have to spend an inordinate amount of time learning the language and getting "inside."
- I met four other researchers, two White males and two Japanese, one male, one female, while carrying out the research. I saw how difficult it was for them to really get "inside" Rastafari. A few Dreadlocks posed for these "foreigners" as more serious Rastafarians than they actually were (I say this because I knew some of them). Money was the main medium that the foreigners used to get information.
- Expectations placed on native researchers by their people can be high. Many elders trusted me to help the cause of the movement and to work in the spirit of Haile Selassie, I, whereas foreigners were understood to take and not return and give back to the movement.
- I found that prior researchers, Rastafarian and non-Rastafarian, had made many elders wary to the point that they did not want to assist any other researchers. This will be a problem native researchers will often have to confront.

SUMMARY

The life history provides a useful way to explain identity formation, Nigrescence, and religious conversion. It allows the researcher the opportunity to view the range of a person's experience and to understand watersheds in their lives and their motives and concerns. By combining it with social history, the researcher is able to contextualize the person's life within a social context, especially social and institutional change. Being a native researcher can be an added benefit, provided the researcher uses his or her experience to get inside the group and elicit personal and group concerns that might not be told to non-natives or address issues that may not appeal to non-natives.

ENDNOTES

1. There many oral historical approaches: topical (e.g., the Great Depression); genealogical; work experiences; community history; institutional history, etc.
2. Maybe most important is the recognition that life histories, regardless of the sub-genre, are the product of someone, often a researcher. This influence of the writer may not be obvious in the final text, but she is nonetheless responsible for initiating the process, collecting the information, analyzing it, and making a coherent story out of the data. Irrespective of the discipline involved, creating good life stories require sound and creative sociological thinking along the lines of C. W. Mills' *The Sociological Imagination* (19**). This is a special skill required of the life history researcher. It does not imply that life history research is "non-scientific," or unique to the approach, but that "...validating interpretations...lies at the core of interpretive research" (Bertaux & Kohli 1984:233). As such, the skill of the researcher– as is the case in the discovery process in science– become central to sound research.
3. He says he frames his work in terms of a contribution to national liberation and the "removal of racial antagonisms" (p251).
4. Originally published in *Human Organization* 29(4):251-59.
5. By sidestepping the idea of west versus non-western I avoid simplistic questions such as Can groups born in the "West" be non-western, even when their experiences and world views differ from those of the dominant social groups and prevailing scientific and humanities discourses?"
6. Jones defined basic parameters about native-oriented research, and refinements and critiques have emerged. Fahim & Helmer (1982), Narayan (1993), Jones (1994), Carnegie (1992), and Greenbaum (1994) offer examples of how the discussion has continued.
7. They also point out that cultural norms might constrain the indigenous anthropologist in ways irrelevant to the "outsider"; or, the indigenous anthropologists might not be taken seriously by the locals who expect the researcher to already know the answer (Fahim & Helmer 1982:xix).
8. Her confession about her identity suggests she confuses the issues she seeks to clarify. Narayan insinuates that she is a native and good example of why the idea of the native anthropologist is highly problematic. She is born of a White mother of German and WASP lineage, and an Indian father of Gujarati and Maharashtra descent. Both parents are well-educated professionals. She then embeds all of this in the past of her parents, and her own past, when she lived in areas near or in where she is conducting research. She says that "I write as someone who bears the label of 'native' anthropologist and yet squirms uncomfortably under this essentializing tag....Tacking between situated narrative and more sweeping analysis, I argue for the *enactment of hybridity* in our texts...writing that depicts authors as minimally bicultural in terms of belonging simultaneously to the world of engaged scholarship and the world of everyday life" (Narayan 1993:672, original italics).
9. Jones, bound by prior commitments, asked me to sit in his place as a discussant on a panel discussion about native anthropology, Society for Applied Anthropology 53rd annual meeting, Cancun, Mexico, April 14, 1994.
10. Ras is a term that male Rastafarians use toward each other. It serves as a title of honor, and a general referent; it is also used by some non-Rastafarians toward Rastafarians as a greeting or acknowledgment. The term was borrowed from the Ethiopian vocabulary where the term translates as "head" or "prince." Older male Rastafarian are also referred to as "King," "Daddi," or "Fadda" (father).

11. Marijuana.

**PART TWO:
THE EMERGENCE AND CONSOLIDATION OF
BLACK IDENTITY IN JAMAICA**

CHAPTER THREE

THE EMERGENCE OF A MORAL ECONOMY AND BLACK IDENTITY:

SLAVERY, RELIGION, AND REBELLION THROUGH 1865

...it was the institution of slavery which first crystallized these values and desires [Black redemption, righteousness, Black messiah] which have a compulsive urgency for those who declare themselves of the Rastafari faith (Kitzinger, 1969:245).

We'll ne'er forget the struggles of those who've gone before; who fought for peace and justice and opened freedom's door. May we still keep the vision clear of justice in our land.... ("Our Freedom Song," Noel Dexter, May 22, 1997).

Rastafari is committed to a "new morality that values selflessness, brotherly love, and communalism above deceitfulness, stealing, exploitation and envy" which requires "improved standards of discipline in the conduct of one's daily life..." (Nettleford, 1972:110).

This chapter focuses on the period between the British¹ slave era and the early manumission period, concentrating on some of the watershed events² and processes out of which Black identity and a Black moral economy emerge. Explaining the emergence of the Rastafari, and why people take on that identification, is facilitated by grounding their beliefs, actions, and identity within the system of a moral economy. E.P. Thompson, analyzing English riots and insurrections of the eighteenth century, argues that understanding manifestations of a moral economy requires identifying patterns, and these configurations have antecedents: insurrections, for instance, "exhibit a pattern of behavior for whose origin we must look back several hundreds of years...." (1971:108). While the New World context does not always allow us to delve "several hundreds of years" into the past, identification of continuities and discontinuities make possible an opportunity to provide encompassing explanations. The Black moral economy developed under slavery, a product of enslaved people's creation of their own institutions, ideas, and relationships within the oppressive arrangement. It provided an environment conducive to Ethiopianism, an Africa-oriented variety of Black nationalism that entrenched itself in the minds and hearts of many Black

Jamaicans after the late 1700s.

African slaves, cut off from mainstream civic life, and having little power within the slavery and colonial system, developed moral economies that were rooted in their African-influenced approaches to work, social organization, and religion. They did not implant their African institutions in toto, but their experience served as a foundation to erect an edifice that theories of creolization minimize by downplaying Blackness in favor of synthesis. As I shall illustrate in Part III, Rastafarian identity and ideology is a dialogue with long-standing Black moral economies and the present. *These moral economies change over time as circumstances lead actors to add and expunge elements.* While certain subsistence and cultural practices of the Black moral economy are widely shared, it is best to think of multiple moral economies that are given specificity through relation to experiences of particular socio-cultural groups. Examples of how early moral economies provide frameworks for action and belief include Myalism, the Maroons and the wars they fought for independence, and the Tacky and other rebellions. Later examples examined in the next chapter are the Morant Bay Rebellion (where Blackness comes to the fore), Ethiopianism, and the Bedward and Garvey Movements. As the life histories shall demonstrate, the identity and ideology of the first and second generation Rastafarians are closely wedded to these legacies.

Moral economies in Jamaica, and the expressions of Blackness that pervaded them, were significantly shaped by turbulent and distressful conditions: slavery, rebellion, brutal reprisal, exploitation, injustice, and frustrated desire. Nonetheless, periods of relative calm are equally important to its development. For example, the thirty years between the end of slavery and the Morant Bay Rebellion were a crucible for the continued development of a Black moral economy, because the anticipations the former slaves had for freedom did not materialize and the gatekeepers of the status quo continually found ways to thwart their aspirations. Such experiences ensured that Black definitions of freedom and justice would differ from those of the hegemonic groups. The historian Michael Craton, who has written extensively on slavery and resistance in Jamaica, makes a similar point:

Unrest in the earliest years of nominal freedom stemmed from problems of adjustment, from official opposition to a return to traditional ways, especially in religion, from tensions occasioned by questions of rents, wages and the availability of land, and from the conflict with new immigrants, government surveyors and the police. These incidents multiplied and spread in times of economic slump such as the

late 1840s, early 1860s and mid-1870s, or in times of natural disasters, such as drought, flood, or cholera epidemic (1988:145).

Central to Jamaica's Black moral economy are the African-influenced religions and the King James Bible. These provide a theoretical and rhetorical framework for Black ideas about justice, righteousness, and redemption, alongside material relations such as subsistence activities. Similar developmental trajectories are found among Thompson's (1971) eighteenth century English people and Gosner's (1992) Mayans.

Edward Brathwaite has argued that understanding Jamaica and its people requires analyzing the development of its religious, political, and economic institutions in relation to external influences, such as the American and the Black Haitian Revolutions. Out of this, he has argued, emerged a distinct integration of institutions and cultures he called Creole society (1971). Yet, plurality did not mean real integration, as groups tended to operate within the boundaries of ethnic and racial enclaves, despite sharing the same nation (cf. M.G. Smith, 1965). Moreover, despite the aim of the theory of Creolization to emphasize synthesis and the creation of a new society in the West, there is always the undercurrent that Blacks assimilate White culture and that Black culture has not maintained its own integrity. Chevannes has contributed to our knowledge of the origins of Rastafari by showing that their roots are of peasant ancestry (1989; 1994). I have engaged these perspectives but taken a path of my own. The essence of this part of my overall explanation is that the roots of Rastafarian identity grow out of slavery, indigenous Black religions, contrastive ideas of freedom and justice which girded many rebellions, a critical suspicion of gatekeepers, and the creation and defense of their moral economy.

OUTLINING THE BLACK MORAL ECONOMY

Slavery and struggles for freedom and against oppression left an indelible imprint upon the psyche and culture of Black Jamaicans, which continue through to the present. While this legacy is a common denominator of the Black experience in all former slave-holding societies of the New World, each nation's experience differs because of demographic, political, economic, geographic, and cultural factors. And then there is always random circumstance. Although several moral economies can be distinguished among Jamaica's Black population, the themes common to all are an unrelenting desire for freedom,

justice, righteousness, equality, self-rule, and social welfare. These ideals were especially directed toward the basic factors of subsistence—the need for land, food, and shelter. Why were the people so athirst for the rights and goods given sacred status in British political and economic ideology? Because these were patently denied to them under slavery, and only occasionally materialized under local rule, Crown government, and national independence. The inhumanity of slavery and the entrenched racial and class-based discriminatory practices it gave birth to compelled Black people to find ways to re-humanize themselves and to make a living. From the Sam Sharpe insurrection forward, this moral economy becomes clearer and more forceful, manifesting with undeniable conviction and seductive persuasiveness in the beliefs and culture of the Rastafarians. In between Sam Sharpe and the Rastafarians, we find efforts to forcefully implement this moral economy in the Morant Bay Rebellion, and efforts to extend or defend it in the development of Ethiopianism, the Great Revival, the Bedward Movement, and the great Labor Rebellion of 1938. There are many smaller, less noticeable efforts to augment or preserve the Black moral economy, but they are not chronicled here. The specificities of these “abstract” rights as they relate to the Rastafari are addressed in Part III.

This is not a study of the Black moral economy itself, but of its expressions, contours, and content. It is a counter-institution borne of necessity. Men like Sam Sharpe, Benjamin Vickers, Governor Darling, Paul Bogle, Alexander Bedward, Marcus Garvey, and Michael Manley understood the material and symbolic nature of the Black moral economy and knew how to tap into it to mobilize and organize people.

What are the core elements of a moral economy? E.P. Thompson (1971), James Scott (1976), and Kevin Gosner (1992:7) show that the foundation of a moral economy is rooted in a sense of justice, a common notion of what is good, and norms of reciprocity. These conceptions grow out of locally defined experiences of what is fair and acceptable, and how to deal with injustice within said framework. Whether an indigene, slave, or free person takes up arms, takes to the street in protest, or patiently waits for a God to intervene on his/her behalf depends on what local norms define as acceptable and unacceptable. The values and codes of conduct of a moral economy are expressed through myth, tradition, and religion. Hence, defense of the moral economy is a defense of community and religion (e.g., Gosner, 1992:10), which are often the bedrock of personal and group identity. Those who

do not consider the role of the moral economy in protests and rebellions may conclude that these actions of resistance are irrational and senseless.³ (see endnote three for background on how I came to apply the moral economy concept to Black Jamaicans).

For instance, to this day it is not clear why in 1915 American-educated Africa John Chilembwe led a poorly-mobilized revolt against White settlers in the Protectorate of Nyasaland, and why he and his followers killed only White men while not harming a single White woman or child. Chilembwe, an Ethiopianist who likened himself to the radical American abolitionist John Brown, is believed to have desired to purge Nyasaland of all Whites except those deemed to have skills useful to Africans. Chilembwe was tired of seeing his fellow Africans discriminated against, of paying taxes to Whites, and of being landless as a result of the colonial White presence. He desired to see the creation of "native state or theocracy" (Rotberg, 1971:137, 138).⁴ In Chilembwe's case, and similar situations examined in Jamaica, we find the following themes binding the Black moral economy: an end to racial oppression; freedom and justice; a hunger for land; an end to over-taxation; a sense of morality and righteousness steeped in Old Testament imagery, especially of the captivity and release of the Jews in Egypt who returned to their homeland.

As Anthony Wallace(1956) pointed out, stress alone is rarely enough to precipitate rebellion or provoke a millenarian or revitalization reaction. Wallace argues that indigenous groups manage stress as long as basic needs are met and that revitalization and millenarian movements are a reaction to disintegration of their social structure *and* an effort to regain an idealized past (1956). Wallace's account is consistent with Scott's (1976), Thompson's (1971), and Gosner's (1992), underlying arguments that rebellions are not a one-to-one reaction to exploitation. Local norms determine what constitutes a violation, what must be endured, and when indignation should take the form of protest (Scott, 1976:41).

Understanding the need of Black Jamaicans to maintain their moral economies, and the ruthless ways their efforts were frustrated or destroyed, goes a long way toward clarifying the numerous rebellions and the role religion has played in them. Insurrections, small and large, have played a great part in congealing and maintaining Black identity in Jamaica. Rebellions and protests disclosed what the oppressed define as rights (Thompson, 1971:98). Rebellions also furnish the conditions that enhance solidarity and shared experience and beliefs, even if only momentarily. Those who find themselves swept together against an indignity are

operating under a shared conception of justice and righteousness that must be different from the same embodied in the target(s) of protest. Though we focus on the major episodes, this does not mean the small-scale ones are unimportant.⁵ The rebellions that occurred between the mid-1700s and the present can be thought of as a chain of inter-related expressions of dissatisfaction with established authorities and institutions and an effort to defend or implement a moral economy.

In Jamaica, the Black moral economy finds its cardinal rules in the St. James version of the Bible, and later melds with Ethiopianism and Black nationalism. While moral economies emerge during British slavery, they gained substance through the values and practices of the peasants whose habits grow out of their experiences with their provision grounds under slavery and the post-slavery apprenticeship era. Monica Schuler portrays the scope of the work carried on by the slaves and their descendants: The

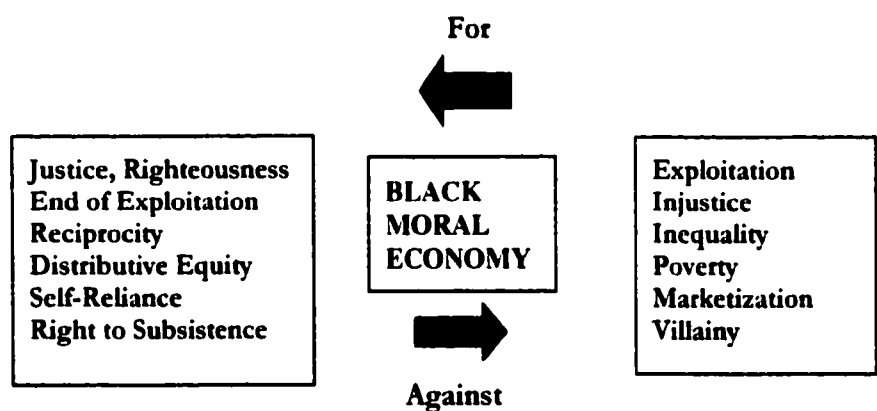
...most constructive and positive patterns of Afro-Jamaican response to emancipation had already been firmly established during the centuries of slavery—and not along the stereotypical lines of laziness, disorder, irresponsibility, and immorality either. These responses include establishment of the nuclear family household in a village environment...breeding livestock and cultivating provisions for family consumption and sale in weekly markets...preserving and acquiring skilled trades; reinterpreting African and Christian cosmology to fit the Jamaican experience; self-government through religious law and the establishment of their own law courts; discarding ethnic disunity in favor of pan-African solidarity; and maroonage, by which some, most notably the Maroons of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, withdrew from the plantations and successfully defended their freedom in the wilderness (1980:31).

To these, add the values and morals validating and sustaining their efforts.

The British promoted an abstract conception of values, rights, and justice grounded in Western civil and political theory. These abstractions easily accommodated injustice and inequality (slavery, reneging on promises, backlash reactions to rebellions and abolitionists, awareness of the acute poverty of slaves and free persons, restricting Black access to means of livelihood, etc). The Black moral economy is a vessel for an alternative set of social relations and interpretations of abstract conceptions of values and rights of Black Jamaicans. Thompson submits that the model of the English moral economy derived its legitimation from the “paternalist model” of English gatekeepers who recognized that the poor could disrupt the politico-economic system if their basic needs were not met, hence they set up

protective rules, even if they implemented them only during times of crisis (1971:95,98). In Jamaica, the slave codes required planters to provide minimal and basic necessities to slaves, such as provision grounds, housing, medical treatment, and at least one day of the weekend off. Yet, planters subverted or ignored these codes. But the slaves knew they were supposed to have these minimal rights, according to the White man's rules (Table 3.1). This is likely one source of the basic principles of the Black moral economy: a literal and tangible translation of the abstract Western ideas of truth, justice, righteousness, and later, redemption, that were not fairly applied to them. The slaves emphasized values and principles that contrasted with those of Whites and the market economy (see Figure 1), even though they used the same terms. This is not uncommon for Blacks under slavery and in the wake of freedom (e.g., Palmer, 1998).

FIGURE 3.1: An Abstraction of the Ideology and Structure of the Black Moral Economy in Jamaica



The formation of literal interpretations of abstract values and rights by Blacks in the West is unexceptionable once their experience is historically contextualized. Black ideas of freedom have been wider than those of Whites because their conception calls for freedom from domination and oppression, in addition to basic civil and political rights. Furthermore, freedom includes autonomy and independence, not only an absence of authoritarianism and emphasis on personal liberty to do as a person wishes. Political pursuit of these

comprehensive ideas of freedom often occurred through religious expression:

Black popular religion and different forms of struggle...demonstrate the vitality of an early Black radical tradition which expressed itself in anti-slavery revolts [really struggles for equality], and a vision which, while being influenced by political struggle in Europe...developed a liberation perspective of its own. As the issues of race continued in the twentieth century, the dynamic of the black liberation struggle in all its forms increasingly criss-crossed with Marxist theory (Bogues, 1997:70).

Robotham echoes this point by showing how religion was often the vehicle that ferried Black people in their quest for emancipation, especially in providing the foundation for a different moral order (1983:101). Likewise, Brathwaite noticed the political dimensions of how Black Jamaicans used religion to express protest and freedom, especially under slavery (1971:210, 211).

In sum, the Black moral economy is a configuration of institutions, values, relations, ideas, and symbols in which Blackness is a signifying element. As a system, it has rules, norms, and taboos, and does not depend upon the state for its maintenance. Its development and implementation has often drawn the ire and force of bourgeois and state agents. When it is threatened, it is defended, sometimes appearing as a defense of community or religion. During those moments when it is defended, the norms and relations that gird it are reinforced, although probably changed in the process. The Black moral economy is a cultural artifact because it is an adaptive mechanism that meets material and psychic needs of Black people continually negotiating exploitative arrangements. Some of the concrete aspects of the Black moral economy are listed in Table 3.1.

MORAL ECONOMY AND IDENTITY

Trevor Munroe has claimed that the Jamaican national personality is a complicated amalgamation of a “certain passivity, a capacity for long-suffering with an extraordinary aggressiveness, individual assertiveness and proneness to violence. Analysis which identifies one without the other is obviously deficient” (1990:13). Monroe’s observations highlight identity and social action, but beg asking, What is the material basis of the

TABLE 3.1: Components of the Black Moral Economy

The Black Moral Economy	Concrete Components
	Access to and ownership of land
	Fair and flexible taxes
	Access to means of subsistence: Food; reliable sources of employment; petty entrepreneurship; access to capital
	Justice in the courts
	Protection from police and army brutality

personality characteristics? Approaching the Black experience in Jamaica in terms of embeddedness in, or in relation to, a Black moral economy helps ground why Jamaicans can be both long suffering and prone to violence. To round out the delineation of a moral economy and why it is important to this study of Rastafarian identity and ideology, I sketch out a few identity-related considerations.

It is unlikely that any modern group can create an identity comprised of entirely new elements. They combine previously existing ideas, values, and cultural traditions in novel ways. Personal and group identity is more than a sense of self in relation to others; it has an ideological dimension. Values, morality, ethics, culture, ideas about group origin, and how the past is interpreted, are a part of identification. Ideology gives substance to identity by anchoring it in beliefs about the world. The genealogy of identity components can stretch far into the past, and studies of identity rarely approach a group’s contemporary identifications in relation to past events and processes. The processes and events that facilitate the emergence of a sense of morality, justice, equality, and ethics, that serve as an alternative blueprint for identity and social action must be specified. Marginalized groups intimately know injustice, inequality, and oppression; and they know that legal codes and abstract constitutional principles are unlikely to lead to immediate improvement in their condition. Where arrangements different from the dominant order are desired, they must first be sought in intimate relationships and conceptions of self. The Rastafarians used the past to

create a permutation of the Black moral economy that required donning a new self in addition to the innovative recombination and interpretation of existing ideas and traditions.

Group identity is forged through shared experience, and terrible experiences like slavery and institutionalized exploitation forge psychological bonds that perpetuate themselves. The treachery and brutality demonstrated by Whites and their collaborators reinforced the evolution of a Black identity, antithetical to Whiteness (and Brownness), and subtly nuanced to differentiate between a strong pro-Black orientation supportive of liberation, justice, and righteousness, and those Blacks who hold no allegiance to Blackness.

1655-1738: SLAVERY, BRITISH COLONIALISM, AND THE MAROON WARS

Smith, Augier, and Nettleford wrote that “Some brethren affirm that they personally and physically experienced the whips of slave-drivers. These hold the doctrine of reincarnation.... In this view, the Africans brought to Jamaica had our culture beaten out of us, our language, and all that our forefathers did. We reincarnate this culture through Almighty God Ras Tafari” (1960:24.). What they are pointing out is the Rastafarian view that his or her life in Jamaica is a continuation of the links to their African ancestors and a contemporary reaffirmation of the culture that was “beaten” out of their ancestors. Remembering slavery and its impact on the ancestors of Black people is a central dimension of Rastafarian identity and ideology. “Do you remember the days of Slavery?” asks the Rastafarian lyricist, Burning Spear. And consistent with the previous quote on Rastafarian ideas of “reincarnation,” Bob Marley and the Wailers, proclaimed how

Everytime I hear the crack of a whip
my blood runs cold
I remember on the slave ships
how they brutalized our very souls
today they say we are free
only to be chained in slavery.⁶

The Rastafarian moral economy enshrines freedom, justice, righteousness, equity, and redemption in ways that evoke their feelings about the moral economy of their ancestors, attempting to maintain a connection between old and new conventions.

Slavery is important to understanding Black Jamaican identity for two reasons. First, Black identity grew out of the institution of slavery because the “entire economic culture of the plantation system brought forth a new ethnicity among the slaves” (Robotham, 1994:28).

Early slavery brought together Africans of different tribal and linguistic groups, whose prior experience differed greatly. Slavery, for reasons which cannot be fully explored here, replaced a variety of ethnic experiences with newly shared, but traumatic, experiences: the Middle Passage; seasoning; occupational segregation into field and domestic slavery; bondage (cf. Brathwaite, 1971:205, 298; Craton, 1978:166); and all of the insecurities and injustices associated with these. Curtin (1955:26) and Craton (1978:166) claim that these agonizing experiences created bonds stronger than blood ties, and the relationships were passed on to subsequent generations. Instead of thinking of themselves in tribal terms, enslaved Africans and their descendants slowly came to call themselves Africans, and then Black (See Robotham, 1994:34-36; Drake, 1991). Curtin (1955:25) asserts that this process was widely established by the 1830s, while Craton (1978:157) suggests it was well underway by the third generation of slaves in Jamaica. Even though these estimates conflict, Drake neatly sums up what occurred, adding a dash of hyperbole:

Where individuals from the same tribe were placed together in New World work situations, the “tribe,” the ethnic group, provided one natural primordial base for binding men together—even though they were not kinsmen. Ethnic solidarity and a sense of ethnic identity persisted wherever it was not deliberately disrupted by the masters or was made impossible by the accident of extreme heterogeneity within a given group of slaves...from the beginning a new bond of solidarity is also apparent on the plantations, a supratribal bond, the tie between “shipmates,” the solidarity of those who defined themselves as “We who went through the ordeal of the Middle Passage together” (Drake 1991).

Second, Ethiopianism, which is synonymous with classical Black nationalism (Moses, 1978:16), grows directly out of Black people’s experiences during and after slavery. Ethiopianism is a core thread running through the history of Black ideology in Jamaica, and central to the ethos of the Rastafarians (Ethiopianism is discussed in detail in chapter 4). Ethiopianism and Black nationalism provide, respectively, religious and secular theoretically-oriented frameworks that have helped ideologically structure the Black moral economy.

Slavery and Early British Colonialism

The influence and role of Africans in developing a Black culture, identity, and moral economy in Jamaica was significant because of the large number of Africans imported into the Island between 1701 and 1810, and a new, but smaller wave that came after the 1830s.

The British, unlike the Spaniards who forced Africans and Native Americans to adopt Catholicism, had no such inclinations.⁷ As late as 1815, they had made no concerted effort to allow slaves to practice Christianity, nor to support missionary activities. For one, the rationalization of slavery depended upon a belief in the inferiority of Africans, especially their intellectual and moral inferiority. Another reason for not promoting religious training was the view that the slaves would become literate; and thinking slaves would become aware of the injustice of slavery, and seek to challenge it. The reluctance of the British and other Europeans to disseminate their religious beliefs facilitated the development of African-oriented folk religions. The newly enslaved Africans brought with them their own intellectual and religious traditions, and leaders in these areas helped lay the foundation for Jamaican folk religions. Afro-Jamaicans built new religious beliefs that combined what they remembered of their African traditions, and whatever they could glean from the Christian teachings. African religious leaders, according to some interpretations, became the foundation for the practices of Obeah, Myalism, and Kumina (e.g., Barrett, 1988:18), which will be discussed below.

The British, relying on slavery and plantation agriculture as a primary mode of wealth creation, imported thousands of slaves from West and Central Africa into their new colony. Jamaica was the “largest single importer of African slaves laborers [sic] in all British America” (Klein, 1978:141). Between 1601 and 1700, 8,500 slaves were imported into Jamaica, and another 662,000 between 1701 and 1810 (Curtin, 1969:268). Even though the British slave trade was ended in 1807, a significantly sizable generation of slaves who remembered Africa were alive in the 1830s, because of the large number imported between 1801 and 1807 (Curtin, 1955:24).⁸ Some of the youngest of this last batch of slaves may have been alive during the Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865.⁹ Thus, despite the diversity in language, religion, tribal affiliation, and regional origin, a pan-Black identity and culture is created by Africans and their offspring, something which has not happened in Africa. Most of the slaves imported into Jamaica originated in Nigeria, the Gold Coast, the Niger Delta, and to a lesser extent, the Congo and Angola. Generally, they were of Yoruba and Ibo ethnicity. Culturally speaking, the dominant group of slaves were the Twi-speaking Akan peoples. They are erroneously called Coromantees, indicating ethnicity instead of the village Kromantsi, near a major British slave fort.¹⁰ According to Craton, slavers stereotyped

“Coromantines” (the spelling varies widely) as hardy and resourceful, but prone to rebellion. According to Barrett, the Ashanti (really a coalition of chiefdoms, not an ethnicity) influence greatly prevailed upon the development of Jamaican folk religions like Kumina, the term being a combination of two Twi words, “Akom” (to be possessed) and “Ana” (by an ancestor) (1988:17). However, this interpretation conflicts with that of Schuler, who lays the development of Kumina with groups from the Congo (1980).

The African influence was reinvigorated during the mid 1800s when African indentured laborers came to Jamaica. These Africans came from various places and differing ethnicities, but the Yoruba and the people from Central Africa were dominant among them (Schuler, 1980). Again, the significance here is that out of many ethnicities and a large number enslaved Africans, a pan-Black identity is created.

The Maroon Wars: Early Formulations of the Black Moral Economy

The Maroons provide some of the earliest cues to the development of a Black moral economy. Their pantheon of heroes are freedom fighters, although many Jamaicans are ambivalent toward them because of their legacy of stymying other Blacks from implementing or expanding the Black moral economy. They gained their freedom long before Haiti’s Black Jacobins, generating a moral economy that embraced concerns important to other Jamaicans, such as freedom, autonomy and self-reliance; but they made some far-reaching compromises in order to win their self-direction. Many of their Black contemporaries found intolerable the Maroon exemplification of selfishness because they sacrificed the struggle of the larger collective against oppression in exchange for their own security. As one observer remarked, “Maroons became the natural friends of the whites and the enemies of their own race, a distinction which they jealously guard today. They look upon the alliance as a distinct pledge of superiority over the other negroes....” (Beckwith, 1969:184).

Some scholars argue that British runaway slaves originated among West African warriors skilled in warfare, mainly the Akan peoples.¹¹ They became an integral part of the Maroon leadership (Dallas, 1968:29; Barrett, 1988:31). Techniques that are now seen as classical guerilla strategies,¹² such as use of leaf camouflage, surprise attacks from above, and use of booby traps, kept the rigid British military off guard.¹³ Even though they worked with

Whites to suppress the pursuit of freedom by their fellow Blacks, an early observer commented how they held a “deadly hatred” toward White people (Dallas, 1968:73).

The earliest slaves in Jamaica escaped the Spaniards and were led by Juan de Bolas, who in 1663 was made a Colonel by the British as a strategy to appease them. De Bolas was then sent to his people to negotiate for peace.¹⁴ Such bait-and-catch tactics¹⁵ were often used by the British, and according to Barrett, de Bolas’s people recognized the ploy as a plot aimed at suppressing them and proceeded to cut their “Colonel” into bits (1988:31). The most famous Maroons were a family of Ashantis—Cudjoe, Johnny, Accompong, Cofi, and Quaco,¹⁶ whose territory mainly encompassed northern and southern Jamaica.¹⁷ On the eastern part of the island, Maroons were led by the stouthearted warrioress, Nanny, now the only female Jamaican national heroine (named so in 1975). The fact that many of the Maroons came from the same region of Africa assisted in their communication, tribal differences notwithstanding.¹⁸ Twi, the language of the Ashantis, was likely the lingua franca in early Maroon communities.¹⁹

The English, wearied by nearly 50 years of battle, offered the Maroons a peace treaty on March 1, 1738. While the treaty promised the Maroons freedom, the concessions had negative long-range ramifications for Maroon-slave relations. Examination of a few articles of the treaty should make clear why some Jamaicans hold ambivalent attitudes toward the Maroons, and how it challenged the implementation of the Black moral economy.

First, the British agreed to end hostilities forever. They then granted Cudjoe and his “staff” a “perfect state of freedom and liberty” and eternal control over a marginal 1500 acres of the inhospitable Cockpit country. After further circumscribing the ability of Maroons to freely hunt and roam, the British divide-and-conquer strategy was revealed:

...that the said Captain Cudjoe, and his successors, do use their best endeavors to take, kill, suppress, or destroy, either by themselves, or jointly with any other number of men...all rebels wheresoever they be...unless they submit to the same terms of accommodation granted to Captain Cudjoe....” (quoted in Barrett, 1988:34-35) and “...if any negroes shall hereafter run away from their masters or owners, and fall in Captain Cudjoe’s hands, they shall immediately be sent back to the chief magistrate...and those that bring them are to be satisfied for their trouble, as the legislature shall appoint (Quoted in Barrett, 1988:35).

The freedom-fighting Maroons had been made into mercenaries responsible for denying other Blacks for that which they had fought. This is remembered by many up to the

present.²⁰ One African descendant remembered how “The Maroon[s] sell out a part of the African that they may [be] free” (Schuler, 1980:68). The Maroons interceded in several slave uprisings, and may have been decisive in quelling the Tacky, Sam Sharpe, and Morant Bay rebellions. The Maroons were working against the moral economies of other Jamaicans by protecting their own and Britain’s self-interests.

On the other hand, the Maroons resented Africans and Afro-Jamaicans, especially those who refused to fight with Nanny and, instead, remained slaves. Nanny continued to direct guerilla campaigns for a year after the peace treaty. In 1795, the Trelawny Maroons entered into war again with the British, eventually losing after a protracted and mettlesome engagement. The losers were shipped to Nova Scotia (where many died during their first winter), and later to Sierra Leone.

The Maroons give example to early formulations of the Black moral economy, particularly their defense of freedom (autonomy and independence). They risked all to fight their oppressors, as Ras Mas pointed out in the epigram of the Introduction. Still, they chose to protect their interests against those other slaves who had the same aspirations.

1738-1865: THE CONSOLIDATION OF BLACK RELIGIOUS, CULTURAL, AND SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS: RELIGION, REBELLION, AND THE FORMATION OF THE PEASANTRY

By the time of the Tacky²¹ Rebellion in 1760, rebellion and religion were clearly linked. Religion offered the slaves “solace and catharsis” (Craton, 1978:192) and a framework for action. Although Christianity had little influence among the slaves during Tachi’s (aka Tacky) time, African religious beliefs were central to the cornerstone of the Black moral economy.

Tachi, from the territory presently known as Ghana, supported by accompanying Ashanti slaves, led an uprising in St. Mary’s parish that spread to other parishes. Tacky, according to one account, was one of several “Myal-men” (e.g., shaman-sorcerer) who were ringleaders in the uprising (Alleyne, 1989:83; cf. Beckwith, 1969:143). Sixty White people were killed. This confrontation set the stage for the outcomes of several uprisings. After the rebellion was stanchd by the Militia, Maroons were used to hunt down Tacky and his followers. Many captured slaves were killed and around 600 were deported to Central

America.

Given the experience of the slaves, it is unobjectionable that the Black moral economy expressed concerns related to subsistence, freedom, justice, righteousness, and redemption. British morality easily rationalized slavery as a practical and beneficial institution. For instance, slave codes required slave owners to meet the basic needs of slaves: clothing, housing, medical treatment, and food. Regardless, policy implementation was far from humane and generous. Slavers spent as little as possible to maintain the upkeep of their slaves. Children sometimes went naked, and it was not uncommon for adults to go nearly unclothed, or clothed only in rags. Only the coarsest materials were available to construct housing, and meals were nearly always some combination of yams, plantains, or potatoes, and these the slaves themselves supplied. The slaves would be doing well to get a bit of salt mackerel to “season” their starchy diet.

The Consolidated Slave Act of Jamaica of 1793 mandated slave owners to teach the slaves Christianity and to baptize them, but they did not heed this law. It was not long before the disobedience of slavers became law. The Consolidated Slave Act of 1816 forbade slaves attendance at places of worship, as well as practice of religion in their own homes (without a special license from a Magistrate [see Phillippo, 1971:161]). According to Phillippo, in 1800 there were only 20 churches on the entire island, while there were 400,000 registered inhabitants (1971:276). Given the late formal²² influence of Christianity upon the religious practices of Black Jamaicans, it is important to examine some of these cultural and spiritual expressions, focusing on those of relevance to the early Rastafarians.

Blackness, Early Religions, & the Development of Religions Traditions

The prominence given to the use of drums, the attention paid to ancestors, the use of plants and spirits to heal, the power of spirits to intervene in worldly affairs, a present and not “hereafter” orientation to the world, and the centrality of dancing and singing in a range of social activities, show the influence of African traditions in Black Jamaican religion.²³ There is a range of these African-influenced religious expressions in Jamaican and throughout the Caribbean. These groups too have characteristics that make the ideal of a Black moral economy consistent with their experience and history.

Myalism, of Akan-Ashanti origin, was the earliest form of religious association

among slaves in Jamaica. Myal means “being in a state of possession” (Barrett, 1988:18). Myalism involves religious practices centered around controlling spirits, spirit possession, and the use of these and herbs for healing purposes.²⁴ Myalists believed that misfortune was the result of evil forces, and their religion provided a means of combating it. Myalists, like many African slaves, thought the West to be the land of the dead, because one had to cross a great watery expanse to reach it. They also thought Whites to be sorcerers since they lived in the land of the dead (Schuler, 1980:93-96). Myalists believed they could use their power and knowledge to become invincible against Whites. Myalism also served as a means of social control by keeping in line those who put their self-interest and well-being before that of the group (Schuler, 1980:33). Myalists protected the well-being of their people, and contributed to “creating an ideology around which organization and broader (but still narrow) ties could be built” (Robotham, 1994:35). It is comparable to the West African secret societies, where its origins likely lie.

Obeah is a Caribbeanized form of sorcery that grew out of the power and knowledge of African religious leaders. It can be applied toward selfish or hurtful ends; but during slavery, its main function was to bring misfortune, or even death, to Whites and the slaves devoted to them. The term has its origins in the Ashanti word for sorcerer, “Obayifo.” Obeah is practiced by Obeahmen and Obeahwomen who, drawing upon enduring lore and knowledge of the properties of various plants, animals, and spirits, cast spells that supposedly affect things as diverse as sexual stamina, infidelity, and the well-being of an adversary. Obeah “workers” can also be Myal-men and Myal-women (Alleyne, 1989:84), although the two social roles are not functionally identical. Myalism could be used against Obeah, as one of its purposes was to defeat evil spirits²⁵ (Henriques, 1953:85). Another purpose was to make slaves invincible during revolts. Acceptance of Myalism by slaves was made easier because of the belief that it provided “resistance to the cruelties of the White planter class” (Jamaica Information Service, 1997:28).

By the late 1700s a Black/Ethiopianist Baptist version of Christianity had infiltrated Myalism; and two different religious practices grew out of it: Kumina and Convince. As discussed in the previous chapter, only parts of Christianity were incorporated into these Black religions, mainly those that resonated with their existing beliefs and experiences. One of the rituals of Myalism involved an intense dance called Kumina. The name of the Myal

dance eventually came to be associated with an entire ritual complex. Kumina literally means possession by the ancestors. It consists of a set of religious rituals associated with special occasions and rites of passage (e.g., marriage, sickness, death). Kumina services have a distinctive and ritualized style of drumming and dancing. The drums inspire dancing and the drums inspire spirit possession and speaking in “tongues.” Pukumina, which emerges later, is a more “Christianized” version of Kumina.

The major Anglo (conformist) religious influence of eighteenth century Jamaica was the Church of England (Anglican).²⁶ Many slaves were not interested in mainstream White religions because they differed so greatly from their beliefs and practices. It was the non-conformist missionaries who had the greatest early impact upon the slaves. A few Moravian, Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian missionaries began their work as early as 1734 (the Moravians), but it was the Baptists who had the greatest success at converting slaves and free Blacks. The Methodists, however, were especially concerned with the plight of slaves and free Blacks, and preached a basic message of human equality. The missionaries were the only ones who showed interest in the slaves, albeit driven by their propagandized self-interests—that of spreading the Christian message and “civilizing” the slaves—although some were humanists who wanted slavery abolished. But even the abolition-minded missionaries found it nearly impossible to execute their goals before the Sam Sharpe/Christmas Rebellion drew international attention to British slavery. Planters and merchants fought obstinately against teaching Christianity to slaves, fearing it would lead to the abolition of slavery. And most missionaries were not resolved to reconciling the conflict between the justice and righteousness commanded by their Bible and the injustice and inhumanity of slavery (Turner, 1982).

In 1783, George Lisle (or Leile), a former slave and preacher,²⁷ accompanied his Tory master from America to Jamaica, where he founded the Ethiopian Baptist Church in Kingston. It was the first Black Baptist church in the island. Myalists became involved in the “new” Black churches, facilitating syncretism.²⁸ Two other ex-slaves from America had a great impact upon the development of creole Native Baptist Christianity among Blacks. Moses Baker, from New York, had, by 1814, developed a congregation of 500 in St. James and claimed more than 3,000 adherents throughout the island (Braithwaite, 1971:163). George Lewis, of Virginia, became a traveling preacher who sowed his brand of Baptist

teaching throughout Jamaica. These native Baptist churches and teachings were a mix of the ex-slaves' interpretations of Christianity and the indigenous religious practices of Jamaica's Black people. Their Ethiopianism (the idea of redemption being a prime element) was transplanted to Jamaica. It is likely that Lisle and subsequent Black preachers from America carried Ethiopianism to Jamaica. Ethiopianism was influential in the teachings of African religious and lay leaders in the United States.

Race, Religion, Justice, and the Sam Sharpe Uprising

Sam Sharpe, in 1831, set off a serious rebellion that facilitated Britain's granting of emancipation to slaves. This rebellion is known as the "Baptist War" and the "Christmas Rebellion." Schuler argues that the uprising should be called the Myalist War, instead of Baptist, because Myalism was such a strong force at the time (1980:34). Sharpe, now a national hero, is a martyr to Rastafarians, who emphasize how he died while fighting for freedom and justice—"righteousness," in their terms. It is in the Sharpe uprising that the confluence of Black identity and religion with ideas about social justice and social action becomes unquestionable.

Sharpe was a slave who had been converted to Baptist Christianity, either to the London missionary branch or Native Baptist denomination (the Native Baptists played a prominent part in the insurrection). While the extent of Sharpe's literacy is not known, his use of Biblical metaphors and his charismatic oratorical skills commanded considerable respect among the slaves. The ethics and morals driving Sharpe's sense of righteousness and justice were impeccable: "The Whites had no more right to enslave the blacks than the blacks to enslave the Whites."²⁹ Under the guise of having prayer meetings (in the home of his unsuspecting master, illustrating why the British were not inclined to Christianize their slaves), Sharpe plotted an uprising that involved slaves on several nearby plantations. It appears that the rebellion was the result of a loose coalition of slave groups on different plantations and under different leadership (Curtin, 1955:85). Barrett argues that Sharpe believed, and led other slaves to believe, that the Crown had already dispensed their "free papers" and that the Jamaican colonials were withholding this information (1988:43; cf. Knox, 1962:40). Sharpe turned this rumor into a message of prophetic proportions, and rallied the slaves to fight for their freedom because God was on their side. A deliberative

body of slaves agreed to not return to work after Christmas; and on December 26, 1831, they went on strike. The signal for the rebellion to begin was the burning of a property on a hill-situated plantation called Kensington, located near Montego Bay. Some believe that Sharpe envisioned a non-violent confrontation, but his peers were not inclined toward pacifism (see Barrett, 1988:45). More than 100 estates were set ablaze. The battle raged between December 28, 1831, and January 5, 1832.

White Planters immediately assembled their militia, but did not advance straightaway toward the rioting slaves. It was a company of Black soldiers who assisted the traumatized White militia, and made the pivotal difference in the outcome of the confrontation (Barrett, 1988:47). Although less than a thousand slaves took part in the initial showdown, after a couple of days as many as 50,000 had joined the disturbance.³⁰

The Governor called for martial law and sent out several regiments of British troops to drive back the slaves. Using their devious bait-and-catch strategy, the commander of the regiments offered a pardon to all who would lay down arms and return to their owners. Barrett believes that the offering of the pardon reinforced the slaves' belief that their freedom was at hand and reports how some slaves greeted British soldiers in a state of hilarity (1988:38). However, many of the slaves who returned to their "owners" were killed or mercilessly beaten, to set an example to those who might consider rebelling. Those slaves who fled to the mountains were searched out and killed by Maroons, who brought back the ears of their victims as proof of their accomplishments (Barrett, 1988:49). Fourteen Whites were killed, but 312 slaves were hanged and more than 1,000 killed in other ways, including by firing squad and whipping.³¹ Sam Sharpe was among the last to be put to death, at Montego Bay, May 23, 1832.

An Emancipation Bill was introduced in Parliament in 1833, and two years after Sharpe's death, on August 1, 1834, full emancipation was granted by the Crown to Jamaican slaves. Sharpe, and all those who took up arms in December 1831, remain symbols of the struggle for liberation, self-determination, and righteousness.

The Moral Economy of Apprenticeship and the Peasantry: Land, Autonomy, & Self-Reliance

Emancipation raised the hopes of the former slaves, while it absolved the planters of

what little responsibility they had. Freedom, as the former slaves broadly envisioned it, had finally arrived. But relatively positive developments, such as the rise of the free village system, were overshadowed by a spreading sense that despite no longer being slaves, they were still oppressed. Dissatisfaction with the lack of justice, religious autonomy, and economic opportunity was repeatedly expressed through rebellion and the perpetuation of alternative social institutions, such as Black courts. By the 1860s, many Blacks viewed the legal and political system as bankrupt, being entirely devoted to maintaining the interests of elites. Black identity was continually reinforced as distinct and separate by the country's political, economic, and religious structures.

In 1834, before emancipation, there were 311,070 slaves, plus another 2,000 or so who were not formally counted, according to one census (Hall, n.d.:6; cf. Eisner, 1961:130). Legally, emancipation conferred full civil rights upon the slaves, but in practice, other rules, such as minimum property requirements, prevented their participation in mainstream civic and political activities. Only children under the age of six were "full free" (fully free). The former slaves thought emancipation meant "full free," but soon realized the White planters would not easily relinquish control. Despite the 20 million pounds³² in compensation paid to British planters for investment and revenue lost because of the abolishment of slavery, the Whites created a new slavery that did not need chains: apprenticeship. The Whites argued that there was a need for a period of adjustment. They would have to learn how to relate to free Blacks and former slaves would need time to learn what freedom entailed, such as working for a wage. Hence, for a period of six years after slavery, apprentices were required to work for their former masters for 40.5 hours each week, from sunrise to sunset. Once the ex-slaves put in their mandatory time, they could then withhold their labor or demand payment for it. They were working for free during the most productive hours of the day. To make matters worse, the wages paid after compulsory work was not enough to live on, and property owners began to demand rent for the same land the former slaves worked and lived on for free, especially if they worked for someone other than their former owner(s).³³ Many ex-slaves believed apprenticeship to be a new type of slavery (Knox, 1062:75).

Of the more than 300,000 slaves in early 1834, fewer than 15,000 were skilled tradesmen (Hall, n.d.:7). Free Blacks often could not afford to pay their rents and few of them learned new skills since demand for tradesmen was limited by the homogeneity of the

economy. Apprenticeship was a bald failure and was inopportune ended in 1838. True to their radical potential, more than 2000 free Blacks in St. James and St. Mary parishes met at the Salters Hill Baptist Church in 1841 and organized a strike in reaction to the planters move to reduce wages by 50 percent (Wilmot, 1997:5). The planters were indebted and trying to pass on the losses incurred as a result of the weak British sugar market.³⁴ Such assertion by Jamaican Blacks almost always had policy consequences. In this case, it spurred planters to explore immigrants as a source of cheap labor and as a means of keeping wages low. Starting in 1834, up through 1865, nearly 25,000 immigrant workers were brought to Jamaica (Wilmot, 1997:4). At this point, most were Africans (11,380), followed by Indians (9,195), Europeans (3,890), and Chinese (464) (Wilmot, 1997:4; Eisner 1961:142-145). The White immigrants (mainly Scots, Irish, and Germans) were initially seen as a way to increase the White presence in the island and to populate the interior and keep the land from Blacks. But the scheme failed, as many became sick as a result of the climate. Even so, the planter strategy worked in that it drove down the bargaining power of Black labor.

Subsistence, Land, Self Reliance, Autonomy, & Efforts to Quash the Black Moral Economy

An act passed in 1678 required estates to supply at least one acre of land for every five slaves to plant in provisions (Brathwaite, 1971:133). The slaves planted small gardens and raised poultry and livestock, sometimes near their dwellings. Tending the provision grounds under slavery was the only time most slaves were able to get away from the overseer and plantation drudgery. Saturday afternoons and Sundays were the only days most plantation owners gave the slaves time off. Unintentionally, the provision ground experience prepared them for adaptation to emancipation in ways apprenticeship never could. The provision grounds augmented the slave's poor diet, and sometimes provided a surplus that could be sold in the local markets.³⁵ It instilled in them the value(s) of autonomy, self-reliance, and the importance of land ownership.

By the time the slaves were emancipated in 1834, they were well on their way to developing a small-holding tradition. As slaves, some were even able to purchase the land they used. Emancipation fostered the already existing desire of the former slaves to be independent—to be their own masters.³⁶ The ex-slaves and their descendants developed a

strong sense of independence and autonomy, in addition to tendencies associated with peasants the world over: conservativeness, a love of the land, “reverence for nature,” “restraint on individual self-seeking in favor of family and community,” and a belief that agricultural labor is naturally positive (see Lewis, 1964:xxxii). These are values we find prominent among early Rastafarians, many of whom were of rural origins (Chevannes, 1989; 1994). However, the government did not encourage the growth of an independent peasantry, despite the support it would have given to the domestic economy, lessening dependence on imported foods. The planters did not readily accept the emergent peasantry because it created a labor shortage for them, and it lessened the effectiveness of one of their avenues to controlling the activities of free Black people.¹⁷

In 1841-42, there was an eruption of Myalism that lead church and government officials to try and suppress it by fining practitioners, imprisoning its leaders, and then outlawing African-based religious practices (Knox, 1962:133).³⁸ The action fostered Black religious identity by stigmatizing practitioners and making them more aware of themselves as a distinct and oppressed group.³⁹ The overwrought reaction to Myalism may have been one of the root causes of the John Canoe Christmas Riots of 1842 (John Canoe is an African-influenced parade-festival)⁴⁰ and the racially-charged political power struggle playing out in the Kingston Common Council around 1840-42 (Wilmot, 1990).⁴¹

By 1860, the planters had devised many means for not paying peasants for what little employment existed (the sugar industry was in decline), such as “stopping wages.” This meant that a manager had found some fault with the work already done, and refused to pay the laborer for his or her labor (Holt, 1992:265). Black peasants found themselves in a predicament. There was not enough work to live off wages alone; and the wages paid were abysmally low, despite claims from planters that they paid too much. Besides, there was not enough arable land to meet their needs and desires; and squatters were being abusively treated. As Holt argues, the planters explained this bind in Victorian racial terms where

...black workers, or rather nonworkers, became the villains of the piece. By mid-century, the logic ran as follows: Blacks refuse to work on the sugar estates as needed and at wages the planters feel they can afford to pay. Ergo, Blacks will not work on the sugar estates. Ergo, blacks will not work. By this logical legerdemain, what the freed [Black] valued as the attainment of some measure of autonomy...market gardening—came to be labeled simply as “laziness.” Working when, where, and as they chose became “They will not work.” The defect was racial. Blacks somehow

were missing that drive for material self-improvement innate in Europeans....Having failed to master themselves, they must have masters (1992:280).

The post-emancipation development that was probably most important to newly-freed Blacks was the creation of free villages. Initially, churches played a central role in this process. It was the non-conformist churches, especially the Baptists (followed by Methodists and Presbyterians), who spearheaded the undertaking. The free villages were “planned communities” where White missionaries bought large tracts of land which were subdivided into smaller plots and sold to Black church members (White planters often refused to sell small tracts because they knew Blacks would buy them). Although the efforts make the missionaries appear altruistic, they were trying to ensure that the free Blacks physically remained near their churches, which would allow them to more efficiently carry out their missionary activities. Like their White counterparts in America, White non-conformists in Jamaica saw their role as a civilizing one, that of bringing God to the godless. Some believed in Providential design, which holds that slavery was a part of God’s master plan. Through slavery, Africans would absorb the superior morality, ethics, education, and religion of Whites, and then return to Africa to enlighten their kinspeople.

Regardless of the motives of the Whites, the newly freed people saw an opportunity to fulfill their dreams of owning land and becoming independent. Sligoville, the first free village, was founded by a Baptist minister just outside of Spanish Town (the former capital city of Jamaica, in St. Catherine’s Parish). Between March 12 and August 1, 1838, 21 free Black families, including three female purchasers, acquired their own property. By 1842, all 150 lots had been sold (Wilmot, 1997:6,7). This became a trend.⁴² Freedpeople were hungry for land and autonomy. Self-reliance was the theme. These free towns became the root of Jamaica’s domestic, market-based economy, providing households and market consumers with goods like cocoa, mangoes, breadfruit, tobacco, pimento, coffee, banana, ginger, root crops, and cane. The centerpiece of the peasant economy was the provision ground, a survival from slavery times that manifested throughout the Americas.⁴³

The poor and “middle” peasants relied upon family labor, pooling of resources and labor, and reciprocity, all being social behaviors antithetical to capitalist market expansion. The poor peasant was likely to be a subsistence farmer, barely eking out an existence from season to season. Some peasants became better off than others—Jamaican Kulaks, if you

will—especially those who had larger land holdings.

At least part of the anti-capitalist tendencies expressed by the Rastafarians may have their roots in the slow spread of capitalist social relations from the apprenticeship era through the early twentieth century, although there are more immediate factors. The main impediment to the widespread entrenchment of capitalism was the foundering of Jamaica's major industry, sugar, around the same time that the free Blacks were trying to break off their dependence on the planters. Competition from foreign sugar producers (Cuba, Brazil, Louisiana) was a primary problem, as was the introduction of the sugar beet in Europe. In 1836, there were 670 sugar estates in Jamaica; twenty-nine years later, more than half of them no longer existed, their number dwindling to 300 (Post, 1978:30). Accordingly, sugar as a share of exports and national and local revenue declined from nearly 60 percent of exports in 1832 to less than 15 percent in 1890 (Post, 1978:31). With the decline of the sugar industry came the waning of the political and economic influence of the planter class that had ruled Jamaica since the slavery era and the hegemony of the sugar industry. Such extreme economic shifts are normal in the long-run for capitalism and tend to facilitate the emergence of new industries and technologies, although such transformations bestow misery upon the citizenry. The peasantry and poor are exceedingly vulnerable to the negative impacts of these changes, and their moral economies may be unable to withstand these inexorable forces. Marketization and the oscillations of capitalism are often root causes of the defense of a moral economy.

According to Ken Post, the northeast part of Jamaica has been the “most important area of the development of the Jamaican peasantry because of the emergence of the banana from the 1870s onward as a crop which could support small-scale enterprise” (1978:124). The peasant desire for individual proprietorship was continually thwarted by the low prices paid for agricultural goods on the local and world markets, high prices for equipment, and the vagaries of poor soil, unpredictable weather, and disease. The peasant toiled as he marched to his and her own drum, and most were kept at the subsistence level.⁴⁴

The declining sugar industry was superseded by banana and cattle production. Unlike sugar, these industries required little machinery, thereby limiting the development of industrial capital, although large banana enterprises like United Fruit were on the island.⁴⁵ These kinds of industries reduced the opportunity for Black Jamaicans to become skilled

laborers of the kind that go with heavy industry. Between the end of apprenticeship and 1865, wages earned by estate labor declined (Hall, n.d.:8), adding distress to general politico-economic listlessness. During the same period, prices paid for market crops remained low, British import duties increased rising prices, and unemployment rose as sugar estates closed. Skilled craftsmen found themselves competing for work against their less-skilled prentices, further driving down wages; barbering, carpentry, tailoring, masonry, and domestic work are examples of trades invaded by the less- and unskilled. Peasants and merchants were not making money, there was great competition for the few wage jobs, and capital equipment and other goods were expensive since they had to be imported. Essential imports included fabrics like osnaburgh (a coarse linen), cotton, flour, cornmeal, and salt pork and cod (these foodstuffs could easily have been domestically produced by smallholders). Times were rough:

The proprietary and the peasantry alike are suffering...Merchants and store-keepers state that their trade has fallen off, that they are unable to collect debts; and that the people generally cannot purchase clothing and food as in former days...Small tradesmen and others in towns are reduced to deep poverty and suffering (Hall, n.d.:12).

The main safety valve for these social tensions was emigration. Five thousand Jamaicans went to Panama between 1850 and 1855 to take railroad construction jobs (Hall, n.d.:15). A second wave of emigration to Panama to work on the Canal occurred during the 1880s. Another exodus occurred at the turn of the twentieth century, to Panama and Costa Rica, and between 1916 and 1920 to Cuba (Eisner, 1961:148). An undetermined number of Jamaicans took jobs on ships. Some of the returnees were able to use their savings to purchase homesteads, but a significant number became destitute abroad and had to be repatriated home by the government. Besides alleviating social tension, emigration brought Jamaicans into contact with different cultures, experiences, literature, and ideologies, the latter two often returning with the sojourners to Jamaica, mixing with extant traditions and ideologies. This international experience would later be something shared by several of the founding Rastafarians. Winston convincingly demonstrates how the experience of Caribbean people abroad in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is correlated with an upsurge in Caribbean radicalism (1998).

Moral Reform & Blackness: The Great Revival

During 1860 and 1861, a wave of religious fervor swept across Jamaica (and the United States). Thousands of former slaves were transformed—literally overnight—into zealous spiritualists, flocking to churches in a manner suggestive of fanaticism. The Great Revival was a “supreme spiritual effort to launch a reform of the society by purely moral means” (Robotham, 1983:103); but the mixture of low wages, unemployment, high prices, poor weather, pestilence, poverty, and perpetuation of class and racial boundaries did not allow the new moral order to sink in. By the middle of 1862, the fervor had subsided. Its brevity notwithstanding, the Great Revival was in sync popular with struggles for freedom and equality—that ever-recurrent exertion to spiritually and ethically reform Jamaican society.

In Jamaica, the Great Revival facilitated the full-fledged emergence of African-influenced Christian churches and the religious movement called Revival Religion. At least three Afro-Christian sects are a part of Revivalism: Pukumina, Revival, and Revival Zion. Pukumina (like Kumina) has the most obvious African-derived rituals. Revival exhibits African-derived and Christian tendencies. And Revival Zion most closely parallels mainstream Christian rituals. Even with the unmistakable African-derived rituals, members of these churches see themselves as regular Christians, although mainstream Church goers find them quaint.

With the exception of Revivalism, most of the indigenous traditions tended not to have an overarching dogma, no tight central control over beliefs and practices. Local priests were noticeable community residents (although sometimes authoritarian) and various local forms of organization and practice co-existed. Quite a few of these characteristics are found among first and second generation Rastafarians.

SUMMARY

Under slavery, Africans created a foundation for a mix of alternative ideas, practices, and institutions. These included values and morals that turned European terms like freedom and justice on their heads. Moreover, these were a core set of ideas—justice, righteousness, freedom, self-reliance, and so on—which were subsequently developed by the offspring of the slaves. These interlocked racial and religious ideas, institutions, and relations have been described as a Black moral economy. It was also under slavery that the basis for a generic

Black identity emerged. The Black moral economy and the ideas that support it have been reinforced by the shared experiences of uprisings, reprisals, dashed hopes, marginalization, and a strong desire for better. But this is only the beginning.

In 1865, Jamaicans experienced a profound watershed that indelibly etched itself into the consciousness of Black Jamaicans. Paul Bogle, a Black preacher, spearheaded an insurrection in the eastern part of the island. Examination of this rebellion is instructive, because, as we shall see, even while the Black populace was suffering numerous adversities, an indignant moralism and radicalism had developed; and it was expressed in racial terms. The themes and ideas expressed during the Bogle uprising continued to live on beyond the revolt, eventuating in the rhetoric of the early Rastafarians. The Morant Bay Rebellion and other milestones in the experience of Black people and the development of their identity is continued in the next chapter.

ENDNOTES

1. I acknowledge the great diversity amongst the people we call British is obscured when we call them such. They have political division—Labour, Tory, radical, etc. There is ethnic division, as instanced by the Welsh, Scottish, and English. During the period being examined in this chapter there were planters, financiers, politicians, lawyers, and workers. Their religionists were far from harmonious the Anglicans, Catholics, Protestants, and so on. By British I mean mainly planters, financiers, slavers, politicians, and those others needed to support the edifice of slavery. When I step outside of this I will be specific, as when talking about missionaries, for example.

2. I define a watershed event as a decisive occurrence that changes people's awareness of themselves and the world around them, and which may precipitate cultural and institutional change. This is important since institutions and culture tend to be conservative and slow to change. Certain watershed episodes have provided the templates and material that form the basis of the ideology of Rastafari, and inspires the general national consciousness

3. The idea of Black moral economy is rooted in my experience and analysis of the 1998 Zeeks rebellion. This was a three-day uprising that was caused by policemen who clumsily apprehended a local area Don named Zeeks. The police wanted to question him about his knowledge of some area homicides. The people of Zeeks's community assumed the police had nabbed him in order to kill him. This they would not have since Dons like Zeek provide many services to the community that the state does not, such as clothing and books for school children, and weekend and holiday celebrations. Hence, residents of poor communities defend their Dons even though most are involved in illegal activities. Within hours of Zeeks's arrest more than 1000 people had assembled in front of the Central police office on East Queen Street, many vocally demanding the release of Zeeks. In order to placate what had become a mob, the police brought Zeeks out onto a balcony and gave him a megaphone to tell the crowd he was OK. When Zeeks waved his hand he received a thunderous ovation. However, the police did not release Zeeks as the crowd demanded, and the rioting and looting began on one side, while heavy-handed police repression incited the crowd on the other. The merchants knew the score: Close the shops and head for the hills. Within hours of Zeeks arrest downtown Kingston was nearly deserted as experienced protestors had set up blazing road blocks, set cars and garbage cans ablaze, and armed local gangs took control of the streets. The Dons and their henchmen are typically well-armed and provide threatening challenges to the police and army. I spent the better part of the riots inconspicuously watching what was happening and listening to what people were saying. The poor people of Downtown Kingston were fed-up with police brutality, feckless politicians, and of being ignored by nearly everyone. They framed their grievances in terms of injustice. They clearly felt some norm had been violated; one mainspring of community access to resources and favors had been threatened. Despite the media and pundit analyses of the streets being commandeered by criminal gangs, there was an unmistakable and striking moral quality to the rhetoric I heard on the streets and in various yards. It was then I first realized that protest in Jamaica often carried a moral quality, and that violation of tacit norms can trigger protest. Subsequent large-scale uprisings in April 1999 and June 2001 were similar in their root causes: over-taxation, political treachery, uncertainty about who will provide basic resources, etc.

4. Another explanation holds that Chilembwe sought martyrdom, like John Brown, and hoped that in losing his life other Africans would feel emboldened to rise up against the Whites and reclaim their land.

5. Some important lesser known insurrections occurred in 1848 (western Europe was also in turmoil) and 1859. In 1848 a riot occurred in Brown's Town (St. Ann's parish). Two were killed and several wounded. In St. Thomas (then called St. Thomas-in-the-Vale) a riot occurred on an estate where workers resisted police who were seeking to execute a warrant; in St. Mary's parish law officers were attacked and wounded by a crowd of 200-odd people armed with sticks; a week later the police returned to execute warrants against the original agitators, only to meet 500-odd armed people. The police repeated the same action the next week, and met the same fate. It took the 2nd West India Regiment to "restore order." In 1859 two major rebellions occurred. In Westmoreland parish residents unhappy with a toll road system tore down the toll gates. When

the perpetrators faced court, angry resident mobilized and burned down the police station. Troops were required to restore order. In Trelawny parish, the arrest of over 60 people over a property dispute led to residents attacking the police station and freeing the detainees; the police fired on the crowd, killing two women and wounding many. The excited crowd then torched the police station and various parts of town (Heuman 1995:124). Other "minor" rebellions include an aborted one in 1799; an 1802 attack upon a community of run-away slaves near Runaway Bay in St. Ann; an 1807 uprising in the former parish of St. George; and in August 1808 at Fort Augusta, and an attempt to repeat the event the following year (Brathwaite 1971:251)

6. The song title is "Slave Driver."

7. One of the principal aims of the Spaniards in making Jamaica a colony was their search for gold. That no significant amount of gold was found gave them little reason to engage in a prolonged battle when the British navy drew upon Jamaica's shoreline in 1655. Besides, the British had already defeated the Spanish armada in 1588, ending their naval supremacy (Ferguson 1990:7). The British wanted Jamaica for different reasons: they were seeking economic and political power through the acquisition of new colonies for development and military staging points.

8. Curtin estimates 63,045 new slaves were imported into Jamaica during the last six years of slavery (1955:25).

9. Craton, using the Worthy Park Estate as typical of Jamaican slave plantations, estimates that 60% of slaves were African in 1795. By 1808 and the end of the British slave trade, the number of African slaves was 40 percent. By the end of slavery in 1834 just over 10% of the total population of former slaves were born in Africa.

10. Personal communication with Professor Donald Robotham, August 2000.

11. They were called Coromantees or Comorantines (sometimes spelled with a "K") because of the name of the slave fort from which they were shipped in present-day Ghana.

12. The Maroons were experts in low-intensity guerilla warfare. Their small numbers and simple technologies made cunning and the element of surprise cornerstones of their military strategies.

13. The fact that the British wore bright red coats, marched abreast in columns, and often beat a drum as they marched did not work in their favor (Barrett 1988:33).

14. As we shall see, the British were masters of ingenious divide-and-conquer and bait-and-catch strategies. In this case a bait a catch strategy was offered, the bait being the British title "colonel" and promised recognition on the Maroons' military prowess; the catch involved the assumption that such simple-minded techniques would lull their adversary into complacency, which is true to some extent with the Maroons. The use of the term colonel by Maroon leaders persists to the present day, as does factionalism involving who is the rightful Maroon leader.

15. By "bait" I mean use of strategies that lure people into a false sense of security or by goading conflicts between individuals and groups, with the outcome being a result planned by the British.

16. Spelled Quao in early accounts, see Dallas (1804).

17. The Maroons developed into two distinct groups, an eastern group situated in the Blue Mountain region, and a western group situated in the cockpit region.

18. Dallas (1968) noted that another African group called "Madagascars" joined the Maroons, although he could find no evidence of Jamaican slaves imported from that island. He noted they spoke a different language and had a dusky complexion, but integrated into the West African Maroon community.
19. The Abeng, a hollowed conch shell (or cow horn), was blown to communicate information between Maroon groups.
20. To mention the Maroons in some communities can draw ire from residents, even recently, as some distributors of the radical newspaper *Abeng* found in the 1970s (Scott 1999).
21. It is more appropriate to pronounce this as 'Tachi.'
22. By formal I mean sanctioned by mainstream religious, political, and economic gatekeepers.
23. With the exception of the use of drums, chanting (singing), and Nyabinghi dancing, the Rastafarians of the 1940s absolved the movement of what they considered to be the superstitious practices of the indigenous religions.
24. Myalists, like other non-mainstream Jamaican religionists, typically dressed in White robes and turban head wraps.
25. One source of power of Myalism was the drug derived from the myal weed, which induces a deep sleep in the user. This pharmacological property was misrepresented to make people believe the Myalists had the power to give life to the dead (Jamaica Information Service 1997:28). Anthropologically speaking, these early African-based religious practices served their practitioners by diminishing anxiety and providing a sense of control over the supernatural (i.e., those things beyond the control of ordinary humans).
26. The non-conformist denominations were threatening to the status quo because their services were unlike those of the established churches. Their services were not staid and somber, but animated, interlaced with shouting and hand-clapping. This exuberance appealed to many slaves since it was similar to the zest expressed in their own practices. This facilitated syncretism between the African-derived and non-conformist Christian religions. The Establishment sought to suppress the missionary activities of the non-conformists and the services of the slaves, but both continued up through Emancipation.
27. Lisle also influenced the founding of two early Black churches in America: around 1773-75 in Silver Bluff, South Carolina, and in 1788, in Savannah, Georgia.
28. The non-conformist religionists fostered the emergence of denominations such as the Native Baptist Church and the African Methodist Church, which combined some of the liturgy and structure of the Christian churches with Ethiopianism, and the animation of the African-derived practices.
29. Quoted in Sherlock & Bennett (1998:4).
30. Jamaica Information Service (1997:36).
31. Ironically, many of those hanged at the gallows were executed at the hands of a fellow slave named Bacchus (Barrett, 1984:50).
32. The £20 million pounds was distributed West Indian slaves emancipated, so Jamaican planters received on a portion of the money.
33. The Ejection Act allowed Whites to evict free Blacks from the land and homes they occupied under slavery with only a week's notice. Free Blacks were expecting wages of 1s. 6d. per day, which they earned under slavery when carrying out "free time" work; instead, in bad faith, the planters paid wages around 7d. and

9d. (Wilmot 1997:3).

34. Low productivity and extravagant living had cut into their profits. And competition from foreign sugar did not help their predicament. Personal communication with Professor Don Robotham, August 2000.

35. It was normally only on weekends that slaves could give their full attention to their provision grounds.

36. The desired independence of the freeholders should not be over-stated since those who did possess title to their land continually faced threat of being put off the land if a dispute arose with the landowner, losing ownership of his provisions in such cases.

37. In the mid 1840s legislation was passed that granted smallholders some protection from estate owners who acted above the law; for instance, unfenced estate cattle that trampled peasant provision grounds could be impounded by the peasant. But this slowly changed as even in the 1840s tax burdens were gradually being shifted from planters to smallholders.

38. Additional myalism outbreaks occurred in 1846, 1848, 1852, 1860, and in 1857 in Kingston (Curtin 1955:170).

39. Repressive colonial policies sometimes had the unintended effect of reinforcing group identity.

40. Beckwith believed that myalism and John Canoe rituals are related because both use the same instruments, songs and rhythms (1969:155)

41. Using an armed group of volunteer police officers, officials attempted to interrupt the John Canoe procession by arresting participants. Disturbance of the procession led to four deaths at the hands of the police, including two innocent female bystanders (Knox 1962:133). Wilmot says only two were killed (1990:72).

42. In 1839 another freehold was established by Baptists in Linstead, another section of present-day St. Catherine; in 1841 Baptists established free villages in St. Ann's parish, and in 1842 in Trelawny parish. By 1861 there were 50,000 small holders who each owned an average of three acres (Wilmot 1997:12). This class was most firmly entrenched in the middle county of the island, Middlesex.

43. For comparison see Mellon's edited narratives of American slaves in *The Bullwhip Days: The Slaves Remember* (1988).

44. Toward the end of the 19th century Black and Brown people began to look at the peasant differently than the Victorian-influenced Whites and their racial inferiority theories. The peasant came to be seen as radiating an air of respectability because he worked hard, motivated by his own aims; he was poor but noble. This idealization of the peasant pervaded the consciousness of the poor and middle classes; even some of the bourgeoisie held fetishized notions of a venerable peasant. Norman Manley, founder of the People's National Party, was a promulgator of this ideology. Whether or not such beliefs are accurate is not our concern. What the Jamaican peasant is, though, is conservative. He does not like change, be it technological or socio-political.

45. Still, their tendency was to repatriate capital and not diversify large productive investments in the local economy.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE BLACK MORAL ECONOMY AND BLACK IDENTITY, 1865-1976: RELIGION, REBELLION, AND POLITICS

We the Rastafarians who are the true prophets of this age, the reincarnated Mosesses, Joshuas, Isaiahs, Jermiahs who are the battle-axes and weapons of war (a jihad), we are those who are destined to free not only the scattered Ethiopians (Black men) but all people, animals, herbs and all life forms....We are those who shall fight all wrongs and bring ease to the suffering bodies, and peace to all people.¹

In this chapter I continue tracing the development of Black identity in the context of a Black moral economy, religion, protest, and now, social movements. The aim is to identify those elements that the Rastafari incorporate into their identity and ideology. I provide a brief sketch of Ethiopianism to contextualize the actions of Paul Bogle and the rhetoric of the Morant Bay rebellion and the subsequent discussions of Alexander Bedward and Marcus Garvey. Next I examine the Morant Bay Rebellion. This is followed by a detailed account of the great labor uprising of 1938. This period is important because now the Rastafari are on the scene and some of them participate in the demonstrations. More importantly, the labor uprising highlights the Black moral economy under “new” conditions: changes in capitalist development; the rise of Jamaican political parties; the rise of a Jamaican left; and outside of Jamaica, liberation movements. All of these have impact on the development of the Rastafari movement. I close by appraising Jamaica’s phase of developmentalism and the Rodney riots.

Race and religion had become the most salient modes of social and self-identification by the time of the Morant Bay rebellion in 1865. The two races were as distinct and diametric as the actual colors black and white. It was further complicated by the group designated as “Brown” (or Mulatto), who formed the equivalent of a middle class and occupied many of the professional and government positions. Blacks had developed a moral economy and on many occasions defended it against what they viewed as encroachment, exploitation, injustice and threats to their capacity to subsist. As James Scott has argued, a moral economy is built on the assumption that people have a ‘right to subsistence’ (1976). By understanding how this is ordinarily expressed, one can derive ideas about local norms of

social justice and what constitutes injustice and exploitation (Scott 1976:11, 32, 41).

Rebellions and protests are thus understood to be more than mere reactions; it is a way in which groups have demonstrated their rights, especially to a livelihood. Protest in this context can be a defense of a way of life or of a desired way of life that includes ideas about tradition, community, and identity. Protests and rebellions can also be solidarity-enhancing mechanisms. They bring people together under special conditions that propel their ideas about righteousness and justice to the fore. It is this long-standing Black moral economy from which the Rastafarians draw.

The influence of the Black moral economy became more explicit as a conceptual framework with Ethiopianism incorporated into it, and later, Black nationalism. Wilson Moses, finds the origins of classical Black nationalism in slavery and the exploitation and exclusions it entailed (1978:16). Symbiotically tied to it are Ethiopianism and Pan-Africanism, which are ideological forces that have propelled the Rastafarian movement from its birth to the present. Equally important within these ideologies are the dichotomies that counterpose the exploitation, brutality, and injustices associated with Whites and their Black counterparts against Biblically-rooted ideas about righteousness, justice and equality. Alexander Bedward and Marcus Garvey, in different ways, provide example of these permutations of the Black moral economy. As capitalism slowly expanded without enlarging opportunity, wage labor became a volatile issue. The Morant Bay Rebellion is key to understanding the emergent themes in the rhetoric and ideology of Ethiopianism and the early Rastafarians.

ETHIOPIANISM AND THE LOVE OF AFRICA

Ethiopianism and Black nationalism furnished conceptual support for the different expressions of the Black moral economy by providing reasons for why people ought not be oppressed, and explanations for why Black people were suffering exploitation and injustice. Although I detail Ethiopianism in the next chapter, I shall briefly mention some central aspects of the ideology as they relate to the social history that follows.

Ethiopianism is a religious and racial ideology that sometimes evidences political overtones, especially when it is tied to Black nationalism. The religious aspect grows out of the numerous, if sometimes cryptic, references to Ethiopia and Ethiopians in the King

James Bible, particularly Psalms 68:31: "Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God." These people were at least vaguely aware of Christianity's roots in ancient Ethiopia, and later, the recognition that Ethiopia had never been colonized by Europeans, and repelled two invasions by the stronger and technologically advanced Italians, in 1896 and 1935.

By the time of the Morant Bay rebellion poor people had developed a strong sense of righteousness and justice that found its validation in the Bible, especially in the journey of the Hebrews out of bondage in Egypt, and a growing anticipation of Ethiopia stretching forth her hand to God's children. James Phillippo, a Baptist missionary active in Jamaica during the early-mid 1800s, suggests that identification of Black slaves with Ethiopians and with Israelite captivity in Egypt, was likely a common notion of the time. Phillippo notes that free Blacks and Browns came from "...among the sons and daughters of Ethiopia..." (1971:143), and that "...the whites, like the Egyptians in reference to the Israelites, held it an abomination even to eat bread [with Blacks]" (1971:148). Pullen-Burry, a White British woman, writing the beginning of the twentieth century, refers to Black Jamaicans as "exiled Ethiopia" and "silent Ethiopia" (1971 [1905]:19, 20).²

Even though literacy was low in Jamaica during the Ethiopianism era, it was the King James version of the Bible that most poor Jamaicans looked to for hope, for signs of the commencement of redemption, and for answers to their questions about life's trials and tribulations. Post provides an apt quote from one of the founding Rastafarians who, while on trial for sedition in 1934, was asked why they held Ethiopia in such high esteem. He said: "We found it in the Bible. The brethren, who could write, search [sic] the Bible and use a dictionary and we find out that we were Ethiopians" (1978:160).

In Jamaica anti-White sentiments grew militant again in the early 1900s and increased in intensity as the Depression set in. Ken Post's quote of United Negro Improvement Association (Garvey's organization) member Satira Earle provides illustration: "...the year 1935 was the *commencing with Ethiopia stretching forth her hands unto God and not unto Europe as they think; The Negroes all over the world are stirred and we ought to get a square deal, if not, Europe shall in time hear our voices*" (quoted in Post 1978:171, emphasis added).

Ethiopianism intensified as a result Italy's second invasion of Ethiopia in 1935. In the United States and the Caribbean Blacks volunteered to go to Ethiopia to find alongside

their African brethren against the Fascists. Some of the heightened racial consciousness and radicalism of this period was tied to Jamaicans who had spent time abroad, and experienced their Encounters with racism and oppression. New support organizations were formed and money raised to support Ethiopia. Black newspapers such as the *Chicago Defender*, The *Pittsburgh Courier*, and Jamaica's *Plain Talk* informed the public on what was happening in Ethiopia, and how they could help. Later communist, socialist, and pan-African ideas would seep into Ethiopianism (or vice versa).

Arguably, it was the decline of the UNIA and local chapters of the Ethiopian World Federation (EWF), alongside the emergence of national liberation and de-colonization movements that led to the slow demise of Ethiopianism as an overt ideology that provides a framework for social action. Yet, Ethiopianism continued to exist in the beliefs the Rastafarians.

THE MORANT BAY REBELLION

"...war is at hand my black skin[s], war is at hand from today to tomorrow. Every black man must turn out at once, for the oppressor in [sic] too great, the white people are cleaning up they [sic] guns for us...." (letter written by Paul Bogle).³

By the 1860s the identity boundaries between Blacks, Browns, and Whites had sharpened. In areas such as St. Thomas Whites and their supporters had lost all claims to genuineness. Religious ideas had gained a greater grip on Black thoughts about freedom, righteousness, and even the right to land and food. Later, in St. Thomas, in the districts of Golden Grove, Trinityville, Leith Hall, and Pear Tree Grove, Leonard Howell, a founding father of the Rastafarian movement, would be preaching his message of the arrival of the Black Messiah to threadbare peasants, some of whom likely retained vivid memories of the uprising, which was only two or three generations distant. In St. Thomas, Howell found anti-colonial and anti-White sentiments which preceded the rebellion, a lasting reaction to exploitative colonial policies and the atrocities committed by Whites against Blacks because of the rebellion. Racial rallying cries of the Morant Bay rebellion include "Colour for Colour!"; "Skin for Skin!"; "Cleave to the Black!" and, Paul Bogle's instructions to some of his poorly-armed rebels to "Kill all the White men and all the Black men that would not join them!"⁴ The Rastafarians redefined the latter call as "Death to all White *and* Black

Oppressors!” This is no coincidence, but a continuity born of shared experience and geographical proximity. The race-based radicalism of St. Thomas led one scholar to call it a site of “negro nationalism” in the latter 1800s (Knox 1962:164). Religion, especially Myalism and the Native Baptists, was instrumental to the incubation and rationalization of the slave’s belief that rebellion was necessary and right in the sight of God.⁵

The former slaves had few or no sources of income since their means of generating income, such as small-farming, had been thrown into disarray because of changes in the international markets. Banana farming, for example, was destroyed by a combination of bad weather and plant disease. The White churches and the Government were not providing relief, nor were the Black churches able to fill the void. To make matters worse, the post-emancipation legislature imposed new taxes, fueling deep-seated resentment among the Black populace. The free Black minister Samuel Holt, from the adjoining parish of St. Elizabeth, publicly expressed the racially and class-rooted economic resentment of the grassroots: “We are poor. Have we got the same property, the same quantity of clothing and money as we had in past times? A reduction of taxes must take place. We shall have it made. We won’t submit to be crushed down any longer” (Wilmot 1997:22).

The main two instigators at Morant Bay were George William Gordon, a mulatto minister who was a radical politician and wealthy land owner, and Paul Bogle, a Black minister. Both were affiliated with the Native Baptist Church, although they were of different class backgrounds. The fact that Gordon, a former slave who became an elite, converted to the Native Baptists during the Great Revival, probably made him seem especially radical to his colleagues. It was Gordon who ordained Bogle as a minister. Gordon evidently thought of himself as defender of the poor, and as a politician, put himself out on a limb among his White peers with his candid arguments against the policies of the Colonial government. However, Schuler claims he was as exploitative of Black labor as anyone else, either holding back wages or failing to pay (1980:135).

Gordon began a feud with Governor Edward Eyre, charging him with neglecting the deplorable condition of the Blacks in his parish (St. Thomas). Barrett vividly captures Gordon’s élan by quoting a heated exchange between Gordon and the Speaker in a Parliament debate (note the biblical and prophetic imagery, especially the Ethiopianist-like reference to Herod):

I regret Mr. Speaker, that I am out of order, but when every day we witness the maladministration of the law by the Lieutenant Governor, we must speak out. You are endeavoring to suppress public opinion, to pen up the expression of public indignation; but I tell you it will soon burst forth like a flood, and sweep everything before it. There must be a limit to everything: a limit to oppression— a limit to transgression— and a limit to illegality! These proceedings remind me of the time of Herod— they remind me of a tyrannical period of history! I do not think any Governor has acted so before. While he justifies himself in one case, he uses the police force to accomplish another illegality. What an example to the prisoners who are confined in prison! If the Lieutenant Governor is to go on this way, what can you expect from the populace? (1988:55-56).

Gordon's stance and politics made him enemies with the White churches, White elites, and the government; he was dismissed from his political office in 1862.

Not much is known about the early life of Paul Bogle. He lived in a community called Stony Gut, not far from Morant Bay, and in the same parish as Golden Grove and Trinityville (both being early Rastafarian strongholds). It appears that Gordon baptized and ordained Bogle as a minister (or a deacon), in the same year of the rebellion (Barrett 1988:58). Like Gordon, Bogle saw himself as an advocate for the poor.

By fall 1865 Bogle had developed plans to lead a contingent of Blacks into Morant Bay. Bogle had been organizing support for his plans for some time, and there must have been enough discontent for him to gather support for such an outrageous plan. On October 7, 1865, Bogle marched into Morant Bay with a detachment of two hundred-odd men, armed, and playing drums and fifes (Barrett 1988:59). After Bogle's lionhearted display, warrants were issued for him and some of his men; the eight officers sent to Stony Gut to arrest them were badly beaten. Barrett surmises that the officers would have been killed were they White (1988:60). Moreover, they were forced to swear on a Bible that they would fight on behalf of Blacks if released.⁶

On October 10, Bogle and his brigade a few hundred men strode into Morant Bay, killed nearly a score of people, mostly Whites, hurt many more, and freed prisoners from jail. They then marched back to Stony Gut and held a prayer meeting (Barrett 1988:61). On October 12, the town of Bath was seized by soldiers, and the Maroons entered the fray (Barrett 1988:61). The next day martial law was declared for the eastern part of the island, and indiscriminate murder of Blacks by the British and their supporters began. It was as if

they tried to outstrip the atrocities committed against the slaves during the Sam Sharpe uprising. Hundreds of Black people were killed,⁷ and more than one thousand homes burned by soldiers. Although Gordon did not instigate Bogle's actions, Governor Eyre felt his speeches and actions incited rebellion in the Black people of St. Thomas; both Gordon and Bogle were captured and hanged. Bogle never implicated Gordon, and this created an uproar in England since Eyre could produce no evidence that Gordon was directly connected to the rebellion.

Although the toll on the lives and minds of Black Jamaicans as a result of the uprising is incalculable, like the Sam Sharpe uprising, the Morant Bay rebellion expedited a change in British colonial policy. Before 1865 ended the British regained their control over the island's affairs by making it a Crown Colony Government.⁸

ALEXANDER BEDWARD AND THE BEDWARDITES

"The Government passes laws which oppress the black people. They take their money out of their pockets; they rob them of their bread and they do nothing for it. Let them remember the Morant War..." (Post 1978:7).

Alexander Bedward delivered sermons and teachings that instructed his followers about how the colonial government had oppressed Black people, emphasizing the Morant Bay rebellion as an example as to what happens when Black people are tired of being oppressed. This was taken by the colonial government as solicitous of insurrection.

Bedward drew on the emotions and critique that motivated the Morant Bay rebellion. Bedward, most likely born in 1859, became one of Jamaica's great grassroots religious leaders. Keith & Keith suggest that Bedwardism may be the "...first global expression of Afro-Christianity as an active molder of the political will" (1992:66). Bedward may not have thought of himself as an Ethiopianist, but the overtones are clear in his speeches and thinking. Bedward's Ethiopianism, religious militancy, and social organization (bands and camps) provided continuities that later were embodied in the early Rastafarian movement. Some prominent Bedwardites like Robert Hinds and Bishop Brown took on the Rastafarian faith, holding Haile Selassie to be the Black God-King. After Bedward's imprisonment and death, they continued to work in ways that maintained a Black moral economy.

Bedward's following consisted mostly of poor peasants and working class people (e.g., casual laborers, household workers, crafts people, etc.) who were drawn to his religious messages and the Black moral economy he pointed to: the need for land and justice, the injustices associated with White rule, and the necessity of setting up social welfare schemes that addressed the needs of the aged, infants, sick, and illiterate. Like Bogle, Bedward developed alternative social institutions such as Black courts of law to administer justice and protect fair play.

Bedward, like the Rastafarians who would come after him, became a threat to the established religions *and* the colonial government. He created a mortifying racial and class critique steeped in religious grandiloquence. Bedward claimed he had created a new religion, a faith that would replace Christianity. Moreover, Bedward asserted that he was the Black successor to Christ on earth, and later, that he would ascend into heaven and destroy White rule from above. He menaced the government with blistering anti-white and anti-colonial rhetoric, and his talk of rebellion. In 1895 Bedward made the following statement to a great throng of listeners:

We (meaning thereby the black subjects of our said Lady the Queen in this Island) are the true people; the white men are hypocrites, robbers and thieves; they are all liars. Hell will be your portion if you do not rise up and crush the white men. The time is coming, I tell you the time is coming. There is a white wall and a black wall, and the white wall has been closing around the black wall; but now the black wall has become bigger than the white wall, and they must knock the white wall down. *The White wall has oppressed us for years; now we must oppress the white wall* (quoted in Post 1978:7, italics added).

In this excerpt we hear Ethiopianism, and racial and eschatological rhetoric that will resurface in the Rastafarian movement. He is auguring another Morant Bay-type confrontation between Blacks and Whites, where the black people will come away as the victors.

Bedward, like many Jamaicans of his time and some of the early promoters of Rastafari, traveled to Central America in 1883 (Colon, Panama) in search of a cure to an unknown ailment. In 1885 Bedward experienced an Encounter: he had two religious visions that compelled him to return to Jamaica to be baptized (Post 1978:6). In April 1889, Bedward joined H.E.S. Woods' newly founded Jamaica Native Baptist Free Church (JNBFC) in August Town, a small community in St. Andrews parish, on the northeastern

fringes of Kingston. In October 1891, Bedward claimed that God had called on him to carry out special work in Jamaica.

At first the JNBFC was just another revivalist church; Bedward turned it into a movement. Bedward and his followers spread their beliefs widely by organizing their congregations into camps⁹ spread across the island. Pullen-Burry, who visited Jamaica at the turn of the twentieth century, estimated there were 6000 Bedwardites (1971:142). The Charismatic shepherd Bedward commanded absolute loyalty of his flock, especially those located in camps in August Town and greater Kingston. Many of these camps were like small community development schemes. People from all over the island would come to be healed and baptized by Bedward in the “healing” waters of the Mona River.

Bedward had many clashes with the police and army, and ended up in jail on several occasions. For example, in April and May 1895, Bedward was on trial for his “seditious” activities, and pled not guilty on grounds of insanity. He was acquitted by a jury, but ordered to the Kingston asylum, although he was later freed of this order. The pattern that emerges here and continues through the history of the Rastafarians up to early 1960s is the arrest of religious radicals on grounds of sedition, treason, and vagrancy, and imprisoning them on grounds of insanity.

Between the mid-1890s and 1921, Bedward’s movement grew in strength. Bedward is best-known for claiming on December 31, 1920, that he would fly up to heaven from Union Camp in August Town, to return on January 3, 1921. Stories abound about how Bedward climbed a tree and jumped out, flapping his arms as if they were wings. This supports the view of Bedward as a lunatic. But Rasta Ivey, one of the oldest living female Rastafarians, who was a Bedwardite during the late 1920s, argues that what Bedward meant was that he was going to take an airplane flight to reach the heavens, but he was unable to get access to a plane during the time he claimed. She argues that the stories about flailing arms and jumping out of trees are patent falsehoods, even though she remembers people gathering to watch him take off. As Rasta Ivey tells the story, the crowd did not understand that Bedward meant he was going to fly on a plane. This is her reply when I asked her if she was present when Bedward was to fly:

No, No, No, No. I only hear of it, I did not see that. I understand that he was talking to people, and he was showing them [things they did not know], but the people are so wicked and lie that they put it more than what he said. They said he said he was going to fly, but

they said he flew. He only fixed up himself [dressed sharply] and when he told them that, he meant aeroplane. The aeroplane was coming. They had it false. He told them he was going to fly, but it was not himself that would fly. He meant that he was going away because he disappeared and they did not know how he disappeared. From they took him [to asylum] nobody heard anything about him. And all his members that I know were sent back to country ¹⁰ (Rasta Ivey 1998).

Martha Beckwith gave this account of Bedward's promise:

On the morning of the day predicted for the ascent, he took a chair and stationed himself in the yard in full view of his followers who grouped about him dressed in their fast-day clothes of white. As the hours passed and nothing happened, he told them that the event has been postponed. From time to time he set another date. Still many remained faithful (1969:170).

In preparation for Bedward's stunt, Jamaican colonial authorities had been observing him and his followers for months, and had nearly 200 armed soldiers and police ready on the day of Bedward's departure. Even though his "flight" did not occur and the throng of followers left disappointed, he did not lose popularity (there would be succession of similar disappointments among grassroots religionists awaiting salvation or repatriation).

In April 1921, Bedward, his followers, and the colonial authorities clashed a few times, leading Bedward to proclaim a major march from August Town to Kingston on April 27. On the day before the march the Governor issued a warrant for his arrest:

...when Bedward began his march at dawn on the next day there were 60 police, half of them armed, and 60 men of the Royal Sussex Regiments waiting to intercept Bedward on the road. Dressed in white robes, carrying wooden crosses and palm leaves, his followers offered no resistance to the arrest of their leader and 685 of their number. All were taken to Half-Way Tree court...the rest [excepting Bedward] were immediately tried in batches of ten, being accused under the Vagrancy Law, a useful measure of class control, of 'being able to labour and habitually abstaining from work' (Post 1978:8).

All were found guilty except some of those who believed that Bedward was Christ; these people were enjoined to medical observation.

Bedward was consigned to the asylum as a result of the 1921 incident, and died there, November 8, 1930, six days after the coronation of Ras Tafari as King of Ethiopia. But for 30 or so years, Bedward's ideology and practice had wide support among poor Jamaicans across the island.

Bedward's anti-White, anti-colonial rhetoric, the continual confrontations with the colonial government, and the offering of a radical alternative to the established religious

ideologies, is very similar to the first 30 years of the Rastafarian movement. They too promoted anti-White, anti-colonial, anti-establishment religious ideology coupled with militant practice and rhetoric. Like the Bedwardites and the protestors during the labor rebellion of 1938, they too often fought hand and foot with the police and army.

MARCUS GARVEY: DEEPENING THE ETHIOPIANIST TENDENCIES

Marcus Garvey¹¹ was born in 1887, in the parish of St. Anne. He left school early (around 1901), worked as a printer, and traveled through Central America as young man. Garvey initially was not a “radical” Black man, but could be described as an adherent of Booker T. Washington’s assimilationist tendency; Washington was one of young Marcus’ heroes. In 1916 Garvey left Jamaica for America, and popular and academic lore hold that in his parting speech he said: “Look to Africa for the Crowning of a Black King, he shall be the Redeemer.” While Rastafarians took this statement literally, and academics uncritically confirmed it by repeating it in print, there is no hard evidence that connects the statement to Garvey (Hill 1983). Upon arrival in the United States, Garvey had his Encounter and became radicalized, being influenced by the “New Negro” movement.

Garvey founded the UNIA in 1914 in Jamaica, and somewhere between 1916 and 1918 he founded the first chapter in New York City. Garvey’s message combined the Jamaican peasant’s aspirations for economic and cultural independence with the American mantra of individual success.¹² In 1919 he inaugurated the Black Star Line shipping company, one of his more widely-known ventures. The *Negro World* newspaper, introduced in 1918, was read by Black people throughout the Americas, the Caribbean, Europe, and Africa; annual circulation ranged between 50,000 and 200,000 copies between its inception and 1933 (Carnegie 1999:60).

His ventures supported and promoted his message of Black empowerment, African redemption, and self-reliance; these placed him squarely in the camp of Black nationalism and Pan-Africanism. In 1921 Garvey sent a delegation to Liberia, and toured the Caribbean and South America during the same year. Although a very controversial figure—Garvey was arrested and indicted on fraud charges (regarding false advertising), met with an Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, and spent 1925-27 in federal prison—the tremendous impact of his thinking and ventures upon Black nationalism, Pan-Africanism, and Black power

movements is undeniable. Upon release from prison Garvey was deported to Jamaica.

Ethiopianism, compared to the Black nationalism espoused by Marcus Garvey, was a diffuse model for framing the Black moral economy. Garvey was much more coherent, articulate, and forceful in linking his rhetoric to the Black moral economies, in Jamaica and abroad. He held constant most of the values and symbolism of Ethiopianism and Jamaica's Black moral economy, while elaborating by modernizing the discourse and making tradition secondary to Black progress and empowerment. Garvey's rhetoric brilliantly utilized religious imagery, while subtly emphasizing capitalist and American ideology. Garvey tapped the sentiments of those embedded in the Black moral economy. But his promotion of capitalist enterprise conflicts with the subsistence concerns of most of those who maintain the Black moral economy. This is because capitalism requires no morals or principles other than 'naked self interest' and 'callous cash payment.'¹³ Nevertheless, Garvey welcomed those who were willing to absorb his variant of the Black moral economy. What is more, the conditions of the early 1930s were rife for the Black moral economy to have a powerful messenger. Anti-British and anti-colonial sentiments were high and times were hard. Garvey filled a space and met receptive audiences (and reactionary forces).

Regrettably, observers have placed more attention on the "...sordid, entangled and unfortunate history of the Black Star Line as business venture than to its symbolic import or the imaginative fires it kindled" (Carnegie 1999:65); Garvey's activities made many Black people proud.

Garvey's Pan-Africanism draws upon Ethiopianist sentiments, although the relationship is a complex one. In one way he sustained Ethiopianism through his fiery racial upliftment rhetoric, and the Rastafarians paid close attention:

...We as Negroes have found a new ideal. Whilst our God has no color, yet it is human to see everything through one's own spectacles, and since the white people have seen their God through white spectacles, we have only now started (late though it be) to see our God through our own spectacles. The God of Isaac and the God of Jacob let him exist for the race that believe in the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. *We Negroes believe in the God of Ethiopia, the everlasting God...we shall worship him through the spectacles of Ethiopia* (Garvey 1989 [1923]:34, emphasis added).

Garvey says that : the desire of the UNLA is "...not to disturb the tranquility of other men, but to lay down our burden and rest our weary backs and feet by the banks of the Niger and sing our songs and chant our hymns to the *God of Ethiopia*" (Garvey 1989:120, emphasis

added).

Whereas the tenets of Ethiopianism easily merged with Garvey's Black nationalism, his politics do not allow an uncritical association between the two philosophies and their proponents. For example, Garvey at first looked positively upon the crowning of Ras Tafari as Emperor of Ethiopia and, as late as 1935 held respect for the Emperor, being one of many who condemned the invasion of the fascists and offered support to Ethiopia. However, by 1936, after the Emperor fled Ethiopia and sought assistance from the League of Nations, an embittered Garvey had become stinging critical of the Emperor, accusing him of seeking help from those who were the enemies of Black people, and not identifying with the average Black African (referring to Selassie's Amhara ancestry, which historically distinguished itself as an elite group; see Appendix 4). Even though most Rastafarians revere Marcus Garvey, he did not hold a favorable view of them, nor of grassroots religions like the Bedwardites and practitioners of Kumina, which he called cults. In a speech to a UNIA convention late in the summer of 1934 (when he also announced he was leaving Jamaica), he said that the

...prevailing religious fanaticism existing among certain classes of Negroes was alarming and that up to the present the Race had not properly settled upon sound religious policy...every day very simple and ignorant people were founding and organizing new cults which were extremely contradictory to the set principles of true religions, and that it was to the Race's benefit to use its intelligence to curb this spreading fanaticism (*The Daily Gleaner*, August 10, 1934).

Garvey's rhetoric resonates with the Black moral economy because it speaks to freedom, blackness, solidarity, and self-reliance. Specifically, Garvey sought: 1) a global unification of Black people; 2) to facilitate the contribution of Black people in the diaspora to the politico-economic development and self-determination of Africa; 3) to advocate the creation of black educational establishments that taught Black culture and history; and, 4) to rid Black people of their negative self images.

Garvey's departure probably accelerated the deterioration of the UNIA in Jamaica, but many Garveyite organizations continued to exist. A significant number of Rastafarians participated in or were sympathetic toward UNIA locals, and some Garveyites took up the banner of Rastafari. Sister Ecila, for example, was a Garveyite during the 1940s, and although she holds Haile Selassie as divine, she does not see herself as a Rastafarian.¹⁴ She is a good example of how adherents combine Ethiopianism, Black nationalism, and Pan-

Africanism. They tie together the historical and ideological strands through lived experience.

THE GREAT LABOUR UPRISING

For nearly a century prior to 1938 more and more people coming into the wage labor economy. The 1938 labor rebellion, in retrospect, suggests that the Black moral economy had been changing for some time. Although capitalism had its roots in slavery, its growth quickened after emancipation. As capitalism is prone to do, its benefits were poorly distributed and monopolized by elites. Still, wage labor incorporated more people, if only seasonally, for a wage or piece-rate. Wage labor did not displace Black peoples desire for access to land, a central element of the subsistence ethic of the Black moral economy. Religion continued to influence protest, and despite the secular tone of some of the post-1930 protests, the essence of discontent was a matter of defending and enlarging the moral economy.

The first Rastafarians appeared in Kingston and St Thomas parish, in the early 1930s, and they began the process of creating a distinct version of the Black moral economy by re-combining already existing elements with a “new” belief: The return of the Messiah as a Black African consigned to righteousness, justice, and the redemption of all Black people of African descent. This was the antithesis of the White God and Savior of the oppressors, the God who oversaw slavery, White retaliation against Black freedom efforts, the injustices of apprenticeship, and the maintenance of a system that keeps Black people poor and on the margins of society. At first the Rastafarians were largely indistinguishable from other Black Jamaicans in appearance and values (especially those centered in the Black moral economy), and were involved in protest, social, and political activities with fellow citizens of their social class. The development of the Rastafarians is detailed in chapter 4, so they are mentioned only as occasion warrants.

The years leading up to the labor rebellion were turbulent. Not only were workers and peasants engaging in actions, the Rastafarians were also out in the Kingston streets and rural communities. Common moral threads linked these ostensibly disparate groups: they were concerned with justice, obtaining better living and working conditions, and recognized how their Blackness related to colonial history and their misery. Police brutality was rampant and indiscriminate, and Rastafarians got their share of beatings and imprisonment, as we

shall see in the next chapter. These occurrences helped to shape their identity and ideology in critical ways. Agitators directly related their plight to local capitalists, harboring strong anti-capitalist sentiment. All the classes were in turmoil and most were anti-British except the elites. This crisis spurred some radical middle class elements into action, and they will later figure in this account. Jamaicans further honed their tactics of social disruption (which so many contemporary commentators disparage): “These good-tempered people were in fact blocking roads, cutting telephone wires, breaking down bridges, burning cane, destroying banana trees and, on several occasions, ambushing armed police with nothing but sticks and stones” (Post 1971:198).

Capitalist market structures and relations hindered peasant and worker access to the requisites for social and biological reproduction. Low prices for agricultural foodstuffs, low wages for the emergent working class, and the lack of access to arable land for those willing to tend it (land now being monopolized by large agri-capitalist enterprises) left little room for otherwise industrious people to improve their condition. Although they did not always cooperate, the well-being of peasants and workers were inextricably bound. The peasant needed to sell her produce and the worker, selling his labor, needed cheap, nutritious foods. The intermediate classes could not avoid the economic pinch, especially the small merchants whose livelihood depended upon peasants and workers.

Urban material conditions complicated the labor situation. Kingston’s and St. Andrew’s population significantly increased between 1921 and 1943, mainly the result of immigration. Rural citizens, unable to subsist in the countryside, were swarming into Kingston, bringing with them their land and community-oriented values and aspirations. These migrants came mainly from St. Catherine, St. Ann. St. Elizabeth, St. Mary, and Manchester (Eisner 1961:188). Eisner sums up the situation: “The movement [into Kingston] was not in response to real employment opportunities.... There was little development in the city to correspond to the magnitude of the influx...most of the immigrating labourers [sic] found openings in petty trade and domestic service or none at all....” (1961:188).

While some peasants emigrated to seek work, these outlets had been closed by the early 1920s; returning migrants and their children intensified the situation. What peasant and returnee alike found was casual labor. A volatile situation was growing more tense, and leaders like Garvey commented upon the situation: “On the edge of the City of Kingston is

a greater city of poor people whom nobody sees except when something unusual happens. In what is called the Spanish Town Road area there are more people living in the most primitive and unfortunate state than can be found in any recognized city of the world” (in Post 1978:131). From these slums and shanties came many of the first and second generation Rastafarians.

Messianism and the Labor Rebellion: Ethiopianism, Organization, & Association

Post does not believe that Rastafarians and other Ethiopianist-oriented groups played an important role in the labor rebellions, but this is not the same as saying they were not involved. The only way to differentiate an early Rastafarian from other Jamaicans was by their beard, if they were men, and probably not at all if they were women. The early Rastafarians did wear red, gold, and green insignia to identify themselves to each other, but it is unlikely that observers would take note of this in a way that a historian like Post could document. The Rastafarians were especially concerned with truth, justice, and the new Black God and King, but cries for justice and righteousness were already widespread among the poor and working classes. The middle classes also wanted justice, but the classes identified different roots for their problems, and hence conceived the problem differently. Race and exploitation were a rallying theme for the poor in the central parts of the island and the east. In the parish of Clarendon, early in 1938, the Poor Man’s Improvement Land Settlement and Labour Association (PMILSLA) was formed. Its leader wrote: “We are the Sons of slaves who have been paying rent to landlords for fully many decades and we want better wages, we have been exploited for years....We want freedom. We are still economic slaves burdened in paying rent to landlords who are sucking out our vitalities” (Post 1978:249).

The rhetoric of the Black workers and the Rastafarians also overlapped. During the period of labor unrest workers likewise were concerned with righteousness. Many saw exploitation in Christian terms: a sinful injustice. The labor leader Alexander Bustamante offers an example in one of his agitative speeches to workers in Montego Bay in 1938: “The day that they [government] nab me, Jamaica will see what it has never seen, thousands of workers will fold their arms, industries will be tied up...our weapons will be unity, comradeship, which are all consistent with righteousness” (quoted in Post 1978:257). The

early Rastafarians appear concordant with the prevailing sentiments of time.¹⁵

Women like Rasta Ivey and UNIA leader Satira Earle, were just as vocal and active in protest as their male counterparts. Earle, a UNIA leader, proclaimed this admonishment: "...wake up men, if you are afraid to carry on [protests against the capitalists], I will organize a committee of women and launch out against capitalists in this island and leave you drowsy men behind" (Post 1978:241).

Post claims that the Rastafarian "...cult as an organization played no very obvious part in the labour rebellion" (1978:193). However, as Chevannes' account (1994) and several life histories I collected show, there *was active* participation in some of the labor uprisings. We do not know the extent of participation because such evidence is only now coming to light. Furthermore, the focus on formal organization diverts directed attention away from the ways in which marginalized groups express protest.¹⁶ Their expressions are often informal and their associations (or organizations) nearly invisible; they are rarely political and bureaucratic in the formal sense of these terms, but can become agents for political action under certain conditions.

In Post's view the only way such people are driven away from their spiritual world and into action is when they are pushed so far against the wall (1978:179), like a cornered animal, they instinctively lunge at the threat. Until recently, the orthodox Marxist approach tended to ignore the functions of race, religion and culture in social action (Monroe 1990:7, 10). In fairness to Post, his dialectical perspective prevents him from taking a rigid and defeatist stance since, for millenarian groups, assertion is a parallel aspect of retreatism. It is the cultural and structural legacies bequeathed millenarian groups by the past that shapes the form and direction of their actions. Especially important for them is charismatic leadership and some form of association. For example, from the marxist "crisis"¹⁷ perspective, Leondard Howell and Alexander Bedward might have been content to carry on their business as usual, maybe occasionally marching as a display of pageantry, if the police, government, and ordinary citizens had not rebuked them.¹⁸

Jamaican peasants and workers began to form their own secular associations in the late 1800s, driven mainly by material pressures. One of the earliest associations was the Artizans [sic] Union (skilled craftspeople), formed in 1899. In 1908 a printers union followed. The young Marcus Garvey worked as a printer in 1908 and participated in union

activities. In that bastion of racial radicalism, St Thomas, poor peasants combined to form the Tax and Rate Payers Association (TRPA) in 1935, driven by the pressure of exploitation at the hands of landlords. One of the leaders of the TRPA, Darrell Reid, had earlier written in the newspaper *Plain Talk* about how Black people needed an Armageddon and the Second Coming of Christ to change their wretched condition (*Plain Talk*, 12/21/35; Post 1978:246). In chapter 4 we shall see how Leonard Howell, a founding father of Rastafari, was also exhorting his followers in St Thomas, around the same time, to not pay taxes and not acknowledge the colonial government. Although there is no hard evidence yet, it is likely that Howell 's and the TRPA's constituency overlapped, and that Howell was in communication with, or at least familiar with Darrell Reid. In 1936, Allan Coombs (1901-1961) assembled a labor union in the Kingston Public Works Department, and this organization would later become the Jamaica Workers Trade Union.¹⁹

Ethiopianism merged with a growing labor and social radicalism for a short period of time prior to the 1938 labor rebellion. What prevented Ethiopianism from being a political force, as Post sees it, is that as a racial and religious ideology,

...it could provide no explanation for exploitation other than the Israelitish captivity or the inherent godlessness of the white man...this ideological determination ultimately refracted and atomized potential collective class consciousness. Far from being able to suggest class action which the workers and poor peasants might take to end their exploitation, its remedy was patient expectation, either of the millenarian arrival of Ras Tafari or the collapse of the crisis-torn white world. Ethiopianism was open to all the vagaries of personal interpretations and well as opposed by the counter ideology of the ruling class (1978:186-187).

What is overlooked is how people's understandings of justice are tied to their moral economies and the ideas and norms that define it. Action should be approached from this perspective.

Material Aspects of the Labor Rebellion

Illustrating the discontent and turmoil, and its religious, moral, and racial essence is consequential because this is the time during which the first Rastafarians are proselytizing and organizing. The discontent and desire for better, on this earth and not heaven, appealed to the dispossessed and disenchanted, and those who could draw upon the Black moral economy's symbols, themes, and norms could find listeners.

The problem for nearly everyone was economic stagnation. In 1933 the unemployed staged hunger marches; in 1935 banana workers in Oracabessa rioted in reaction to workers imported from another district (the growers wanted to increase competition in order to lower wages) (Post 1978:240). On June 4, 1936, two hundred-odd unemployed marched to the Kingston Penitentiary, clamoring for food and a bed, which they believed (probably erroneously) they could get in prison; in September, October, and November 1936, there were hunger marches in Spanish Town (Post 1978:243). The labor leader Coombs recalled how, while leading a peaceful march of the unemployed, they were met and beaten by police: “‘The people all unarmed, were only carrying flags and banners bearing the words ‘Starvation, Nakedness, Shelterless....’ The batons and clubs of the police were brought in (sic) play mercilessly on the people...the poor and unfortunate people recieved (sic) their floggings’” (Post 1978:244). The sustained brutality of the police likely increased the militancy of labor and the Rastafarians. I note here that the Rastafarian motto, “*The hungry fed, the sick nourished, the aged protected, the infant cared for,*” likely emerged during this period, either in Kingston or St. Thomas, the latter being especially a site of nakedness and starvation.

On Friday, April 29, 1938, the seemingly discontinuous episodes of protest began to show commonalities. At the Frome sugar estate in Westmoreland parish, prospective and employed workers, many from Kingston, had come to Frome to work. There were not many jobs available, and the wages workers thought they would be offered were substantially higher than what Frome gave them. A strike ensued and more than 100 police officers were called in. On May 2, the confrontation erupted into what became a full-fledged rebellion. The police, as usual, overreacted and killed four people, including an aged and a pregnant woman (Post 1978:277). The strikers reacted by burning the Estate’s cane fields (the burning of cane fields goes back at least to the Sam Sharpe rebellion). This instance of police recklessness gives example to why Rastafarians and poor Jamaicans held such contempt for them. Speaking of Jamaica in particular, Robert Hill points out that

...the root of social unrest is the state. The state is what foments unrest. And the police in particular in these [poor and working class] communities have waged a war, so that war becomes something forced upon the people. When people go after the police they are fighting back. They are not targetting [sic] police because they happen to have criminal instincts, or criminal impulses: they are really fighting back against the nature of systemic police aggression against their communities. (Scott 1999:88).

There is a morality to their retaliation, but this is not clear unless one is already cognizant of its existence.

During the labor rebellion, "The use of bullets and bayonets [the police] on one side increased destructiveness on the other [workers and the unemployed]..." (Post 1978:282). Knox identified the articulation of Black people's resentment as having its roots in the mid-1800s, revealing itself in their "...antipathy toward the police and their lack of confidence in the impartiality of the judicial system (1962:216)

On that same May evening 3000 Kingstonians attended a protest meeting (Post 1978:277). St. William Grant, a dark-skinned Black man, emerged around this time to become a prominent leader. Another soon to be prominent leader, Alexander Bustamante, immediately left to Frome after he got the news. The great labor rebellion had begun. On May 3, people from the Dungle, one of Kingston's most wretched slums, and a Rastafari stronghold, had become so aware of their condition and of the viability of protest as a means of change that they went to the offices of Jamaica's major newspaper, *The Gleaner*, and asked reporters to come and report to the public the kinds of conditions they lived in (Post 1978:277). Their class consciousness had temporarily been awakened.

On May 21, the dock workers struck, and St. William Grant and Bustamante were there to advise them. The dockers took to the Kingston streets, encouraged other workers (in particular the rail and tramcar workers) to join them, and they shut down shops in the city. By noon workers controlled the streets of central Kingston; 8000 of them came out later that day to hear Grant and Bustamante speak at Parade Gardens (Post 1978:279). Hundreds of police and temporary sworn-in constables were sent to reclaim Kingston.²⁰

The labor rebellion, like past uprisings, evinced religious overtones. For instance, on May 23, five hundred demonstrators marched to the offices of another newspaper, singing "Onward Christian soldiers," while carrying palm leaves and beating drums (Post 1978:280). At night protestors blockaded streets and destroyed street lamps to hinder the nighttime activities of the police. On May 28, the dockers returned to work and Kingston quieted for a moment, but the rest of the island had just begun to convulse. Riots had begun in nearby Spanish Town on May 23, and continued into June. On the same day sanitation workers led a strike which culminated in a general strike.²¹ At the Caymanas Estates, nearly half-way between Spanish Town and Kingston, sugar workers blockaded the entrance into the estate.

Police opened fire on these workers, and in retaliation they burned the estate's cane fields. On May 30, workers in the islands' interior struck.

By June 2, 1938 the rebellion had spread to every parish except Westmoreland; the parishes of St. Mary and St. Ann were especially active with protest (Post 1978:282). By this point the uprising had an impact on everyone; the view of the police as the troublesome agents of bankrupt leaders was pervasive.²²

The most active and militant of all were the banana workers in the eastern part of the island, who were a combination of peasant small holders and itinerant wage laborers. Striking banana workers marched from plantation to plantation, bringing out additional workers along the way as they went (Post 1971:201). These workers also had the most direct confrontations with police. Post locates these workers' militancy in a desire for land: "...it was this hunger for land— either to add to an existing plot or to turn a landless labourer (sic) into a proprietor— which was the main motive force of the strikers in the banana areas" (1971:201). It was not higher wages that placated these activists (which were offered), but a land settlement scheme.

The British did not end this rebellion through use of force; instead they used guile. Acting Governor C.C. Woolley²³ came up with a brilliant plan: announce a "New Deal" for Jamaicans (apparently a take-off on Franklin Roosevelt's Depression era policies). Instead of work, Woolley offered land to a land-loving and land-starved people. Woolley "...broke the news in a 'Sunday Special' of the *Jamaica Standard* that £500,000 were to be spent on land settlement in a huge 'New Deal' for Jamaica" (in Post 1978:283). Protest did not end immediately, but the announcement caught the attention of the protestors. A Land Settlement Commission (LSC) was formed. Interestingly, the LSC envisioned pushing grantees toward an idea of social (community) settlements and away from the fatalism and stubborn independence of the peasant. However, the land settlement scheme came to little for poor people as other classes were better positioned to purchase the land. Ken Post recapped the outcome: "...the settlement of seven thousand men, women, and children scarcely made a dent in the problems of the unemployed and the impoverished small peasants" (1978:452). The desire of many peasants and unemployed people to avoid proletarianization through ownership of land was thwarted. This is likely one of the first episodes that lead the early Rastafarians to become critical of politics. To promise land to

peasants, the unemployed, and people of peasant origin, and to not deliver on the promise is to create the type of social dissatisfaction and sense of relative deprivation that can give birth to and sustain a social movement.

POLITICS AND THE CHANGING MORAL ECONOMY

The People's Nationalist Party (PNP) was formed in 1938 and the Jamaican Labour Party (JLP) in 1943. Expatriate Jamaicans in New York played an important role in the founding of the PNP, through their organization, the left-leaning Jamaica Progressive League. It was also these emigrants who helped to spark the party's nationalist orientation. The organizing of an indigenous political system came largely out of the trade unions that formed around Alexander Bustamante's personality, and through committee meetings of elite Jamaicans like Norman Manley and N.N. Nethersole. The left initially organized within the national party and the trade unions before British pressure split the party in 1943. Some, like St. William Grant, whose principles were grounded in the Black moral economy, began to move into the political arena. And the politicians, whether consciously or not, appealed to those principles sustaining the Black moral economy as one means of garnering support at the grassroots level.

Jamaica's tiny group of leftists play an important, although camouflaged, role in the emerging political process.²⁴ Because of their advocacy on behalf of the downtrodden and the outreach work they did in some Kingston ghettos, they came to have some impact on a small group of Rastafarians, a couple of whom I interviewed. Part of the left's ideology emphasized class over racial struggle, thus some fought against the leader St. William Grant, because of his Ethiopianist tendencies (Post 1978:355). But others such as Jamaica's first Marxist, Hugh Buchanan, gradually moved toward an Ethiopianist, Garveyist, and Pan-Africanist ideology because these spoke directly to the concerns of Black people. Still, part of left ideology and rhetoric converged with that of the race-conscious Rastafarians. The Marxists argued that "The Black capitalist is as oppressive as any other" (Post 1978:355), which fit with the Rasta cry "Death to all White and Black oppressors"! Moreover, Rastafarian ideas of righteousness and injustice were compatible with left condemnation of capitalist inequalities and exploitation. Rasta Ivey for instance, said she did not like the Jamaican Labour Party (JLP) because of they use the word "labour" which in her mind is

associated with hard work and exploitation. Instead, she found St. William Grant [a dark-skinned Black man] much more appealing:

I always, from the first time ...Bustamante come [on the scene] and they had the first voting I did not like it because they should not give Bustamante's Party the name 'labour.' They should not call it labor because labor is not a good thing. Even if they call it labor, they should not say Bustamante [i.e., he should not be the leader], they should say St. William Grant" (Rasta Ivey 1998).

She goes on to give her analysis of politics that I believe is more consonant with how Rastafari of the 1930s and early 40s conceived of politics (the Dreadlocks notwithstanding):

[I am] Neither PNP [People's National Party] nor Labour, but I am not fighting PNP because PNP means the people and I am with the people. I never stood behind it [politics], but I am never against it. I am with the people and where Labour is, I done with that because I am labour myself. I work hard. I well work [worked hard] and that means I am a labourite. I did not have to have that [title] because I worked. So he [Bustamante] could not get me to join him. I was not his Party. First time, every government in the Island saw me. The only one who called me in because he was tired of seeing me [she became a thorn in PNP leader Norman Manley's side], so he told them to call me into the House of Representatives go talk about repatriation (1998).

Both spoke about human liberation and solidarity. Where the left of that time fell short was their failure to see that orthodox marxism required that they ignore the central elements of the Black moral economy in favor of a party line and organizing on a class basis. In effect, they tried to impose a foreign model on people instead of working with people's local understandings as Michael Manley was to later show them.

Around the same time that the political parties were being formed, the Rastafarians were taking a different turn. The PNP spurned them, and many had become disenchanted with politics and politicians. Keith & Keith offer a different take by claiming the Rastafarians became more interested in organizational forms, as demonstrated by their participation in the Ethiopian World Federation and some local UNIA chapters, and how some served as "...guards of honor for PNP politicians at political meetings...." (1992:94). While they are not wrong, they over-state the participation of Rastafarians in formal political events and organizational bureaucracies during the mid-late 1940s.

During the 1940s factionalism developed within the Rastafarian movement just as in the national political party, and the dreadlocks began to be a force in their own right. They

were the religiously militant cadres of the movement, and this made them political, as I shall show in the next chapter. They led in purging the movement of the Obeah and Myal-oriented practices, and in developing a strident anti-capitalist critique as they began to reject the society-at-large. During the 1950s the ideology of the dreadlocks spread and by the end of the decade had become entrenched among many Rastafarians, especially some of their prominent leaders.

Some Rastafarians saw the socialist rhetoric of the PNP as amenable to their concerns about land, housing, medical care, and food. However, the PNP was only nominally socialist if implementation of its platform and promises is used to assess them. Arguably, this presented an opportunity for the militant dreadlocks to assert themselves. For them politics was “big talk” and they rejected it *and* Jamaican society as corrupt, too charmed by self-styled leaders like Bustamante and Manley, and too much like the Babylon of ancient times. Not all Rastafarians took such a puritanical stance toward politics during this phase, so they must be seen as a strengthening tendency in the movement, not the movement itself, which contained considerable diversity. What nearly all early Rastafari supported was repatriation to Africa. The Garveyites and participants in the Ethiopian World Federation locals who took on Rastafari, many of whom were combsomes,²⁵ appeared to not be as swift to intellectually and physically remove themselves from Babylon in the way urged by the dreadlocks.

THE 1950s: DEVELOPMENTALISM AND COLONIAL CONTINUITIES

The 1950s and early 1960s were a period of substantial economic expansion in Jamaica. Bauxite production began in 1952, tourism emerged as a genuine source of foreign exchange, and light industries began to spring up across the island. This was the second substantial penetration of American capital into Jamaica as they had spearheaded getting control of Bauxite for their defense and industrial purposes. It was the inflow of private capital that fueled development and respectable growth rates, but profits were repatriated abroad. This dependent capitalist development, promoted by the JLP, helped maintain Jamaica's already rigid class structure, and part of Jamaica's capitalist class became more tightly, but subordinately, linked to foreign capital. The middle class grew and access to education widened (relative to the past) at the same time the poor were being choked.

Peasants, for example, peasants were still being forced off the land in the interest of capital, and many left to the cities, swelling the ranks of the unemployed. According to Payne, one-fourth of Kingston's population remained unemployed, and a third of these could be described as a lumpenproletariat, "...permanently detached from the labour [sic] market" (1994:18). Informal economic activities and crime were their livelihood. Few Blacks were a part of the capitalist class. Jews, Jamaican Whites, Lebanese, Syrians and Chinese people dominated business, even though nine of ten Jamaicans were Black.

The new political system that the international community was celebrating as a model of Third World stability was really an authoritarian and clientelistic regime run by middle class and business interests. The main roles of the Black and poor were to serve as a guaranteed pool of voters and as a thermometer to test what promises would go over well with the masses. Their votes were superficially and symbolically used to shape programs that spoke to needs and desires of the poor, but really aimed at maintaining class privileges and stereotypes of the Black poor (Payne 1994:19). These problems simmered below the surface of Jamaican society, invisible to visitors and irrelevant the elites (as long as there was no sustained unrest). The social conditions of the late 1930s and the early 1970s are strikingly similar (Keith & Keith 1992:xxii), pointing out the value of understanding Jamaican society in terms of continuities.

1961-75: THE RODNEY RIOTS AND DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM

Jamaica's colonial ward status ended when it became nominally independent in 1962. By now the Rastafarians had come to be seen as a threat to the society, and this led to a dialogue between the Rastafarians and government, and to exploration of the feasibility of repatriating them to Africa (see Chapter 5). However, two conflicting dynamics were at work. Norman Manley and the PNP took a reformist approach toward the Rastafari that sought to co-opt them using courtesies like the Mission to Africa to appeal to and placate them, while Bustamante and the JLP brooked no compromise and sought to keep them underground, or at times, to decimate them.

Nonetheless the profile of the Rastafarians was enhanced as a result of these processes, and this bolstered their sense of spiritual and ideological purpose. From the Rastafarian perspective it seemed their time had arrived: redemption was near. Greater encouragement

for their beliefs and sense of purpose occurred in April 1966 when His Imperial Majesty, Haile Selassie I, visited Jamaica. Now the rest of the society had to seriously reconsider its evaluation of the Rastafarians.

The 1960s and 1970s were a radical and violent time in Jamaica, and there were several anti-establishment tendencies²⁶ being expressed. Rupert Lewis defines Jamaican anti-establishment movements as having two main tendencies: those “...influenced by marxism and more organic grass-roots movements that embraced Rastafarianism or some brand of black nationalism as expressed in the Black Power movement” (1997:6). Lewis’ definition hints at some of the post-1950s expressions of the Black moral economy. This period was one during which Jamaicans and Rastafarians experienced events that greatly affected their sense of self and their relationship to the greater society. Rastafarian numbers grew substantially during the late 1960s and early 1970s, as people, especially the youth, made the Rastafarian message consonant with their own experience and the tenor of the times, as exemplified by the Black Power, Third World, and national liberation movements abroad.

The Rodney Riots

By the mid-1960s the Black Power movement had emerged in Jamaica; the nation was re-discovering its African roots and taking pride in her Black culture. This, though, the Rastafarians had been doing from the 1930s, and the Ethiopianists even longer. Again, discovery of what they held important led some people to reassess them. Their version of the moral economy had a growing appeal and it was clear they had a distinct identity and ideology; they showed themselves to be Jamaica’s spiritual and cultural vanguard. Yet, it took another uprising to make fully clear the role of Rastafarians, race, and class inequality in Jamaica. In October 1968, the Walter Rodney riots occurred in Kingston. The riots grew out of a specific event, the banning of University of the West Indies professor from returning to Jamaica, but it shed light on the longstanding divisions in Jamaican society and the effort to build new coalitions.

Walter Rodney, a Guyanese historian, was hired into the UWI faculty in January 1968. Rodney was unique for that period in how he combined Black Power philosophy and marxism with an almost Frierian pedagogy that led him to give lectures in some of Kingston’s notorious ghettos. Many Rastafarians were his ghetto students, and for these first

and second generation Rastafarians in Kingston, Rodney was one of the leading figures who introduced them to theories of imperialism, marxism, and leninism. The fit between Rodney's rhetoric and older ideas prevalent among Black Jamaicans, such as "Bogleism" and Ethiopianism, is shown in his definition of Black Power as meaning three things: " (i) the break with imperialism which is historically white racist; (ii) the assumption of power by the black masses in the island; (iii) the cultural reconstruction of the society in the image of blacks" (Rodney 1990:28). Rodney's Black rhetoric was not racially intolerant, but it urged Browns and Whites to figure out where they stood in relation to Black Power: "...they [non-Blacks] can *have the basic rights of all individuals, but no privileges to exploit Africans* as had been the pattern during slavery and ever since (Rodney 1996:29, 30, original emphasis).

Rodney was highly critical of the JLP regime, and his criticisms of them and talk of the need for revolution to break imperialism caused him to become government's enemy number one. Here was a man speaking the language of Sharpe, Bogle, Bedward, and Garvey, and government's reaction to these champions of Black liberty (but threats to the status quo) was liquidation. Here is what Roy McNeill, Minister of Home Affairs, told the House of Representatives: "...in [my] reading of the records of problems in this country, I have never come across a man who offers a greater threat to security of this land than does Walter Rodney" (quoted in Payne 1994:22). The Black and Brown leadership feared the Black Power movement in the U.S. would influence Jamaican affairs. The Forbidden Publications Act banned importation of books such as those by Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael and Eldridge Cleaver, and publications by Jamaicans, such as Orlando Patterson's *The Children of Sisyphus*. Thus, avenues to Black consciousness, such as provocative reading materials about contemporary Black experience, were restricted.

The initiatory reaction of government was to ban Rodney from entering Jamaica when time came for him to return from a Black writers conference in Montreal, Canada. Upon landing in Jamaica, October 15, he was not allowed to disembark and forced to return to Canada. By the evening of the 15th the news had reached the public and university students began to organize protests. On the morning of the 16th of October marches began in different parts of Kingston, with the aim of all converging for rallies at two ministerial headquarters. However, students on Mona road met police officers armed with guns, batons and tear gas. A clash between students and police eventuated. The confrontation drew

crowds, and in central Kingston this meant workers, lumpens and Rastafarians. To intensify matters, members of the BITU (Bustamante Industrial Trades Union, a JLP affiliate) stoned protestors. As the students retreated from the onslaught, the masses took charge of the confrontation: another leader the people respected had been taken away by a government unable and unwilling to earnestly address their needs and desires. Burning and looting throughout central Kingston followed; businesses scorned by the masses, such as foreign banks, non-Black department stores, and the Jamaica Omnibus Service appear especially targeted. The state responded by deploying all of its armed forces. The JLP developed a complex rationalization for why they banned Rodney and used such heavy force to restrain democratic expression. Like Bustamante, Prime Minister Hugh Shearer fell upon blaming foreign radical and communist elements, and a small contingent of native hoodlums, for stirring up the otherwise complacent supporters of the status quo. These actions led to the complete vilification of Prime Minister Hugh Shearer and the government in the eyes of Rastafarians. He represented, for Rastafarians, everything inimical to Black people's interests, and accordingly, he was called 'Pharoah' by them, and a popular reggae song by Prince Buster, "Pharoah House Crash," was banned (Waters 1989:97).

The Rodney Riots made the already skeptical Rastafarians more distrustful of government, further defining their identity and moral economy in contradistinction to the rest of the society. They solidified and popularized their view of themselves being "strangers in a strange land," just like the ancient Israelites in Egypt. The riots advanced the communication between Rastafarians, leftists, and university intellectuals begun in the early 1960s. Rodney had confirmed what the Rastafarians had long believed, preached and lived in regards to Black identity and power; and the government, as a reactionary force in their eyes, was insistent of keeping them "downtrodden" (repressed). The PNP found the riots as occasion to develop a program of reform in opposition to the JLP's "reactionary" program. Tough times returned to island in the 1970s, and political rivalries sparked a short-term civil war.²⁷

Joshua and Democratic Socialism

Religion, politics protest, and the moral economy maintained strong association into the 1970s. Michael Manley, who became Prime Minister in 1972, took on the name Joshua.²⁸

Joshua was a prophet and leader who succeeded Moses and whose deeds are recounted in the Old Testament. God, speaking to Joshua, outlined his mission as a servant of God:

There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. Be strong and of good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I swore unto their fathers to give them. Only be thou strong and very courageous...turn not from it [God's commandments] to the right hand or to the left that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest (Joshua 1:5-).

The socialist rhetoric of the PNP resonated with the moral economy of many social groups in Jamaica. Norman Manley seemed to have understood this, but Michael Manley implemented it. The phrase "socialism is love" and socialism is the "...philosophy that best gives expression to the Christian ideal of equality of all God's children" aimed directly to appeal to the ideologies of two influential groups: Rastafarians and Christians, respectively (see Keith & Keith 1992:18). The party resuscitated its socialist message in the 1970s, repackaging it as democratic socialism.

This era is relevant to Rastafarian identity and ideology for several reasons: 1) another charismatic leader, Michael Manley, emerges, playing the role of a prophet, and using Rastafarian rhetoric to invigorate a grassroots political campaign; 2) socialism, as advocated by the PNP, found support among the poor and working classes because it resonated with the moral economy of the people and preceding movements such as the Bedwardites and Garveyites; 3) the Rastafarians become further legitimized in the eyes of the wider public, enhancing their sense of purpose and identity, and attracting more people to explore their philosophy and ideology; and 4), radicalism was widespread: Third Worldism, Black Power, dependency theory, and marxism-leninism converged in Jamaica during this period, and many Rastafarians were influenced by these ideas and movements.

The JLP's reign between 1962 and 1971 did not improve its legitimacy among Jamaica's poor and working class. The stance it took during the Rodney affair made it unpopular. This set the stage for the PNP to make a thunderous return to power in 1972. By August 1974 the PNP had begun an education program aimed at making the public aware of its socialist roots, and in September 1974 announced itself as one of the socialist nations of the Third World (Payne 1994). Many observers see Jamaica's experiment with socialism as a failure and the cause of many of the nation's problems. Such critics tend to have an ideological agenda; there were many positive political and economic aspects to Manley's mild

socialism that fit Jamaica's dependent and weak national bourgeoisie, and the beliefs and desires of many of its marginalized groups. It was a combination of external pressures, unforeseen domestic events, and poor governmental management that led to the undoing of Jamaica's experiment with socialism (see Payne 1994; Stephens & Stephens 1986). Keith & Keith argue that "national populism" more aptly describes Jamaica's politico-economic experiment than does democratic socialism (1992).²⁹

Micheal Manley, son of PNP founder Norman Manley, was the embodiment of the shepherd leader, as was the opposition JLP leader, Edward Seaga (A phenotypically White Sryanian who studied anthropology in America and involved himself with revival shepherds and Obeah workers. He too knew how to use the Black moral economy to mobilize support. See Laurie Gunst's *Born Fi Dead* for a treatment of how the populace reacted to Seaga's antics). Whereas Norman Manley's idea of socialism was likely more in line with that of the British Labour Party, Michael was inspired by the struggle of Third World nations to gain liberation and a semblance of autonomy in charting their course in the world-system. Manley met with and aligned himself with Third World leaders such as Presidents Nyerere of Kenya and Fidel Castro of Cuba. This set him at odds with the JLP and the United States. But Manley was not an admirer of the dogmatic and textbook socialist regimes. He sought a mixed economy grounded in an ideology of brotherly-Christian love, "equality of man," and the end of exploitation of people. This was a brilliant display of understanding of the historical themes that have pervaded the Black Jamaican's experience (e.g., religion, Ethiopianism, desire for land, autonomy, etc.), and using these denied desires to mobilize different constituencies. Manley and the PNP argued that "Socialism is the Christian way of life in action..."³⁰ The "brother" part of the brotherly-Christian love notion spoke to the Rastafari since they are adversaries of the Christians. As in the past, religious rhetoric and ideology were fused with social action. This organizing and mobilization strategy was very different from the those of the left of the 1930s and 1940s.

Although the Rastafarians are vocal critics of the Christians, much of the ideology being promoted by Manley, the PNP, and some leftists, fit with their beliefs. They coopted elements of the ideology they liked and repackaged it as "social living" instead of socialism. Especially appealing to the Rastafarians were promises of free education and school uniforms, rent freezes, land reform, cooperative farms, food subsidies, work, youth and relief

programs, expanded health care, and access to housing. The appeal to brotherly love, equality, and eradicating exploitation unsurprisingly resonated with the Rastafarian concern with justice, righteousness, and love. The PNP's platform could easily have been a pragmatic Rastafarian one, and Michael Manley capitalized on this. For example, an elder Rastafari, Ras Brenton, said "We (Rastas) must be socialists. We support socialism because we want to be able to have a house too, to have some land, to be able to make a living without so much sufferation...Capitalism is not for we. It is fi dem (for them) who already have [capital]" (1998).

Manley's use of Rastafarian symbolism and rhetoric was a shrewd political move that took advantage of prevailing social sentiments. From the visit of Haile Selassie up through the Rodney riots, the Rastafarians had steadily been gaining respect and admiration among Jamaica's poor, who called themselves "sufferers." The Rastafarians espoused a set of principles that carried a moral and ethical force that showed people how to live a moral and righteous life, and Manley too was showing himself to be a man of principles and morality. Manley tied himself and the PNP to the Rastafarians in several ways. He allowed a Rastafarian group, the Mystic Revelations, to represent the nation abroad; he carried a stick he called the "rod of correction," which he claimed was given him by Haile Selassie I during a tour of East Africa; and he used "Rasta talk" (such as "I man") during some of his campaign speeches. Indeed, some claim that infamous worshiper of Haile Selassie, Reverend Claudius Henry (whom the status quo erroneously named a Rastafarian) named the rod, and even met with Manley and gave him the name Joshua (Waters 1989:111). The rod imagery drew from many religious traditions that gave symbolic import to the staff-carrying shepherd, and Rastafarians of that time commonly walked with a staff. Manley's 1972 campaign appealed to non-voters (Waters 1985), which in Jamaica, means youth, squatters and Rastafarians, making him a populist in the truest sense.

Manley also drew on the Black Power sentiments aroused during the Rodney affair to appeal to the majority Black population. In 1969 he indirectly condemned the race-based injustices of the past: "*An epoch of brainwashing in a white-oriented society has left scars, which, however unconscious, mar the inner assurance with which Black people accept their own norms of beauty and excellence,*" and in early 1970, in his own words, said he supported "*The acceptance, with joy and pride, of the fact of blackness, of black dignity and black beauty[and to] use political Black Power to*

make the black man free in his own country to live a decent civilised [sic] and happy life" (quoted in Waters 1989:120, 121, italics added).

SUMMARY

From 1865 forward Black identity came more forcibly into its own, although this process antedates the Morant Bay uprising. Ethiopianism contributed to this clarification and strengthening of Black identity, as did events in society. On one side protests and reactions to it magnified a sense of shared identity where Blackness and oppression were a commonality, while honing the values associated with the Black moral economy: justice, righteousness, freedom, self-determination, etc. Vigorous movements emerged during the period investigated in this chapter, and Blackness, religion, and redemption were core organizing themes. These movements threatened the status quo by virtue of their appeal to large numbers of Jamaicans. Alexander Bedward and Marcus Garvey are two prime examples of leaders who mobilized followers around racial and religious issues that have their grounding in a Black moral economy. Blackness as a core-identity referent was associated with many symbols, themes, values, and traditions, and it is from these the early Rastafari summon essential components of their identity. The quickening pace of change in the twentieth century meant the Black moral economy changed. In my opinion it was enlarged. Migration into the cities, travel abroad, the great labor rebellion, continued protest, changes in capitalism, and the rise of Jamaican political parties and unions all affected people's options or lack thereof. The most fundamental of activities, making a living, was influenced by these changes, and ideas about religion, race, and morality shaped many people's understanding of their condition.

Having outlined what a Black moral economy consists of and how it relates to Black identity, in the next chapter I will chart the emergence and development of the Rastafari. This is largely a chronicling of their group identity and how it came to be what it is. It will be shown how the past is drawn upon in the construction of Rastafarian identity, especially the core organizing elements of their identity and ideology. When personal identity is discussed in chapters 6 and 7, the social history will assist in making sense of why people become Rastafarians, what about the world engaged them to the point that they changed who they were, and how they going about re-defining themselves, and at the same time perpetuating

the group and the Black moral economy they created.

ENDNOTES

1. Ras Sam Brown was an organic intellect of the highest order. He wrote numerous treatises and monographs, poetry, hymns, memorized much of what he wrote, was an organizer, and a fiery militant who brooked no compromise. When I met him he was still ornery. At a rally I once reached out a hand to help him onto the stage. He quipped: "Go away! Do I look like a cripple to you?" and proceeded to scramble up on his own. The epigraph is taken from his *Treatise on the Rastafarian Movement*.
2. Pullen-Burry does not explain why she uses the "Ethiopia" to refer to Jamaicans, but apparently she gleaned it from the religious language of the people during her tour of the island. For example, she went to visit one of Alexander Bedward's baptism ceremonies at Mona river. Her book is an interesting ethnography colored by the benign racism of the author.
3. Cited in Robotham (1983:107); Robotham points out that some argue the letter to be a forgery, but this is unlikely. He goes on to show the letter to be one piece of evidence, among others, that suggest the Morant Bay Rebellion to be more than a haphazard riot— it was a planned, and (somewhat poorly) organized rebellion.
4. This is what Bogle told his supporters as they prepared to march into Morant Bay. By "them" he meant those Blacks who would not take sides against the Whites.
5. The social conditions of the eastern part of the island prior to the rebellion were pitiful (the people of this part of the island were prone to militancy). In 1850 more than 30,000 people died as a result of an Asiatic Cholera epidemic, and in 1852 small pox swept the island. During 1863-1865 severe droughts forced an already foreign-dependent colony to rely even more on imports that were priced sky-high because of the American Civil War. Crimes related to debt and theft were high and the prisons were spilling over with prisoners; unemployment was rampant.
6. It should be noted that part of the confrontation began because Bogle had been rebuked for giving counsel to a man being tried in Morant Bay Court. Bogle was a leader in a local alternative Black court. The struggle that ensued was about freedom, autonomy, and race.
7. One source puts the figure of Black casualties at 354 executed by court marshal, 50 shot without trial, 25 shot by Maroons, 10 killed by other means, and 600 flogged (Robotham 1983:57), however the figure was likely higher, as these were the recorded incidents.
8. Robotham argues the transition to Crown Colony was in the works before the rebellion and that the rebellion provided sufficient justification (1983:60).
9. Rastafarian organization is similar. Many form "camps" and "bands" typically led by older, charismatic leaders (sometimes called shepherds by non-Rastafarians), has existed from their emergence to the present. A camp is a small settlement of people, usually those who share an ideology, be it Christian or Rastafarian; band likewise refers to a small group of like-minded people, although the connotation of sedentarism is not as strong. Band generally refers to a group that gathers periodically. Among Rastafarians organized into houses and mansions, it is not rare to find similar roles, but differently defined. Barrett defines a band as a "...collection of believers from twenty to two hundred members who occupy a *yard*, or ritual center where meetings and other rituals are held" (1988:22, original italics). A yard is a Jamaican folk term that encompasses where one resides, a commune or tenement, or even a tabernacle. I have never heard Rastafarians use the latter meaning of yard for Tabernacle.
10. I can only speculate that Bedward may not have wanted to tell his followers about the plane, but to rather surprise them with his "control" of modern technology.

11. The general reference for this section is the compilation of Marcus Garvey and UNIA papers of the *Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers Project, UCLA*, Robert Hill, Chief editor.
12. See Marcus Garvey: An Overview, *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers Project, UCLA*.
13. Borrowed from Karl Marx.
14. Sister Ecila is also a member of the Ethiopian Orthodox church in Kingston. Two reasons for why she says she is not a Rastafarian is because she disagrees with the Rastafarians use of Ganja and their growing of dreadlocks (most Rastafarians did not wear Dreadlocks before the mid-late 1940s). This points to the kinds of factionalism and diversity within the movement.
15. They had not moved to fully separate themselves from society, which begins in earnest in the 1940s. This does not mean identifiable Rastafarians were not treated as outcasts as we shall see. However, I would argue their greatest distinction, besides the beards of the men, was their belief in a Black God who had returned to redeem them.
16. As most good organizers know, the degree of collective action and protest possible depend upon pre-existing patterns of organization and cognition; Post makes a similar case (1978:178-186). However, the confluence of unforeseen events can propel a people into action in a way that does not have to build upon past organization and consciousness. A stage in development can literally be skipped. But such confluences are rare and never forewarns its imminence. If we take Post's traditional marxist perspective, then the task of organizing illiterate and millenarian-oriented people around a class-based political project seems impossible.
17. Within marxism there are several variants of crisis theory. Crisis theory can be applied to groups and structures. At a system and structural level, it is argued that long-term change in capitalism comes as a result of systemic crisis, e.g., the Great Depression, and the institutions and norms created to prevent a similar occurrence, and the crisis of capitalism in 1973, which led to removal of the post WWII system erected to enhance global stability, facilitating what people call economic-financial globalization. Piven & Cloward (1977) applied a type of crisis theory in developing their strategy for the U.S. welfare movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. They argued that mobilization of poor people to overburden the welfare bureaucracy (create a crisis) would lead to lasting change in the system as opposed to organizing for reforms, whereby the building of organizations diverts the energy of protest. Like Post (1978), for these theorists systemic change comes as a result of crisis and resolution of the crisis; people will not go the length to create crisis if they are not pushed.
18. There is credibility to the "crisis" viewpoint which assumes people have to be consistently pressured and the status quo sufficiently threatened before more than token change occurs.
19. By early in June 1938 two new unions had been formed, one for dock workers and the other for printers and newspaper workers. Both were linked to the organizing efforts of leftist Ken Hill (post 1978:350). These unions were not connected to Manley, but Bustamante. Around 1940 the Jamaica Workers Trade Union was being organized.
20. Sixty years later I stood at the same Parade Gardens and watched police and citizenry clash in nearly the same way during the Zeeks rebellion.
21. In the 1960s and early 70s a Rastafarian would emerge as a leader among the sanitation workers.
22. In Islington, in the parish of St. Catherine, four people were killed by police. This happened after a mob had formed in reaction to the police officer breaking a man's back; the police used deadly force to defend themselves against the mob. By June 5 two platoons of Marines arrived to assist in suppressing the rebellions (Post 1978:283). During may through June 1939, some more labor unrest occurred, led mainly by the unemployed. It was limited mainly to Kingston and was not nearly as violent.

23. Governor Sir Edward Denham unexpectedly died on June 2, 1938, after an operation.
24. Originally the leftists were critical of Manley and supported Bustamante, who did have a close, if suspect, relationship with grassroots. However, as the PNP gained public voice, the paranoid Bustamante suspected that the marxists were making attacks on his character in the newspaper *Public Opinion* (they were not [Post 1978:411,412]). Bustamante had the audacity to call himself a 'radical socialist republican' in 1938, and the leftists, before they moved toward the PNP, sometimes called Bustamante 'comrade' (Post 1978:351, 354). Bustamante reacted to the perceived threat by implementing a propaganda campaign against the "communists" who he claimed were infiltrating his unions and spreading the seeds of communism. The JLP's anti-communist ideology would persist into the 1990s. By the end of the 1940s the leftists had moved to support the PNP. This realignment was pragmatic because the PNP's support base was growing (increasing the pool of people the Left had access to) and the popular front strategy of the communists was compatible with the PNP's nationalism. The marxists constituted a left wing within the PNP until they were purged in 1952 when Norman Manley perceived them as too radical for the PNP's program
25. The combsomes are Rastafarians who do not have dreadlocks; they predate the dreadlocks. They are called combsomes because they comb their afro-like hair "some."
26. I prefer the term "antisystemic" which is empirically similar to anti-establishment since they refer to the same groups, but the two are theoretically different. I explain the former in chapter 4.
27. It was in the 1960s that guns were introduced into the ghettos, and this intensified during the seventies. Highly suggestive evidence implicates America's Central Intelligence Agency in these activities. See Gunst (1995).
28. It is rumored that the scandalous grassroots religious leader Reverend Claudius Henry gave Michael Manley the nickname. Henry was associated with a thwarted insurrection scheme in 1960. For more on Henry's part in Jamaican and Rastafarian history see chapter 4.
29. Keith & Keith argue that true democratic socialism was never possible in Jamaica as there was no class basis to sustain it; the state was unable to fully unite the classes (1992:26), even though a cross-class coalition did momentarily congeal.
30. Quoted in Payne (1994:36); taken from the original text of the PNP's Political Education Committee's December manifesto, *Democratic Socialism: The Jamaican Model*.

CHAPTER FIVE

RASTAFARI, ETHIOPIANISM, AND SOCIAL IDENTITY: AN OVERVIEW

The Rastafarian movement consists of the most advanced, determined and *uncompromising fighters against discrimination, ostracism, and oppression of Black people in Jamaica*. The Rastafarian movement stands for *freedom* in the fullest sense and for the recovery of the dignity, self-respect and Sovereignty of the Black people of Jamaica. Many deplore and accuse the black people of raising the colour question in this island. But White supremacy was the official policy of this Island for hundreds of years and white supremacists never regarded black men as good as the dogs in their yards (Ras Sam Brown, Rastafarian leader, on the "Foundation of the Rastafarian Movement"; emphasis added).¹

I see...the brutality of the police because we were the butt of the police. [The] Police did not fight nobody else but we....So, we withstand the police brutality, scorn and everything. That is why we are here today, and that is why a [Rastafari] youth can stand because if I and I did not break down those kind of barriers, the youth could not stand today (Ras Sam Brown, June 1998).

The name "ganja" and "Rastafari" is the two terriblest names in Jamaica (Kitzinger 1966:34).

Rastafarian identity and ideology are outgrowths of Black Jamaican's shared experiences of conflict, protest, rebellion, race, and class-based inequalities, the race-based awareness and practices that evolved out of these, and a relentless commitment to truth, justice, and righteousness. They are a new expression of old traditions. Given the experience of Africans and their descendants, it is unsurprising that their conceptions of truth, justice, freedom, and redemption are different from conventional definitions.² Religious, Ethiopianist, and Black nationalist ideologies that promised redemption for the subjugated and persecuted and damnation for the subjugators and persecutors always found adherents.

In this chapter, I focus on the development of group identity and ideologies of the Rastafari in order to contextualize the Nigrescent conversion process in subsequent chapters. As I shall show, the first two generations of Rastafarians became an antisystemic movement grounded in an antisystemic identity, driven by the racial and religious ideology of Ethiopianism.

Antisystemic movements are those movements whose aims and ideologies run

counter to capitalist development and principles of organization; they envision a society built upon non-capitalist social and productive relationships (Phillips, 1988; Arrighi, 1989; Amin, 1990; Wallerstein, 1990). Equity and solidarity are at the core of the vision of such movements. Antisystemic movements call into question the values and dominance of the status quo, and sometimes gain the upper hand against the establishment to the point of almost—or completely—toppling it. A shortcoming in the theory of antisystemic movements has been their sole focus on organized or “structured” movements, and a disregard of religiously and “unstructured” movements that are clearly anti-system.³ As an anti-systemic movement the first two generations of Rastafarians critiqued the root causes of oppression, discrimination, and mis-education, especially in its race and class-based forms. As an antisystemic movement, they have put forward solutions to the problems: re-education and re-socialization into a world view and life style that redeems Blackness and Africa; eschews oppressive persons, relationships, and systems; requires eating and living in ways that promote good health and minimize damage to the natural environment; and that places faith in a potential for universal brother and sisterhood. The path to these changes for most begins with the reformulation of a person’s mazeway and identity.

Group identity, however, is the product of endogenous and exogenous forces. As an anti-systemic movement and identity the Rastafari had their vision, but their efforts to implement it sometimes came into conflict with their fellow citizens and membership. As a result, their identity evolved in ways it otherwise might not have had there been less conflict.

First, I will discuss the elements of Rastafarian ideology, showing how Ethiopianism, from its origins to its embodiment among the Rastafarians, has consistently expressed the same central themes, regardless of the socio-cultural environments in which it manifested. Also, an examination of Ethiopianism furnishes a perspective from which to approach how Black conceptions of truth, justice, and redemption differed from dominant conceptions. Next, I review some of the influential literature written about Rastafari. I close by providing an overview of the development of Rastafari, focusing on conflict and watershed events and experiences that shaped their group identity.

IDEOLOGY, ETHIOPIANISM, RASTAFARI, AND THE LOVE OF AFRICA

George Shepperson points out that the 1611 issue of the King James Version of the Holy Bible (hereafter referred to as the Bible) was translated from Hebrew and Greek into English, and that a standard convention of the time was the usage of “Ethiopian” to mean “Black people” (1968:249).⁴ “Ethiopia” also meant all of Sub-Saharan Africa and Ethiopia proper (1968:249). Hence, as slaves learned Biblical lore, this is how they defined these terms and themselves, and how they made their initial identifications with Biblical history and figures. These definitions are still used by the first and second generation Rastafarians.⁵

It was secular and religious Black American activists who developed the anti-White ideology in Ethiopianism (Sundkler, 1964:58). What they saw in the Biblical references to Ethiopia was people like themselves, accompanied by the liberating promise of Ethiopia providing a beacon of hope in the midst of the despair and darkness of slavery. The Ethiopians of the Bible were proud and accomplished—dignified—which was the opposite of the experience and notions being foisted upon Blacks by Whites. In retrospect, it is logical that the first Ethiopianists would look to Africa for their Messiah, and that they would want to return there. Most assuaging of all was the promise of their redeemer destroying the Whites and their inhumanely oppressive system.

Detailing Ethiopianism

Ethiopianism originated in the United States around the mid-late 1700s during the height of slavery, as evidenced by the teachings and writings of proto-Black nationalists like Prince Hall, and, in the early nineteenth century, Edward Wilmot Blyden, Robert Young, and David Walker. In 1797, Prince Hall, a Revolutionary War veteran and a free African wanting to repatriate to Ethiopia, wrote:

[In pre-revolutionary Haiti] Nothing but the snap of the whip was heard, from morning to evening. Hanging, breaking on the wheel, burning, and all manner of tortures, were inflicted on those unhappy peoples. But, blessed be God, the scene is changed. They now confess that God hath no respect of persons, and therefore, receive them as their friends and treat them as brothers. *Thus doth Ethiopia stretch forth her hand from slavery, to freedom and equality* (quoted in Moses, 1996:9-10, emphasis added).⁶

Two benchmark Ethiopianist documents were published in 1829: Robert Alexander

Young's *The Ethiopian Manifesto* and David Walker's *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World*. Young, who believed in the coming of a "Black Messiah who would champion the cause of the 'degraded of this earth,'" wrote in his Ethiopian Manifesto:

Ah, doth your expanding judgement, base slaveholder, not from here descry that the shackles which have been by you so undeservingly forged upon a wretched Ethiopian's frame, are about to be forever from him unlinked...indeed the power and decrees of Infinity become subservient to the will of depraved man. But learn slaveholder, thine will rests not in thine hand; God decrees to thy slave his rights as man (quoted in Wilmore, 1998:61).

David Walker's Ethiopianist tract was so militant, radical, and threatening to the White status quo that it was not allowed to be taken aboard ships bound for southern ports for fear its message would reach and incite slaves there.

According to Sundkler, the first "Ethiopian" church, founded in Witwatersrand, South Africa, in 1892, came about because of Black dissatisfaction with White racism and control over church liturgies (1964:38-39,53). This explanation obtains equally well for the United States.

Ethiopianism developed into an ideology around which many Black organizations and religious and political programs were built, spreading from the United States, throughout the hemisphere, into the Caribbean, sub-Saharan Africa, Britain, and France, and wherever there was a significant Black presence, from the late eighteenth century into the 1940s. A primary mode of diffusion of Ethiopianism was American slave preachers who visited the Caribbean, Black seafarers, and itinerant contract workers.⁷ By the 1900s, Ethiopianism sometimes took the form of a critique of imperialism, mainly in those places where colonialism had been implanted.

Ethiopianism laid the foundation for many of the beliefs associated with some varieties of Black nationalism: 1) that Blacks should name themselves and reject names bestowed upon them by Whites; 2) that Whites are aggressive and acquisitive; 3) that God, in his human form, is Black and is deliberately mis-portrayed as White; and 4), that Blacks should direct their own religious and secular destinies. The general themes that imbue the different strains of Ethiopianism include: 1) Ethiopia is the home of all Black people and the root of their cultural and historical legacies, especially for Christians; 2) this connection gives Blacks a direct claim to Jewry and ancient civilizations and history; and 3) Ethiopia is the

place to which Blacks should return and/or develop through financial and political investment. All of these themes are the bedrock of Rastafarian identity.

Given slavery and other forms of oppression, it is not difficult to grasp how these ideas fed and sustained the belief that White hegemony of that time was a replay of Pharaoh and the Jews in bondage in Egypt, except now it was the transplanted Africans, and their descendants, who were God's chosen people to be led out of Babylon:

Whenever the Judeo-Christian tradition is made known to an oppressed people, the scenario of election, captivity, and liberation in the Old Testament seems to have special appeal. The story of the deliverance of Israel from slavery has always been understood as the prototype of nationalist redemption—the divine revelation of the transhistorical meaning historical experience (Wilmore, 1998:60).

Some Ethiopianists eschewed mainstream political efforts, preferring to wait for otherworldly interventions, while others directed energy into secular organizations resolved to facilitate repatriation and to teach Black people about Africa. Ethiopianism was radical because it was based on raising Black racial and political consciousness about African heritage and Africa. For most Blacks and Whites, Ethiopia, during its heyday, was generally thought of as a dismal land full of savages incapable of making history and building civilization.

Scott emphasizes how Psalms 68:30 ("Ethiopia shall stretch forth her hands to God") was interpreted by eighteenth century Blacks as a "divine pledge that the African race would one day be delivered from slavery" (1978:4). In his study of Ethiopianism in South Africa, Sundkler observed how the "Ethiopian mythology projects the longings of the Africans to a Christian African nation under the 'lion of Judah, King of Kings' and that its adherents sought out Mount Zion, 'City of the living God, heavenly Jerusalem'" (1964:59), which is in Ethiopia. Like some African religionists, the early Ethiopianists, and the Rastafarians who followed, believed in a living, tangible God as opposed to the abstract, "mute and so remote" White Jesus and God of the Christians, who apparently was indifferent to the suffering of Black people (Sundkler, 1964:279). "You, my people, were once told of a God who has neither arms nor legs, who cannot see, who has neither love nor pity. But Isaiah Shembe [an Ethiopianist South African prophet] showed you a God who walks on feet and who heals with his hands, and who can be known by men, a God who loves and who has compassion" (Sundkler, 1964:278). Mary Turner demonstrated the great

difficulty African slaves had accepting missionary teachings that God lived in the sky and did not visit earth to mingle with people, and that at death those people who did not live a good life went to a place called hell (they thought the West was “hell”) (1983). In his *Ethiopian Manifesto* (1829), Robert Young, an African-American, was among the earliest Ethiopianists to suggest that a Black Messiah would appear in Ethiopia (Scott, 1978:7); they believed this Messiah would redeem them and bring an end to their physical and mental enslavement.

European-derived interpretations of the Scriptures have ignored or denied the role of Africans in Biblical history, and this too sustains Ethiopianism. Discovering this information can be liberating and empowering. A longstanding tradition in Black scholarship and religious thinking has debated the role and presence of Blacks in Biblical history, arguing that the descendants of Ham were Black, and that the term “Cush” or “Kush,” a term of Hebrew origin, refers to Black people of Africa, especially those of Ethiopia and Egypt. Barrett states that the word “Ethiopia” is a Greek translation of the Hebrew term “Kush/Cush,” and also means “burnt” or “Black” (1988:74; Scott, 1978:3). Similarly, the Black South Africans of Natal called themselves “Ama-Kushi,” or Kushites, as early as the late 1890s. They believed that Kush and Ethiopia were the same (Sundkler, 1964:57).

Smith, Augier, and Nettleford proclaim the following passage to be “The Creed of a Ras Tafari Man,” highlighting their version of Ethiopianism: “The black race are the true Israelites...descended from King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba...‘Woe unto them that call themselves Israel and they are not.’ God is Black (Jeremiah 8), Haile Selassie is black, Solomon and Sheba were black, and so are the true Israelites. The white men have worshiped a dead God, and have taught black men to do likewise” (1960:18-19).

Thus, three major forces gave rise to and sustained Ethiopianism: 1) White hegemony, especially over liberty, knowledge, and religion; 2) a desire for Black self-determination, including the “right” to interpret Christian doctrines in a manner consistent with their own experience and history⁸; and 3) broad ideas about righteousness, truth, and justice, drawn from enduring legacies of White injustices and mis-education. In South Africa, Ethiopianism was nourished by the prevailing White view that there could be no equality between Black and White churches (Sundkler, 1964:17).⁹ William Tabb offers a fourth and fundamental suggestion as to why Ethiopianism has been appealing to Blacks for so long : “New religions...are created when an articulation of what is wrong with the current order

coincides with a statement of an alternative vision so powerful that it compels large numbers of people to accept its truth" (1986: xiv-xv).¹⁰

Ethiopianism was an ideological equalizer that provided Black people with an alternative model of their role in history and the future: They were great in the past and would regain their grandness as soon as God willed Ethiopia to stretch forth her hands.

Jamaica and Ethiopianism

How Ethiopianism emerged in Jamaica is unclear, but George Lisle, Moses Baker, and other Blacks who came to Jamaica with the Tories in the late 1700s, are likely carriers. George Lisle, who reached Jamaica in 1784, founded Jamaica's first Black Baptist church, The Ethiopian Baptist Church. The timing of their departures from the United States corresponds with the period when Hall, Young, Phyllis Wheatley, Olaudah Equiano, and others were touting their embryonic Ethiopianism. Africa, especially Ethiopia and Egypt, became emblematic of a golden age; and in true millenarian fashion, some looked to it as the future that awaited them. "It was the vision of a golden past—and the promise that Ethiopia should once more stretch forth its hands to God—that revitalized the hope of an oppressed people. Ethiopia to the Blacks in the diaspora was like Zion or Jerusalem to the Jews" (Barrett, 1988:75).

Shepperson claims that during the period of 1872 to 1928, Ethiopianism was overtly political: "...it exercised its greatest political influence and was most widely noticed in the European, American, and African press" (1968:250). Laurence Breiner, quoting a broadsheet posted in Lucea, Jamaica, in 1865, argues that Ethiopianism was already implanted on the island: "I heard a Voice speaking to me in the year 1864, saying, 'Tell the sons and Daughters of Africa that a great deliverance will take place for them from the hands of oppression....If the people depend upon their Arms, and upon our Queen, and forget Him who is our God...the mistakes will lead to great distress'" (1985-86:31).¹¹

Ethiopianism has been associated with significant uprisings and millenarian movements—like the WatchTower, Chilembwe, and Mgiijima movements and rebellions, which made White Central and South Africa shudder with trepidation. Excepting the Rastafari, this was the case in Africa more so than in America and the Caribbean, because there Ethiopianism "seemed a clear and present danger to the white man's order"

(Shepperson, 1968:253). While the politically radical aspects of Ethiopianism remained muted in America, in South Africa and Jamaica it was tightly intertwined with protest and religion. Even the indigenous Jamaican religionists called “Pocomanians” have referred to themselves as “Black Israelites” (Simpson, 1970:184).

On November 5, 1930, Ras Tafari was crowned Emperor of Ethiopia and took the name Haile Selassie, I, which translates as Son of the Holy Trinity (the Father, the Son, the Spirit), and entitled himself King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah. The current events framing the experience and interpretations of the early Rastafarians included a World War, the Great Depression, inept colonial administration, natural disasters, and the specter of a strengthening fascism. From their Biblical perspective, the second coming of Christ and the resultant new world would be signaled by wars, rumors of war, famine, pestilence, and hard times. Black Jamaicans were looking to their Bibles for answers to the turmoil and instability engulfing the world. The Book of Revelations provided many answers for them. They construed the Scriptures to promise that on his second visit the Messiah would return as a King. To gather how to recognize the King when he returned required piecing together statements made in Revelations with Biblical history; the King would be of the lineage of Kings David and Solomon, and of the Tribe of Judah, and he would emerge during a time of war and rumors of war. Moreover, the King would be challenged by the Beast or Anti-Christ, and would win. Selassie’s conflict with the Italians and fascism satisfied for them their expectation that the Beast would challenge the Messiah and lose, while the world watched. Therefore, for these reasons and many more, Haile Selassie, I, fit the bill.

Smith, Augier, and Nettleford nicely sum up this perspective:

Revelation 5:2, 5—And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the Book, and to loose the seals thereof?”...And one of the elders said to me “Weep not: behold, the Lion of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the Book and to loose the seven spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.” Later, when the Italians invaded Ethiopia, Revelation 19:19 was fulfilled—“And I saw the Beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, against his army.” In 1941, with the Emperor’s return to Ethiopia, the succeeding verse was fulfilled—“And the Beast was taken....” (1960:5,6).

These ideas and images have widespread currency outside of the Rastafari.

Post postulates that the popularity of Ethiopianism in Jamaica peaked between 1935

and 1937 (1978:239). In his view, the height of Ethiopianism in Jamaica coincided with the growing civil and labor unrest which exploded in May of 1938. Post believes that Ethiopianism, because of its mystical and religious orientations, prevented the emergence of radical, class-based movements: "...in Jamaica it was primarily ideas which emerged out of the Ethiopian crisis, not organization....The pro-Ethiopian movement took not an organizational form but an ideological one" (1978:168). Post treats religious beliefs as a diversion from class struggle and socio-political organization. While there is truth in this view, it neglects the alternative forms of political organization and protest used by messianic, millenarian, revitalization, and similar movements.¹² As Tabb suggests, there may be some value in not putting an inordinate amount of effort into organization building if it diminishes the intensity of a group's vision of social justice (1986:xv).

The Rastafarians were not the only ones in the 1930s who were influenced by the tenets of Ethiopianism. It occupied the minds of others, many of them having activist leanings, and some of whom would move toward the Rastafari movement. Because others were putting forth similar ideas and efforts, this makes the Rastafari seem less extreme and exotic than they are typically characterized. Their platforms combined racial consciousness with moral concerns and political issues, especially poverty and racial and class-based discrimination. For example, Frederick Evans led a group called Africa Black Ironsides, which called for "racial independence" and "equality of human blood." St. Thomas Grant, a Black activist who rose to prominence during the 1938 Labor Rebellion, led the Ethiopian Alliance of the World, and Altamont Reid, an early Rastafarian, led an Israelite group who called for "a day of reckoning" (Post, 1978:239). These groups used a combination of religion, politics, and race consciousness to draw and rally followers, and under certain conditions, such as the Labor Rebellion, such combinations could become activist and political. But Post (1978) does not count these as legitimate forms of political protest. They were not aimed toward building bureaucratic organizations like labor unions: "[Ethiopianism]... as an ideology, could not itself result in meaningful class action, by leading...to a questioning of the whole existing system, even though in racial, not economic terms, it contributed indirectly to the realization of the poor that they existed for themselves over and against social interests" (1978:242). The Rastafarians *did* use Ethiopianism, religion, race, and other cognitive practices to create a critique that questions the entire system. As

Cashmore asserted, "The central ideology of the cult of Rastafari is, in effect, a disguised theory of capitalism and its ramifications (1977:384). Rastafarians use the term "Babylon" as a catch-all word for the institutions and history of the Western world and Jamaica, especially the police, Government, and the Church, all of which they charge with keeping Black people oppressed and mentally enslaved. Both Norman Manley and Alexander Bustamante were viewed first as agents of imperialism and false prophets who mislead the people.¹³

The early Rastafarians did not regard the Jamaican government as their government, and as Smith, et al, discovered, many Rastafari (later) favored communism and socialism over capitalism (1960:21). Their anti-government and anti-authority sentiments have old roots, going back to the apprenticeship era. However, the roots of these sentiments are rarely addressed directly in the academic literature on the Rastafari. The following section examines and analyzes pertinent studies and accounts of the Rastafari that date between the mid-1950s through the mid-1970s.¹⁴ Analysis of the literature of this time period shows how the Rastafari were perceived by various observers, and what they took about the Rastafari to be deserving of their attention.

SCHOLARSHIP AND RASTAFARI

Pioneering Studies of Rastafari

There is near unanimous consensus among observers of Rastafari that the movement originated as a result of the teaching and organizing of four individuals: Leonard Howell, Archibald Dunkley, Nathaniel Hibbert, and Robert Hinds. These men were independently preaching around the same time in the early 1930s that Ras Tafari (Haile Selassie, I) was the Messiah returned to redeem Black people and the world. However, others were also preaching of Rastafari around the same time, maybe even before the aforementioned four.

Of the scholarship on Rastafari, special attention should be paid to the earliest studies as these defined the content of the movement and set the foundation from which most subsequent studies draw. The first published studies were carried out by George Eaton Simpson (he carried out field research in 1953) and the University of West Indies team (1960). After thoroughly addressing these accounts I will then discuss subsequent research, taking care to show the change in foci, attitudes, and perspectives that emerge over time. Of

no less significance are the approaches and conclusions reached by Jamaicans and non-Jamaicans, and insiders and “outsiders,” the vast majority being of the latter variety. Newspaper and local observations on the movement date at least from 1932, but are not chronicled here, but integrated into the subsequent sections and chapters.

One of the earliest scholarly observations was made by Fernando Henriques in a work focused on family and color issues. He observed in the early 1950s that Rastafarians were scattered across the island of Jamaica, that they grew beards, that they “neglected their physical appearances,” and that they were of extreme poverty (Henriques, 1953:68). He went on to remark that the appeal of Rastafari to young people and those of the middle class was due to ganja and Marxism, attributing this to the non-existence of “significant ideals of social justice” (Henriques, 1953:181), implying that Marxism and Rastafari offered such ideals.¹⁵ This was around the time that the PNP’s left faction was most controversial. Joseph Owens concurs in a more humanistic way:

What amazes me is that in their conclusions the Rastas in so many instances come down to nearly Marxist analyses of society even though they begin from a quite different base. Marxism is fooling itself if it feels that the vast number of its adherents believe in it because of its cold logic and objectivity; it is rather its magnificent vision of man and society that appeals to so many, and here it is more similar to Rastafarianism than dissimilar (1975:99).

Simpson (1955:168) is the first to systematically codify and report what he called the “doctrines” of the Ras Tafari movement:

- Haile Selassie is a living King, sitting on the throne of King David. He is the King of Kings, Lord of Lords, and the Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah, as revealed in the Book of Revelations.
- Haile Selassie is invincible.
- Black people are actually Ethiopians, they are descendants of the ancient Israelites, God has returned as a Black man, and the reason Blacks have suffered for so long at the hands of Whites is because of past transgressions.
- The Romans worshiped idols and later the English perverted this further by claiming God is a heavenly spirit who cannot be seen; Rastafarians believe in a living, walking God.
- Whites used the idea of heaven and promising all rewards after death to deceive Blacks; there is no proof of the White man’s heaven, while the Black man’s heaven is Ethiopia (1970:209-210)¹⁶.

While these are core ideas that Rastafarians of that time held, the Ethiopianist connection was not made. Consequently, the Ras Tafari doctrines presented by Simpson had the effect of casting them as lunatics and racists, and not as presenting a critique of racism, deracination, and mis-education by furnishing an ideological and cultural alternative to

dominant ideas. To highlight the disjunction between insider and outsider categories, compare Simpson's account to a Rastafarian's account of their doctrines:

- We strongly object to sharp implements used in the desecration of the figure of Man, e.g., trimming and shaving, tattooing of the skin, cuttings of the flesh.
- We are basically vegetarians, making scant use of certain animal flesh yet outlawing the use of swine's flesh in any form, shell fishes, scaleless fishes, snails, etc.
- We worship and observe no other God but Rastafari, outlawing all other forms of Pagan worship yet respecting all believers.
- We love and respect the brotherhood of mankind, yet our first love is to the sons of Ham.
- We disapprove and abhor utterly hate, jealousy, envy, deceit, guile, treachery, etc.
- We do not agree to the pleasures of present-day society and its modern evils.
- We are avowed to create a world order of one brotherhood.
- Our duty is to extend the hand of charity to any brother in distress, firstly for he is of the Rastafari order—secondly to any human, animals, plants, etc., likewise.
- We do adhere to the ancient laws of Ethiopia.
- Thou shall give no thought to the aid, titles, and possessions that the enemy in his fear may seek to bestow on you; resolution to your purpose is the love of Rastafari (Rastafarian leader Sam Brown, 1966:40).

Simpson's summarization of their doctrines is more complex and "rational" than he presents it. For instance, on the issue of why Whites were thought to be wicked and Blacks superior, a conversation between a Rastafarian speaker and his audience offers some insight: The speaker asks

"How did we get here [Jamaica]?" Chorus: "slavery." "Who brought us from Ethiopia?" Chorus: "The white man." "The white man tells us we are inferior, but we are not inferior. We are superior [morally] and he is inferior. The time has come for us to go back home [Africa]....The English are criminals and the Black traitors [middle-class Jamaicans] are just as bad. Ministers are thieves....The black man who doesn't want to go back to Ethiopia doesn't want freedom. *There is no freedom in Jamaica....*Ras Tafari says 'Death to the white man!'" Chorus: "And to the black traitor!" [remember Paul Bogle's cry during the Morant Bay Rebellion] (Simpson, 1970:210-211, emphasis added).

Or, as another Rastafarian speaker confides, "Heaven is a scheme of the English to make the black man think that white men and black men will be equal in the sky, but on earth the white man isn't going to give the black man anything" (Simpson, 1970a:212). And as regards how so much hope could be vested in Ethiopia, we must frame their analysis and behavior within the racial and geo-political scene of the times. Dozens of world dignitaries visited Ethiopia to attend Haile Selassie, I's, coronation, and Selassie, I, took leadership of the Organization for African Unity, while the European colonial empire was slowly disintegrating: "The white man accuses the black man of being a thief, but the white man

has stolen continents and men....Today we see the downfall of England and the rising of Ethiopia. Even British Guiana, a country that is smaller than Jamaica, has defied England” (1970a:214). They assumed that the sun was setting on Britain’s Empire and that given the two Ethiopian victories over “Rome” and Selassie, I’s, growing influence in international politics, that redemption was near. Ras Sam Brown, one of the movement’s many organic intellectuals, sums up the general feeling:

We are gathered here Brethren to reorganize our groups to save the people of Jamaica. We have to harass the people who have us under their feet. A large river starts with a little stream. This is not a new work; it is the liberation movement of Africans abroad. We will have to fight here with all our means....No rebel army in the world can defeat us. *The white man’s age is coming to an end*; all we have to do is move....We are not many but this is a nucleus. We must get back on the street with agitation.¹⁷

Simpson fails to remark upon the negative impact of White subjugation and control upon Black Jamaica’s sense of self, culture, history, and beauty, and how this manifested in a degradation of things Black and African. But the Rastafarian challenged and slowly changed self, in-group, and eventually, out-group perceptions. For instance, the terms “Bongo” and “Congo” were demeaning and insulting terms that referred to the ugliness and backwardness of Africans and Black Jamaicans, and were used by Whites, mulattos, and Black Jamaicans alike (see Palmer, 1989). But the Rastafarians took these terms and turned them on their heads, redefining “Bongo” and “Congo” as positive terms that serve as titles of honor and that make positive Black attributes such as knotty hair.

The earliest White researchers focused on the racial rhetoric of the Rastafarians, although this concern dissipates as the Black Power movement became popularized. Simpson noted that the Ras Tafari movement was “violently anti-white on the verbal level” (1955:167), and based on his six Rastafari themes,¹⁸ the reader is hard-pressed to not conclude that Rastafarians are racists harboring violent tendencies. Although Simpson emphasizes that he was treated decently during his field research among the Rastafari, his experience as a lone White man among Black nationalists no doubt greatly influenced what he recorded: “Although Rastafarians are extremely suspicious of white persons, and despite the fact that one of the main reasons for being of their movement is hatred of Whites, the writer’s impression is that most Ras Tafarians will respond favorably (sic) to a white person who is friendly” (1970a:210).¹⁹ Joseph Owens, a White Catholic priest, wrote in reference to

Simpson nearly twenty years later how “it is somewhat traumatic for a white man to confront a black-oriented cult, but he should also be aware that his presence will naturally prompt many comments concerning race. This reviewer found that his initial contacts with Rastas frequently stimulated racial comments, but later and prolonged contacts gave no evidence of any inordinate racialism” (1975:87). Unlike Simpson, William Lewis (1993), another White Catholic priest who initially met racial and religious castigation from the Rastafarians he interviewed, recognized that the verbal “assaults” were mainly a rhetorical means of testing a person’s heart and mettle: “Their friendliness which ordinarily greeted me turned into a fierce diatribe against all the values I held dear. The Rastas brought me low through their sometimes vulgar and offensive gestures and language....After twenty minutes of this degrading ceremony, the mood of the group reversed itself and became mellow. All are brothers [they said], black, white, yellow” (1993:29). Lewis recognized this as an informal means of social control: “The Rastas strip one another of status through a ceremony of ritualized degradation” (1993:29).

Although Simpson’s work is important, he missed what would take analysts approximately fifteen years to recognize as core organizing moral elements of the movement. These are well-articulated by Ras Sam Brown:

The Rastafarian does not naturally hate any member of mankind, but determinedly detested systems which will not allow the true brotherhood of man to blossom forth in its full richness. We are not bent on the destruction of the figure of God, which is man, but of confederacies bent on wickedness and suppression of the poor. It is greatly scandalized throughout the world that the Rastafarian is a ready vehicle for communism....we of the Rastafarian order know that brutality of punishment is no detriment to the human will.²⁰

Two of Simpson’s observations contributed to a distorted and misleading view of the movement that persisted into the 1990s. One was his conclusion that the movement is escapist because the participants refuse to participate in formal politics. Simpson’s view, like Post (1970; 1978), was that the appropriate approach to pursuing the kinds of resolutions and reforms begged by Rastafarian criticisms (1970b:224, 228).²¹ A litany of subsequent researchers came to the same conclusion, emphasizing how Rastafarians were an apolitical, escapist-oriented cult. Still, Simpson begins one article by noting that there were at least a dozen “organized” Rastafarian groups operating in Kingston during the early 1950s (1970a:208), and that these offered the opportunity for political activity:

A Ras Tafari group offers the opportunities for political activity. Each branch has its officers, and the meetings which the writer attended were democratically conducted. Men and women who do not have the chance elsewhere may speak at some length on political subjects. Denouncing those who have ignored or rejected them—Jamaican politicians, business and professional men, English officials, planters, bankers—is gratifying....Ras Tafarians distrust all who are associated with politics and government.... (Simpson, 1970a:221).

Simpson ethnocentrically explained their associations in terms of mainstream and left conceptions of political organization and activity, and therefore minimized the actual political functions. As discussed in previous chapters, mainstream Jamaican institutions were typically dominated by charismatic personalities who catered to specific constituencies. It was not practical for Rastafarians to look to these institutions to seek remedies for the problems they identified.

The second conclusion argued that the function of Rastafari lay in the activities and culture of the group which offered a respite and

...release from the drabness, drudgery, and humiliation of everyday living in an economically depressed area. Members compensate for their lowly status in Jamaican society by denouncing their oppressors, by insisting upon their superiority over those now in power, and by rejoicing over the knowledge that deliverance is at hand. The despised and rejected have responded to their situation by creating a world of their own, and they exhaust themselves emotionally in their meetings through singing and verbal violence (1970:222).

This conclusion supports the view that it was poverty, relative deprivation, and cognitive dissonance that produces such a group. The continuity that Rastafari provided with the past, especially Ethiopianism and a Black moral economy, was missing from more than twenty-five years of research.

The *Report on the Rastafari Movement in Kingston, Jamaica* (Smith, Augier, & Nettleford, 1960)²² (hereafter referred to as Smith, et al., or the *Report*) is the other early benchmark document commenting upon the movement. The motivations for this research were different from Simpson's. Whereas Simpson merely reported upon what he saw and learned, like a good functionalist, Smith, et al., had a mandate: find out what it is that motivates the Rastafari and how government can placate them. While Simpson provided no real historical context, the *Report* team took a different approach:

The *Report* team drew upon Simpson's research, but critique his lack of historicity: ...both essays [by Simpson²³] concentrate on a thematic treatment of Ras Tafari

doctrine, descriptions of street meetings and worship, paying little attention to the history, organization and background of the movement. As we shall see, the nature of the cult has changed quite significantly since 1953, and Professor Simpson's account has to be brought up to date (Smith, et al., 1960:4).

The *Report* has its own shortcomings. It only went into the past as far as the 1920s, and it failed to draw any ideological or organizational parallels from Bedward and his camps. The other connection to the past the *Report* team identified was Marcus Garvey. In both cases the team failed to identify connections to Ethiopianism. Although Rastafarians hold Garvey as a prophet, as demonstrated, Garvey was fond of neither Rastafarians nor Haile Selassie, I. Garvey's significance lay in that he was a charismatic leader who personified Ethiopianism and Black nationalism. He stood up for the rights of Black people, their legacy, and indirectly, their human rights.

Several myths resulted from the *Report*. For one, the *Report* convincingly²⁴ states that upon his departure from Jamaica, Marcus Garvey said "Look to Africa for a Black King...." Yet, Robert Hill claims there is no evidence that Garvey ever uttered these words in Jamaica (Hill 1983). Second, they report that Howell fought in the Ashanti War in Africa in 1896. But as Hill reports, there is no evidence that supports Howell's claim to have visited Africa (Hill 1983). Third, the *Report* authors describe how the first Rastafarians to grow dreadlocks were Howellites dwelling at the Pinnacle compound, being motivated by photographs of African tribesmen in Somalia and Kenya who wore similar coiffures. Ivor Morrish illustrates how their erroneous commentary took on a life of its own: "It was here [at Pinnacle] that the custom of 'plaiting' the hair started, perhaps based on photographs of Somali, Masai, Galla and other tribesmen of Ethiopia. Men who wear their hair in this fashion are usually referred to as 'dreadlocks'" (Morrish, 1982:72). But Chevannes (1994) and Homiak (1997) argue that the first dreadlocks did not come from Pinnacle; instead the growing of locks can be traced to youthful, radical groups in Kingston. Even as late as the mid-1960s, the influence of young people on the movement remained strong as one study found the average age of Rastafarians was twenty-seven (Nettleford, 1972:94)²⁵. Nevertheless, Smith's informants suggested the first dreadlocks appeared in Kingston around 1947 (1960:9), which is roughly equivalent to Chevannes's (1994) and Homiak's (1997) accounts, although one elder reported that he first saw a dreadlocks in the 1930s²⁶. Nonetheless, until the 1990s nearly all accounts of Rastafari placed the growing of locks at Pinnacle and that the inspiration was

pictures of African warriors.

Finally, the *Report* authors asserted that the Rastafari movement was “disorganized” and “lacking in leadership” (p.18). Converging with Simpson’s observations, this view was perpetuated for more than two decades, resting upon the inappropriate assumption that the movement should consist of hierarchic organized structures, be devoid of factions, and be vested with publicly recognized and acknowledged leadership. But the organization of Rastafari was anarchistic, providing broad freedoms in activity, interpretation, and organization. As the Rastafari told the *Report* team, “...man is one, in God and with God. For this reason there are no leaders, only brethren and members” (p.24).

All said, the *Report* provided the framework for harmonizing relations between the Rastafari, Jamaican authorities, and the citizenry. The *Report*, written by esteemed scholars in a society that respects academics, personalized the Rastafari by showing that 1) most Rastafari were not extremists, 2) that Rastafarians suffered as much humiliation and violence, if not more, than the public claimed they directed toward them, 3) that the desires of the Rastafari were not as outrageous as assumed and overlapped with issues of import to other Jamaicans, and 4) the *Report* provided a set of recommendations for how to address the desires of the Rastafari.

Given the positive opening created by the *Report*, analysis of the Rastafari during the 1960s oscillated between keen observation and ethnocentrically-biased accounts. On one hand, analysts publishing during the 1960s continued to see the movement as escapist and as a psychological reaction to material and social privation (Lanternari, 1963; Patterson, 1964; Kitzinger, 1966; 1969), although Kitzinger made the prescient observations that if Selassie died the movement would not collapse (1966:36) and that it was “capable of great political force...[for] becoming an integral part of the whole Black militant movement” (1969:242).

A third work of the 1960s deserves mention. Leonard Barrett, a student of religion, published the first full-length monograph on the movement, *The Rastafarians: A Study in Messianic Cultism in Jamaica* (1968). Although brimming with the author’s ethnocentric judgements, the study is one of the most thorough to date. Barrett claims to have interviewed 500 Rastafarians and to have administered a survey over the course of three summers (1968:22). His participant observation with several Rastafarian groups and interviews of leading Rastafarians of the mid-1960s are very informative.

The 1970s: Themes and Issues

For much of the 1970s, the attitudes and perspectives toward the Rastafari exhibited a dual character. They continued to be measured by mainstream norms and were thought of as a cult, although views had begun to broaden. Nettleford argued that Rastafarians were a Jamaican phenomena, implying that their desire to separate from the society and to repatriate was a type of self-delusion; yet he was among the first to recognize the identity issues the Rastafari raised for Blacks in Jamaica and the diaspora (1972). Llewellyn Watson also focused on Rastafari and Black issues (1973; 1974). He compared the Rastafarians to America's Black Muslims, noting the commonalities between the two: a significant presence of young, activist-oriented, "lower class," marginalized men; racial rhetoric that holds Whites and Christianity responsible for the mental and material deprivation of Black people; the appreciable presence of members whose class origins are described as lumpenproletariat; rejection of the larger society in favor of implementing their own moral Black vision of society; Black nationalist roots that draw upon Marcus Garvey's ideas; and their nationalism makes them political, although they shun mainstream politics (1973). He was unable, however, to get beyond a view of the Rastafari as a class of "loafers, idlers and deadbeats" (1974:333). Differently, Yawney asserted that Rastafarian attitudes to race and nation exhibited two dimensions: an ideological, rhetorical, and categorical one that denounces entire groups of people, and the face-to-face interactions that allow for individual exceptions (1976).

One of the most sympathetic, insightful, insider-oriented perspectives was offered by Joseph Owens in his *Dread* (1976). In that work, Owens uses Rastafarian categories to organize his work and uses extensive interview quotes to illustrate the essence of Rastafari.

As national consciousness spread, a growing number of accounts began to focus on the contributions of the Rastafari to Jamaican identity, politics, music, culture, and liberation movements (de Albuquerque, 1977; 1979; Hebdige, 1974; Garrison, 1975; Davis, 1976; Yawney, 1978). The view of Rastafari as a "symbolic" protest movement grew (e.g., Miles, 1978), but mainly out of the analysis of Rastafari in Britain where it was claimed youths, alienated from their parent's generation and British society, sought the security of a Black identity, without fully inculcating the religious traditions of the movement (Cashmore, 1979).²⁷

The 1970s witnessed increased attention being paid (indirectly) to Rastafari and identity-related issues (Nettleford, 1972; Cashmore, 1977; 1979; Rogers, 1978; Garrison, 1979). Claudia Rogers was among the first to draw attention to the ethnicity of the Rastafari—their distinct language, culture, shared identity and world view, and boundary maintenance (1978). Several works approached the Rastafari in terms of mainstream, radical, and revolutionary politics (e.g., de Albuquerque, 1977; Chevannes, 1978; Garrison, 1975; Campbell, 1987). By the 1970s, enough had been written for useful bibliographies to be compiled (Owens, 1975; Chevannes, 1977; Gordon & Hughes, 1978).

Gender Issues

One of the glaring deficiencies in the literature is the dearth of understanding of and publications on women Rastafari. Although women are currently very visible in the movement, and seemingly had a strong presence in the movement during the 1930s, the movement appears male-dominated. The prevailing view, codified in the early studies, is that women play a peripheral role in the movement, subservient to men who believe that a woman's path to Rastafari (God) is through male guidance.

There are two major barriers to a better-grounded understanding of women and the Rastafari movement. One is that men have carried out most of the research and have been reluctant to interview female Rastafarians. The other is that most of the non-Rastafari women who have researched Rastafari tend to approach the issue from a feminist or ethnocentric perspective which measures Rastafarian women against non-Rastafari norms and experience. What is absent from the discussion are perspectives which allow Rastafarian women to define how they see themselves in relation to the movement, and how or whether things have changed. For example, a woman was elected Vice President of the largest Rastafarian organization in Jamaica in 1998. While one or two Brethren contested the move, they were a minority and were verbally chastised on several occasions for their "backward ways."²⁸ Moreover, there is not a clear grasp of the historical dynamics of the movement. For example, Lake points out that there were no women among the first Rastafari evangelists (1994:239), but women were a part of the movement from the start, many being former Bedwardites and Garveyites. Many of the older Rastafari women I have met have been leaders of one kind or another, highly esteemed in their locales. They likely suffered

their share of verbal abuse from men, but apparently did not compromise, hence these dynamics need to be detailed. I suspect that the movement became male-oriented during the 1940s when the Dreadlocks emerged. Some of the Dreadlocks saw women as a distraction that hindered pursuit of Godliness and asceticism; some elders have spoken of being celibate for up to a decade! But by the late 1970s women had reclaimed a central presence in the movement.

Yawney, a White feminist anthropologist, has contended that the “patriarchal principles” that structure Rastafarian households provide a clear sexual division of labor which “provides a ‘certain degree of security and stability in an otherwise tumultuous setting’” (1982:125). Yawney sees male Rastafarians as rarely being “companionable” with their mates, thoughtless to how male-dominated activities affect male-female relationships, and oblivious to sexuality as a part of sex, and how Rastafarian taboos on birth control limit women’s choices (1982:138-141). It is not clear that Rastafarian women would define these as central issues. However, Yawney does see an increase in women’s impact upon the movement coming from international influences that bring “pressures to change such dogmatic attitudes and practices,” especially Rastafarian women who live outside Jamaica (1983:74).

In a later article, Yawney provides a more sensitive account and acknowledges her earlier ethnocentrism by asking who is best situated to explain Rastafari—the outside researcher and categories, or in this case, Rastafarian women themselves, using their own framework (1994:65). The imposition of incongruent categories unattached to empirical validity or lived experience leaves us with less than useful categories such as Turner’s concept of the “new Rastafari”: “...the defining feature of the new Rastafari is the affirmation that class consciousness cannot exist without gender consciousness” (Turner, 1994:10). Not only is it dubious that Rastafarians are approaching their concerns in such terms, it is not clear that real-world men and women have provided the information that would inform such conceptualization.

Obliagele Lake (1994) offers a more complex but ambivalent viewpoint. While she assumes male dominance in a blanket-like fashion, she cites interviewees who do not fit the mold of being subordinated (1994:242-243). In many ways, the research on Rastafari women is suggestive of Simpson’s focus on racial rhetoric among the Rastafari—the rhetoric occupies

centerstage—but there is failure to specify the divergence between grandiloquence and practice.²⁹ It must be considered that all movements harbor progressive and regressive tendencies. Patriarchy, to the extent that it radiates domineering influence upon women, is incompatible with freedom, justice, and equality.

WATERSHEDS AND STRUGGLES IN RASTAFARI HISTORY: THE DIALECTICS OF SOCIAL IDENTITY FORMATION

Further Grounding the Rastafari and the Ethiopianist Connection

Aside from the literature cited, subsequent sections and are based on a combination of oral testimonies, fieldnotes, and newspaper accounts.

Robert Hill has tracked down three of the originative documents of the early Rastafari movement: *The Holy Piby*, *The Royal Parchment Scroll of Black Supremacy*, and *The Promise Key*.³⁰ *The Holy Piby*, published in 1924, had great influence on religious radicals in South Africa and Jamaica. Written by Robert Athlyi Rogers, an Anguillan who settled in Perth Amboy, New Jersey, *The Holy Piby*³¹ is a document that preaches “doctrine of the divinity of Ethiopia” (Scott, 1999:141) and was the first of the trilogy.³²

Rogers, as a result of a dream,³³ decided that he must go to sea, where he came into contact with a South African Garveyite, Joseph Masogha, who was a distributor of Garvey’s paper *The Negro World*. Rogers was once the president of a UNIA local in Perth Amboy and the minister of his own church, the Afro-Athlyican Constructive Gaathlyans Church, of which he later made Masogha the head (See Scott, 1999:140). He believed that the leadership of the African struggle should be an African or someone who has made Africa their home.³⁴ This was perceptive on Rogers’s part because South Africans like James Dwane,³⁵ a leader of an indigenous South African tribal clan, felt strongly that the phrase “Africa for the Africans” had to be literally interpreted. Dwane’s experience with the Black American churches during his visit to the United States made him feel that the church leaders had required him to be subordinate, and did not acknowledge the importance of reaching out to their African compatriots (Sundkler, 1964:41).³⁶

Sundkler’s work on Bantu prophets in South Africa confirms the relationship between Rogers, Masogha, *The Holy Piby*, and between Ethiopianism in America, South Africa, and Jamaica:

The Bible which the Bantu now have is the wrong book. There exists, they say, another Bible, hidden away from the Bantu by the Whites, a book containing the *real truth*, whilst the “old Bible”—as the Bible is called in such circles—was written only to cheat the Black man. One source of this propaganda seems to be the Afro-Athlycan Constructive Church, of Negro [Black American] origin...they know and [claim to] possess “another” Bible, the right, Ethiopian Bible, called “*The Holy Piby*.” According to them, the “old Bible” was given to the children of the house of Israel, whereas the *The Holy Piby* has been given to children of the house of Ethiopia (1964:278, emphasis added).

In this statement there is the implicit suggestion that Ethiopianism is an antidote to mis-education and deracination.

While traveling at sea, Rogers stopped in Colón, Panama, where he met two Jamaicans who expressed an interest in *The Holy Piby* and his Athlycan church. Around 1924-25 the two, Charlie Goodrich and Mother Grace Garrison, resettled in Jamaica and formed a branch of the Afro-Athlycan Constructive Gaathlyans (aka the Hamatic Church) in Jamaica. The Hamitic Church was condemned by the Garveyites (Scott, 1999:142), notwithstanding its Ethiopianism. The Garveyites literally ran Goodrich and Mother Grace out of Kingston, and it was a former Bedwardite living in Port Morant who helped the fleeing pair find respite, and this is likely how the *Holy Piby* ends up in St. Thomas, where Leonard Howell would soon be preaching Rastafari (Scott, 1999:142). Robert Hill believes that Howell found *The Holy Piby* in Port Morant (Scott, 1999:142,143).

The second document of the trilogy, *The Royal Parchment Scroll*, was written by Reverend Pettersburgh, an African American, who apparently visited Jamaica. *The Promise Key*, the final document of the trilogy, was published by the original Rastafarian Leonard Howell in 1934, and according to Hill, was plagiarized from *The Royal Parchment Scroll*. *The Promise Key* was a key text used in street meetings of the early Rastafari. The movement of ideas, texts, and people between the United States, South Africa, and Jamaica make Rastafari a prime example of the global and local dimensions of groups that constitute the Black diaspora.

Several of the early Rastafari evangelists were international travelers, former Garveyites, or greatly influenced by Garvey (see Smith, Augier, & Nettleford, 1960:6; Post, 1978:164). Leonard Howell visited Colón, Panama, and New York City, before returning to Jamaica in 1932 from the United States. Joseph Hibbert lived in Costa Rica from 1911 and

returned to Jamaica in 1931. Archibald Dunkley served as a seaman on Atlantic Fruit Company (AFC) boats, leaving the AFC toward the end of 1930 to study the “Bible for two and a half years ‘to determine whether Haile Selassie was the Messiah whom Garvey had prophesied’”(Post, 1978:164). Robert Hinds was a former Bedwardite. All of these men were preaching the doctrine of Ras Tafari by 1932, and existing evidence places the emergence of the first Rastafarians somewhere between West Kingston and St. Thomas Parish, Jamaica, between late 1931 and early 1932. Reference to them is made in 1932 Jamaican police records.³⁷

As I have suggested, these early evangelists were drawing upon extant traditions and symbols, but they were piecing them together in novel ways. Rasta Ivey has a phrase she uses to explain how she made sense of the new beliefs as she was coming into the faith: “The five is become one” (1998). She is referring to the four evangelists mentioned plus an unknown evangelist, Bishop Brown. She implies a connection between Bedward and the ideas of the early evangelists:

I understood [the varying doctrines of Rastafari] because from Mr. [Alexander] Bedward (sic) forward I could put everybody together and it becomes one. When he [Leonard Howell] came and was telling me, I understood because it is one thing. Mr. Bedward, Bishop Brown and all those men is one thing. It seems as if it is divided, but it is not. It is one thing. At that time [before the Coronation], he [Selassie, I] was not on the scene.... [he was not] in our midst yet that we could understand that it is Him [Selassie had not yet been crowned Emperor] (1998).

To complicate matters, the Salvation Army was preaching of a “Lion of Judah that will break every chain,” which is how Selassie, I, was conceived after he was crowned Emperor (Rasta Ivey 1998). This Rastafari chant enshrines the idea:

The Conquering Lion must break every chain
The Conquering Lion must break every chain
and give I a victory again and again
The Lion of Judah must break every chain
and give I a victory again and again

It was not the racial rhetoric that first got Rastafarians into trouble; it was their rejection of British colonialism and their challenge to the indigenous religions that sparked animosity between them, the public, and authorities.

Prior to the 1960s, street meetings were a major instrument used to promote the message of Rastafari, and an important venue for the uninitiated to experience their

Encounter, facilitating Nigrescence and religious conversion. Leaders held meetings that drew audiences of different sizes. Simpson claims these meetings were held once or twice a week, and typically attracting more than one hundred listeners and onlookers (1970:215). The meetings offered Rastafarians the opportunity to disseminate their message and ideology and it is likely that many new converts to Ras Tafari resulted. The life story accounts confirm these observations. However, by the 1970s, the presence of the Rastafari street meeting as a venue for communication and indirect recruitment had diminished.³⁸

The 1930s: From Proto-Movement to Movement During the “Decade of Despair”³⁹

Another important source of information and imagery for the nascent Rastafarians came from a June 1931 issue of *National Geographic*, which ran a cover story of the crowning of Ras Tafari. The issue showed the King and his Queen in full royal regalia and provided extensive information on the royal family and Ethiopia. How many copies of the issue were circulating among Jamaica’s poorest citizens is not clear. One elder remembers getting a glimpse of it from a seaman or a man who worked on the Kingston docks.

As I show, three main ideological tendencies define the movement, existing from its inception: a mystical, spiritualist, secret society-oriented tendency that likely grows out of Hibbert’s influence; a reform and social justice tendency associated with early leaders like Ferdinand Ricketts, Vernal Davis, and Paul Erlichman, and a communal, mystical, world-renouncing tendency, especially associated with Howell and, later, with Prince Edward. All three tendencies were oriented toward egalitarianism among the in-group. All consistently developed associations, albeit usually small-scale and short-lived, and all relied upon the Bible for reference, although to varying degrees.⁴⁰ Some of the groups harbored Revivalist-like proclivities, but core beliefs uniting the early Rastafarians are belief in the divinity of Selsassie, I, belief in the paramount importance of seeking out truth, justice, and righteousness, and belief in Black redemption-repatriation. There is considerable variation outside of these beliefs, but this is a normal part of group development. Although most Rastafari groups are democratic, autocratic propensities can be found among some, especially those with Revivalist-like practices.

From soon after their coalescence into small groups, the early Rastafarians were persecuted; Ethiopianism and the new ideological synthesis of the Rastafarians became a

threat to the status quo,⁴¹ but not like in South Africa. Although there were many ideological and cultural continuities with the past, what made the Rastafarians “new” was the combination of their positive evaluation of Africa and blackness, their desire to repatriate to Africa, their criticism of the Crown and colonialism, and their view that the Messiah had already returned and was walking once again among mortals—a Black Messiah at that. Not only did the police search out early Rastafari meetings and infiltrate them, they harassed and/or beat members whenever the opportunity presented itself. These dynamics were a substantial factor in the development of Rastafarian group identity, especially their antisystemic tendencies. Hence, Rastafarian identity has a religious and sometimes political radicalism in which ego is seen as a part of a special people committed to truth, justice, and righteousness, and that the scorn and violence directed toward them were a part of the burden they bore as chosen people.

That Ethiopianism was a strong influence upon the thinking and organization of the early Rastafarians is reflected in the names of their organizations. For example, in 1924 Hibbert joined the organization *Ancient Mystic Order of Ethiopia*, a Masonic group, and later became a Master Mason of that Order. Later, names such as United Ethiopian Body, Ethiopian Youth Cosmic Faith, and the African Cultural League were common to the Rastafari (Simpson, 1970:208).

Upon Hibbert's return to Jamaica in 1931, he began preaching that Haile Selassie was the King of Kings, the returned Messiah, and the Redeemer of Israel in the area of St. Andrew known as Benoa District, later moving to Kingston to preach at Redemption Market, where Howell was already preaching that Ras Tafari was God (Smith, et al., 1960:6; Barrett, 1988:82). In 1932, Hibbert met Howell during a street meeting. Howell was planning to leave to preach in Port Morant (St. Thomas Parish), and he asked Hibbert to maintain his Kingston constituency. Hibbert proceeded to organize Howell's followers into a group called *The Ethiopian Coptic Faith*, for which there was developed rules and procedures of order (Smith, et al., 1960:7), suggesting more than informal association. For unknown reasons this displeased Howell, since upon his return to Kingston Howell dismantled the organization and took its membership east with him. Hibbert continued preaching, though, and proceeded to create the *Ethiopian Coptic Church*, which reflected his Masonic and mystical orientations.

Most observers hold Leonard Howell as the father of Rastafari, being the first to

preach the faith. However, others were preaching around the same time, and it seems all were aware of each other. Post suggests that Hibbert could possibly have been preaching Rastafari before Howell (1978:164). To complicate matters, at least one elder Rastafarian who was a follower of Robert Hinds claimed that he too was preaching Rastafari at the same time.⁴² The elder and Hinds were Bedwardites; and Hinds was one of those who participated in Bedward's 1921 march against the police, and was tried and charged as being mentally incompetent. By 1934, Hinds had defined his view on Haile Selassie, I: "...after the 1st of August, 1934, they [Rastafarians] would know when they were going to Ethiopia, because the King of England and King Ras Tafari were going to hold a consultation over that matter, and the King of England would take them over in ships to Ethiopia and hand them over to their King"⁴³ (*Daily Gleaner*, 3/17/34). According to another source, Hinds claims to have learned of Ras Tafari from someone who had returned from Cuba (Post, 1978:163). Howell, however, left the most tangible evidence of his activities, especially his writings, and from an academic perspective, it is this which gives him original founder status. Most Rastafarians acknowledge him as founding father, but this story is far from being complete.

Howell moved back and forth between rural St. Thomas and Kingston during the early 1930s before settling at Pinnacle in St. Catherine's Parish in 1940.⁴⁴ He developed a large and ardent following early on, embedding himself among an already discontented peasant and squatter population. This was an audience receptive to hearing about the Black Messiah in Ethiopia who was ready to stretch forth his hands to gather the scattered Blacks of the diaspora. One of Jamaica's mainstream newspapers, the *Daily Gleaner*, estimated that Howell had around 800 followers in the Leith Hall and Pear Tree Grove areas of St. Thomas (12/16/33, p.1). In the same article, Howell was reported to be selling photographs of Haile Selassie, I, for one shilling each, which he claimed would serve as passports to Ethiopia (December 16, p.1). In several ways, Howell was like Bedward. He claimed to have created a new religion, and that *the spirit of God did not reside in a church, but in the human body*. Like Bedward, Howell came to see himself as divine—even calling himself Haile Selassie at one point—similar to Bedward, and unlike most Rastafarians, he projected an autocratic style of leadership. Like Bedward, he too would be labeled as insane and confined to the asylum. This takes us back to the earlier point about God being able to take mortal form and that this is distinctively African in character.

After being identified by the British colonials as the leader of a “cult” called the Ras Tafari, Howell became aggressive in expressing an anti-state--almost anarchist--view that no allegiance should be given to the British or any colonial, imperialist, and racist government. The British, with the glad assistance of their Black police officers, promptly arrested Howell in January of 1934, charging him with sedition. His arrest was based on a speech he and a fellow founding Rastafarian delivered in December, 1933. Howell was given a two-year sentence and his associate one year. He was painted as a madman by both Black and White authorities in Jamaica. After being released from prison in 1936, Howell formed an organization called *The Ethiopian Salvation Society*. It is said that he operated several bakeries in the vicinities of Princess Street, Heywood Street, and Oxford Street, in Kingston (Smith, et al., 1960:8).

The pattern of harassment, arrest, and labeling of Rastafarians as lunatics would continue through the 1970s. Those accused of lunacy were often those who were speaking for their “rights” and the act of professing Rastafari, publicly or personally, suggested to authorities that a person was suffering “mental deterioration” (Nettleford, 1972:56). People were committed to institutions without any kind of clinical diagnosis.

In 1933, Dunkley founded his *King of Kings Missionary Movement*, preaching that His Imperial Majesty (H.I.M.) was the Root of David, “the Son of the Living God, but not the Father Himself”⁴⁵ (Smith, et al., 1960:6). Dunkley’s rendition of Rastafari depended more literally on the Bible than the other evangelists. His mission was founded in Port Antonio, but later moved to Kingston. According to Barrett, Dunkley recruited many members who were Garveyites (1988:82). Dunkley’s organization was informal and had no officers or headquarters (Smith, et al., 1960:7). Post speculates that Altamont Reid, another early, social justice-oriented preacher, “radicalized” and likely took over the *King of Kings Mission*.

Dunkley was charged by police with disorderly conduct during a street meeting in Kingston, September, 1934 (Smith, et al., 1960:8). He soon received a similar charge while at Morant Bay (the area where Howell was organizing and evangelizing during the same time),⁴⁶ and received a sentence of 30 days in jail. In February of 1935, he was arrested in Half-Way Tree, Kingston, and was later sent to the asylum where he spent nearly six months. Dunkley was thrice arrested during 1935, including one arrest on the charge of lunacy.

Early Rastafari activists Paul Erlington, Vernal Davis, and Ferdinand Ricketts were

Garveyites. They hailed from the Dungle (or “Dung-Hill,” a Kingston ghetto), were critics of Jamaican society, and were keen on the idea of migration to Africa. They were influenced by Howell, Hibbert, Dunkley, and Robert Hinds, and took the stance that Haile Selassie was the Living God.

By the late 1930s, the working and middle classes were disavowing themselves of the Rastafarians, who they now called extremists. The public began to physically confront the Rastafarians in their open air gatherings.⁴⁷ Petitions were put forward that criminalized the public assembly of those preaching Rastafari. The real threat to the status quo was Howell’s anti-state and anti-colonial views, along with the growing support he found among the poor in Kingston and rural St. Thomas. Theirs was a crude but effective political and religious radicalism rooted in Ethiopianism. They believed that they had no allegiance to European principalities and powers. It was an effective message, because it attracted followers.

Fueled by propaganda, anti-white sentiments continued to grow among Rastafarians and non-Rastafarians alike. In 1935, an article by Frederico Philos (probably a pseudonym) was published in the *Jamaica Times*.⁴⁸ The article “revealed” that a threatening and arcane group, the “Nya-Binghi,” had arisen in the jungles and cities of Africa and had spread throughout the world wherever Blacks had been transplanted as slaves. According to Philos, their name, Nya-binghi, meant “death to Whites.” The problem the Nya-Binghi posed was that they were approximately 20 million strong and that Haile Selassie had agreed to be their leader. This newspeak fit perfectly with the widespread anti-White, anti-colonial, and Ethiopianist sentiments of the time. For the first Rastafarians, the article confirmed the new message: Haile Selassie had recently been enthroned as Emperor, and because he was the Messiah, it was logical in their eyes that he would head an organization of Black people aimed at overthrowing Whites and colonialism. Moreover, Philos’ name suggested that he could be of Italian extraction, and given Rastafari views on Rome (including anti-Catholicism), it was not outrageous that people took the article seriously. Philos’s account of the Nya-Binghi fit with the emerging Rastafarian doctrines, particularly the view that White domination of Blacks was about to end, and that the meek (Blacks) would soon reign supreme, inheriting the Earth.

Despite the inaccuracies of Philos’ propaganda, the article is likely the inspiration for the name of a longstanding Rastafarian sect, the Nyabinghis.⁴⁹ They defined the name to

mean death to White *and* Black oppressors.⁵⁰ This is consistent with the themes and cries raised during the Morant Bay Rebellion: Death to the Whites and those [Blacks] who would not join them. Nyabinghi became the term associated with Rastafarian culture, the Nyabinghis being the dominant sect through the present.

In 1937, the Ethiopian World Federation (EWF) was established in New York City, founded by Dr. Malaku Bayen, under the directions of Haile Selassie, I. It was created as an organ to collect funds and build support for Ethiopia's war against the Italian fascists. The EWF preamble states "*We the Black people of the world, in order to effect Unity, Solidarity, Liberty, Freedom, and self-determination, to secure Justice and maintain the Integrity of Ethiopia, which is our divine heritage, do hereby establish and ordain this constitution for the Ethiopian World Federation*" (emphasis added). Many Jamaicans were clamoring for a branch of the EWF, and they received their wish in 1938. Local 17 of the EWF was founded in Kingston in August of 1938, organized by Rastafarian Paul Erlington, who also served as the first vice-president. The first president was L.F.C. Mantle, who formerly preached in the ghettos. Local 17 was organically linked to the nascent Rastafarians. Besides Erlington, H. Archibald Dunkley was a co-founder, and Joseph Hibbert, Vernal Davis, and Ferdinand Ricketts, all early social justice-oriented Rastafarians, were members. The first EWF local did not remain active for long. In 1942, a second local, 31, was formed, and for a while Vernal Davis and Ferdinand Ricketts were among its members.

After the 1938 uprising the Black middle class turned conservative and their enmity toward the Rastafari increased from this time forward. Around this time, for example, the St Andrew Civic League publicly condemned the Rastafari as extremists and racists (*Plain Talk*, April 3, 1937) This facilitated their becoming isolated and further estranged from the Jamaican middle and working class mainstream, despite their being a historical prototype of mainstream beliefs and behaviors of Black Jamaicans. Alexander Bustamante gave voice to anti-Rastafari sentiments by violently cracking down on them at every opportunity. The class dimension of the split in the Rastafari movement's relationship to society may have its origins here. This may help explain why on one hand the Rastafari came to be despised by the working and middle classes and most religionists, but respected by poor rural and ghetto dwellers.

That the movement grew out of organizations or associations and that Rastafarians

continued to create these grassroots structures implies a functional utility that met the demands of their environment and ideology. By the 1950s, some Rastafarian organizations had upwards of a hundred members.

The 1940s: A New Group Identity Amidst In-Group Factionalism

The Rastafarian movement became ever more radical from the mid-late 1940s as reactions from the authorities and citizenry became more punitive. Around 1940, Howell purchased a substantial piece of property in rural St. Catherine and named it Pinnacle (from the site one can see for miles in several directions). The area is near Sligoville, home of the earliest free Black settlements in Jamaica. Smith, et al., relates that Howell moved there with approximately 1,600 followers, most of whom were from Kingston and St. Thomas (1960:8). By mid-1941, Pinnacle was periodically raided by police under the pretext, true or false, of cultivation of Cannabis and of assaulting nearby residents and relieving them of their crops. By this time Cannabis was being used ritually by Rastafarians, although its use among the poor and casual and estate workers was common long before then. Central African indentured immigrants, for example, grew and used it in the mid-1800s, and they worked alongside Indian workers who too used Cannabis (Schuler, 1980). Both groups originate from places that have Cannabis traditions. Apparently Cannabis production provided Howell and Pinnacle a source of income and a supply for community consumption. During the 1941 raid, 70 Howellites were arrested and 28 later imprisoned, including Howell (Smith, et al., 1960:8-9). Howell returned to Pinnacle and resumed his leadership in 1943.

The first Rastafari did not grow dreadlocks (uncombed, uncut hair). The men were known by their beards, a distinguishing feature in a society where most men shaved and only academics and lunatics grew substantial facial hair.⁵¹ Besides the beards, the identifying symbols of the Rastafari during these times were the red, gold, and green “pom-pom” (a tassel-like object with the colors of the Ethiopian flag), a tri-colored badge, or some similarly colored token. A woman might wear a tri-colored sash, ribbon, pom pom, scarf, or some similar distinguishing emblem. Although it started earlier, it is clear that by the 1940s some men had begun the practice of not closely trimming their hair (similar to what is known as an Afro in America), and this made them more identifiable. Eventually, they came to be known as “combsomes,” meaning they comb their hair some. It is also in the 1940s that the

dreadlocks came upon the scene, and it may have been them who coined the phrase “comb-some” in derision of those who did not wear locks. What was occurring was factionalism within the movement. A younger element was adopting the movement and they did not approve of the conservativeness and superstitions of their elders. But the first Rastafari had merely overlaid Rastafari onto other practices and beliefs already held.

According to Chevannes (1994) and Homiak (1997), these “youths”⁵² were among the first to grow dreadlocks. Ferguson places the formation of one of these groups, the Youth Black Faith, as early as 1940 (1994:61). They rejected the religious elements of Rastafari that drew upon indigenous faiths, especially Kumina, Pocomania, the Revivalists, and practitioners of Obeah. Spirit possession, glossalia, candle burning, and similar practices were ostracized by the dreadlocks as incompatible with the requirements of the new faith. For them, the indigenous practices represented the old order and the status quo, a focus on death and spirits and not on life, love, and the here-and-now as opposed to the afterlife. Simpson correctly recognized that “Trances and witchcraft have no place in the Ras Tafari movement....” (1970:22).

A close reading of the Old Testament and the Nazarite vows provided the rationale for why all Rastafari should grow locks. They wanted to closely conform to the Old Testament rules and the lifestyle of the “ancients of days.” In particular, the groups Youth Black Faith and the Higes Knots have been attributed with initiating the changes (Chevannes, 1994; Homiak, 1997), although oral testimonies suggest there were others who played a similar role during the same time. These youths brought with them a zealousness and confrontational stance that fully challenged the elders. Given Cross, Jr.’s, (1995) account of stages two and three of Nigrescence, it is unsurprising that a youthful, zealous, self-righteous group would be the vanguard of in-group change. The challenges of the young Rastafari led to in-group conflicts over ideology and heightened tensions between the Rastafari and the rest of Jamaican society. For instance they would shout “Fire Burn!” and “Death to all Black and White Oppressors” at the citizenry, especially Christians and the middle classes. Some strove to be ascetic, sometimes dressing in sackcloth. Some refused to wear shoes. They lived in camps scattered across Kingston, with prominent camps being in the Dungle, Kingston Pen, Back-O-Wall, Warieka Hills, and Rema areas. These dreadlocks endeavored to live in a state of nature—like modern-day John the Baptists. Most stopped eating meat. Foods were

chosen by the elemental qualities the Dreadlocks determined to reside in the foodstuffs. Earth foods and air foods were staples.⁵³ Many foods were tabooed. These included processed foods and most meats (small scaled fishes were acceptable). Communalism and egalitarianism were given greater emphasis. Illustrative of this is the story related to me by two elders of how if there was only “one I-nana (banana)” and “half-dozen Rastaman,” all shared it and went away “feell[ing] satisfy[ed]” (Ras Mas).

An anti-technologism tendency development amongst these locksmen, but apparently was not rampant. The Rasses Simpson spoke of were not against using planes to reach Ethiopia nor was the Rastafari Repatriation Association averse to using radio and television media to showcase their performances during the 1960s. Simpson's Rasses believed that repatriation would occur by first traveling by air to the United States, and then on ships to Abyssinia. It is claimed that planes were to leave Jamaica every five minutes carrying Blacks to Ethiopia while planes left Abyssinia every five minutes bringing out Whites. Another line of wishful thinking held that seven miles of steamships would sail from America or England to ferry them to Africa. This line of thinking held that America and England were financially responsible for the plight of Blacks in the New World, thus it should be these nations that underwrite their repatriation (as a side note, the Rastafarians have been seeking Reparations since the 1950s, and now finally the issue has seeped into public discussions and onto the agenda of sections of the United Nations, although no credit has been given to the Rastafari as yet). Nevertheless, quite a few groups rejecting using “Babylonian” technologies, which were later referred to as “tricknology.” This indicates divergent interpretations on how the movement should relate to technology.

The militant Rastafari rejected Jamaican society in a way that greatly exceeded their forerunners. For them Jamaica was fully equivalent to Rome past and present, calling it Babylon. They symbolically separated themselves from Babylon through language, diet, dress, and lifestyle. A distinctive group and personal identity was congealing with Blackness/Ethiopianess being a core organizing element around which a new ethnicity was created (ethnicity consisting of discernible national orientations, language, world view, traditions, religion, clothing, foods, etc). The Dreadlocks, most identifying as Nyabinghis, eventually became the hegemonic group within the movement.

The ideology and lifestyle promoted by the younger adherents spread and came more

forcibly into conflict with the beliefs and attitudes of other Jamaicans. Their “antisystemic” tendencies—anti-Westernism, anti-statism, anti-wage-labor, and anti-inequality—were nearly opposite to what their fellow citizens believed and aspired to. Their criticisms could be scathing:

“Strike Busta (Bustamante, leader of the Jamaican Labour Party and former Chief Minister), Manley (leader of the People’s National Party and now Chief Minister), Churchill, and all who sit in the seats of the oppressors”.... “Mr. S. [the White anthropologist who first studied the Rastafarians] is a brave man to come here, but remember that Satan is a brave man too. The Anglo-Saxons teach us ignorance. Black man, be reasonable. Can you have a Queen without a King? I know that the Queen who is coming here doesn’t care for me, so why should I adore her? The only future destination is with Ras Tafari. Where was God when the white man was raping India, Egypt, and other countries? Haile Selassie is Jesus Christ reincarnated” (Simpson, 1970:217).

The above quote is from the early-mid 1950s. A crackdown on the Rastafari awaited the end of the decade, but they were already taking a drubbing by this time. Testimonies of the elders confirm the ways in which symbolic and physical violence was heaped upon them. Several elders explained how they could not walk through certain parts of Kingston during daylight hours; they instead used gullies (drains for water run-off). The heavy-handedness had the effect of solidifying the antisystemic identity of Rastafarians while enhancing their sense of solidarity in being a despised, but special, people. Increasingly resolute in their identity and mission, they more openly confronted the police and legal system.

Although precisely dating the emergence of their anti-wage labor attitude is not presently possible, it existed at least by the 1940s. This perspective may have been a critique carried over from the 1938 Labor Rebellion. Some Rastafarians believed that one person working for another was a type of slavery, expressing what Rex Nettleford called a “theory of work” that was tantamount to a “refusal to work for the oppressors in Babylon” (1972:90). What the Rastafari were pointing to was what work meant to the poor: the precariousness of employment; the obstacles to acquiring property such as land and shelter; and the impossibility of becoming economically self-sufficient. For many Rastafari, the anti-wage ideology co-existed with a disdain for accumulation of material possessions, which were seen as worldly goods that distracted their attention from reaching Africa.⁵⁴ But the complete rejection of capitalism was left to the ascetic militants who moved to the bush and refused to produce for anyone, including themselves. Aside from them, many Rastafari worked or

wanted to work, and a significant number wanted to form labor cooperatives. What all could find common ground in was the desire to be independent and self-reliant, and to control production, investment, and consumption, which are fundamental tenets of Black nationalism. They knew work meant exploitation, and they wanted an end to such relationships. Thus, it appropriate to say these Rastafari may have been anti-wage labor, but not against petty commodity production for local markets.⁵⁵

The 1950s: Conflict Escalates as the Movement Consolidates

Simpson portrayed the 1950s as a relatively calm time for the Rastafarians (1955), but this is far from the truth. It may have been his functionalism that constrained his analysis to only what was happening around him in 1953. Smith, et al., noted that the public already held the Rastafari in “contempt and disgust, especially the locksmen” (1960:10). In 1954, the conflict between Rastafari and society heightened, especially between Rastafarians and the police. In retrospect, the conflicts between oppressors and oppressed were being heightened worldwide. In America, the African American Civil Rights movement was gaining momentum. During 1955, the Bandung Conference was held in Indonesia, signaling the rise of the Non-aligned movement. Charismatic nationalistic-decolonization personalities like Indonesia’s Sukarno, Egypt’s Gamel Nasser, and India’s Jawaharlal Nehru captured the hearts and minds of radicals and poor alike. In 1959, Fidel Castro’s overthrow of Batista suggested that changing the social order was possible. Redemption time for the poor and oppressed seemed at hand, and the Rastafari were aware of the signals of change across the globe. It was also during the 1950s that the movement consolidated, at least culturally speaking.

By 1950, the contours of a distinctive socio-cultural identity were clear. The Rastafari were now known for their idiosyncratic lexicon, eating habits, race consciousness, ganja smoking, long hair, and rejection of Jamaican nationality.

In 1954, Howell’s Pinnacle commune was destroyed by police, the final of a series of law enforcement efforts to close down the commune. More than 150 were arrested, and the destruction of Pinnacle had the unintended consequence of spreading the movement. Pinnacle and the various Rastafari camps, furnished means by which the Rastafari could actualize their beliefs such as the Nazarite vow to live outside of the city and to live more in harmony with nature. Hundreds of people resided at Pinnacle and many of them were faced

with returning to Kingston, although some went farther into the countryside. An increase in the number of locksmen in Kingston coincided with the razing of Pinnacle. Those who returned to Kingston helped to further spread Rastafari beliefs and practices, especially communal living, elder leadership, strong belief in rural life and farming, etc. In 1960, Howell was confined to an asylum, by then a broken man since he had lost standing among Rastafarians for his claims to divinity.⁵⁶

Increased hostility from the public and authorities required that some Rastafari had to travel in small units for protection. When assaulted or arrested, they exhibited a solidarity that befuddled all. During 1954, a group of 18 Rastafari were arrested and later charged with contempt of court, rioting, and “assembling with a view to rioting”; twelve were sent to prison for 15 months. In another case in 1954, 32 were arrested “while marching with banner and Bible, *demanding freedom* (Smith, et al., 1960:11, my emphasis; cf *Daily Gleaner*, 4/17/54, p.1). In still another case related by an elder, a dozen or so Rastafari were arrested and refused to give any name to the police other than “Ras one, Ras two, and so on.”⁵⁷ They did the same in court and were charged with contempt. These strategies are reminiscent of the solidarity tactics used by contemporary activists. The militancy and visible demonstrations by the Rastafari increased in tandem with the police brutality directed toward them. Beatings and “trimmings” became familiar stories during this era. Trimming, the forcible cutting of Rastafarian locks, is a humiliating violation because of the religious significance attributed to their locks.

Mamie Richardson of New York City visited Jamaica in 1955 to assist the EWF in organizing more locals and in teaching the essentials of the EWF mission. One result was a flurry of activity in the form of the creation of new locals, many of which did not survive for long. In any event, Rastafari organizations moved into some of the EWF locals. For example, the *Ethiopian Youth Cosmic Faith* moved into EWF Locals 7 and 33, while Dunkley took charge of the Charter for Local 77 (Smith, et al., 1960:12).

Brother Woks⁵⁸ (whose godfather was Joseph Hibbert) remembers several locals, although he cannot accurately remember their numbers. He remembers his chapter had scores of Rastafarian members. Brother Woks related how Mamie Richardson, a deputy of the New York City EWF, visited Jamaica and “blessed the informal groups [Rastafarians] of Brothers Solidarity of United Ethiopia (BSUE)....that same BSUE had changed to [the] ACL

[the African Cultural League]. When she came here ... she blessed the group [the BSUE or ACL] with a charter and named it His Imperial Majesty Emperor Haile Selassie, I, First Local 37 of the Ethiopian World Federation.”⁵⁹

Repatriation became an urgent item on the Rastafarian agenda during the 1950s. This was a reaction to several circumstances: 1) they recognized that the energy being invested into building Jamaica’s political parties would be of no benefit since politicians had no interest in them; 2) the announcement by the EWF-New York City to Local 31 in Jamaica that H.I.M. had granted 500 acres of rich land that would be made available to Black people in the West; 3) rumors that Haile Selassie, I, was building a Navy and that some of the ships were to sail to Jamaica;⁶⁰ and 4) the negative impact of the great migration of Jamaicans to Britain (the Rastafarians asked why would Black people migrate to the home of their colonizer). It was also in the 1950s that the first Rastafarians appeared in England.⁶¹ Nevertheless, the desire of Jamaicans to migrate to Africa was widespread and vigorous outside of the Rastafari. Smith, et al., observed that “In June 1955 one of the writers visited St. Elizabeth to carry out a survey of labor and employment conditions. All households in a given area were to be enumerated. Almost to a man, the people interviewed regarded the survey as a census by Government of all those who wanted to go to Africa” (1960:12). The *Report* added how “Many other Jamaicans, who do not accept the divinity of the Emperor of Ethiopia, would gladly seize an opportunity to emigrate to Africa” (Smith, et al., 1960:35).

Nyabinghi drumming and dancing became popularized among the Rastafari in the late 1950s, and because of its links to other traditions, deserves some attention because it is a ritual activity that reinforces group identity and community. It is through the Nyabinghi that Rastafarians recite, memorize, and reinforce their ideology; it is a commitment-securing, communion, transcendence, and catharsis mechanism. The early Rastafarians who did not use drums as their music was much more akin to other revivalist traditions that relied mainly on singing, handclapping, shakers, rattles, and rhumba boxes, all played to Sankey and other hymns. Burru, on the other hand, was very “African,” relying on three drum types: the bass, the funde, and the repeater. Verena Reckord, who has studied Burru (it is now virtually extinct), maintains that it has its origins in slavery, providing a “work metronome” function for slaves, which is why Whites allowed it to be used openly despite the 1717 order outlawing drumming and shell-blowing (1977:6). Hence, an intergenerational tradition developed

around the drumming practices.

Bilby and Leib (1986) forcefully contend that Kumina drumming (Kumina is another indigenous Jamaican religious form) was an early influence on the development of the Nyabingi. While their claim contradicts many Rastafarian claims that they have no ties to or interest in ancestor-oriented religions like Kumina, they are correct to emphasize the community level interaction between religious adherents. Furthermore, early Rastafarians, like some of the Howellites, were former practitioners of Kumina and followers of Bedward; so to assert that Kumina rhythms practices were sources of inspiration and elements for the nascent Nyabingi ceremony deserves more attention.

When slavery ended, so too did the Burru people's central function, therefore many ended up moving to Kingston and surrounding areas in search of work. However, between September and December, the tradition found a new function as the drummers traveled through town drumming and singing "topical songs about current events and songs about individuals in the community" (Reckord, 1977:6), like similar West African practices. Nagashima believes Burru people had a religious orientation tied to funerals and other ceremonies (1984:70). During the "fall" season, these drummers spent much time together practicing around campfires, and it is thought that these men were "ne'er-do-wells and criminals" (Reckord, 1977:6), which may explain the link some impute between early Rastafarians and criminals. It was in West Kingston during the late 1930s that the two groups began to interact, an almost natural association between two derelict groups who favored communalism; it was also a ghetto tradition of the 1930s to welcome prisoners back into their community with Burru drumming. Reckford believes that by the late 1940s, Rastafarians in West Kingston had adopted the Burru drums and begun to sing their own chants (hymns) to the rhythms (1977:8). This estimate is reasonable because master Rastafarian drummer Count Ossie, one of the originators of Nyabingi drumming, says he learned the Burru style from a Master Burru drummer in the Salt Lane area of the Dungle during the late 1940s, and that by Christmas, 1949, a Rastafarian camp at Wareika Hills held a congregation where Burru drummers and Rastafarians sang, danced, and smoked herbs together (see Reckord, 1977:8). Cedric Brooks, another noted Rastafarian drummer, added that prior to 1957, Rasta music was confined mainly to camps in Kingston (Editor, 1977:14)

During its frenetic heights, the Nyabingi dance consists of energetic jumping,

lurching, and running movements accompanied by Rastafari chants and Niyabinghi drumming.⁶² One ritual function of the Niyabinghi dance is to symbolically condemn oppressors and enemies of justice; it is also meant to define the common enemies of Black people. Cries of “Death to the oppressors!”, “Earthquake!”, “Fire!”, and “Brimstone!” are shouted during the feverish heights of the Niyabinghi.

In 1958, Prince Edward C. Edwards (later known as Prince Emmanuel, who became the leader of the Bobo Shanti band of the Rastafari) convened an island-wide 21 day “Convention” of Rastafari in Kingston’s Kingston Pen-Back-O-Wall section, which was a Rastafari stronghold. Thousands of Rastafari attended, some coming from as far away as Montego Bay. Some attendees sold all of their belongings, believing that when the convention ended they would leave for Africa (*Jamaica Times*, 3/8/58; p.1,14). It is believed that the Niyabinghi dance became known to large numbers of Rastafari at this convention (cf. Smith, et al., 1960:15), facilitating its diffusion throughout the island.

Prince Edward’s convention expedited the deterioration in Rastafari-public relations. The Nyabinghi ceremonies pulsed throughout the night, lit by bonfires fueled by discarded tires. Like the slaves of old, the Rastafari sometimes drum, chant, and dance from dusk to dawn, interspersed with periods of frenetic activity involving shouting, as described above. Many non-Rastafari who witnessed the shouting, dancing, and chanting were terrified; others were “insulted” by Rastafari idioms such as “fire burn!” and “weak heart!” A 21-day Nyabinghi ceremony in which approximately three thousand Rastafari participated created much enmity and conflict. For example, one Rastafari group attempted to take over Victoria Park but were driven back by police (Smith, et al., 1960:15). Many negative and bigoted myths about the Rastafari became widely cited during this era. One held that Rastafari sacrificed children in their Niyabinghi bonfires; another held that they ate children, and would drive in a Black car to steal them away. This terrified children (and superstitious adults). Two female elders explained how as children they were always afraid whenever they saw a Black car or a group of locksmen.⁶³ Moreover, Rastafari became further associated with criminality.

The 1950s closed on a grim note for the Rastafari. The public and authorities were beginning to view them as a *serious and imminent* threat to the established order.

A major confrontation between some Rastafari and the police occurred May 7, 1959, at Coronation Market, Kingston. What began as a scuffle between a bearded Rastafari and a

police officer turned into a melee.⁶⁴ Police backups helped the besieged officer severely trounce the bearded Ras. The crowd, watching the event transpire, began to pelt the officers with stones and produce, which led to the arrival of police reinforcements. The van carrying the officers was torched by what was now a riotous mob who proceeded to burn the fire wagon that came to douse the burning police vehicle. Scores were arrested. Police vented their anger by going into Rastafari communities and indiscriminately beating and trimming them.

Reverend Claudius Henry intensified the social stigma attached to Rastafari. Henry, who had spent some years in America, left the EWF to form the *Seventh Emmanuel Brethren*, and later, the *African Reform Church*. As a youth, Henry displayed a critical orientation, questioning the Anglican Church about its practice of holding Sabbath on Sunday instead of Saturday (Chevannes, 1976:265). Beginning in the late 1920s, Henry had several religiously-inspired visions,⁶⁵ the later ones indicating that he was to be a leader of Black people to the promised land (Chevannes, 1976:266). During the summer of 1959, he distributed thousands of cards calling "Israel's scattered Children of African Origin back home to Africa, this year 1959,"⁶⁶ inviting them to his headquarters on Rosalie Avenue in Kingston for a Jubilee and that "No passport will be necessary for those returning home to Africa."⁶⁷ As with Prince Edward's convention, Rastafari from across the island began to sell their possessions in preparation for the Jubilee and their journey to Africa. But those heeding Henry's call had their hopes dashed as the appointed day, October 5, 1959, passed without the prophecy being fulfilled. Henry claims he never said that repatriation would occur that fateful day; instead he said he called a meeting to discuss how to get government to respond to Rastafarian repatriation demands, and people mistook his aims.

In the public's mind, Henry was a part of the Rastafarian movement, even though he was disowned by many of them. There were at least three reasons why he was so unpopular amongst Rastafarians: 1) some saw him as a fraud because of the October 5 debacle; 2) he attributed divinity to himself; and 3) he asked, from prison, that his followers trim their locks and shave their beards. To this, one dreadlocks reputedly said, "No clean-faced man shall lead us" (Chevannes, 1976:270). By 1959 the middle classes supported a sweeping crackdown on the Rastafari, coinciding with Henry's Rosalie Avenue debacle and Prince Edward's threatening show of numbers at the first Islandwide Rastafari convention.

The 1960s: Uprisings and the Creation of the Foundation for Co-optation

The early 1960s were a turbulent but exhilarating period for the Rastafarians. On one hand, they came to be viewed as radicals bent upon revolution and creating a socialist Rastafarian state. On the other hand, they got the opportunity to send some of their leadership to Africa to explore repatriation issues, while the establishment slowly came to view the Rastafarians as a legitimate group. And of penultimate significance, Haile Selassie, I, himself, visited Jamaica in 1966.

On April 6, 1960, the police raided Reverend Claudius Henry's headquarters. A hoard of weapons and explosive materials were found, and two letters addressed to Fidel Castro (See Chevannes, 1976). The letters suggested that Henry and his followers were about to begin a violent insurrection to overthrow the colonial government and that they wanted his assistance in setting up a socialist government. The letters are worthy of attention, as they echo themes of the Black moral economy:

[Look at our present condition]...as poor, underprivileged people which were brought here from Africa by the British Slave traders over 400 years ago to serve as slaves. We now desire to return home in peace, to live under our own vine and fig tree, otherwise [sic] *a government like yours [Fidel Castro's] that give justice to the poor*. All our efforts to have a peaceful repatriation has proven a total failure....Hence we must fight a war for what is ours by right...we want to assure you sir [Castro], and your Government that Jamaica and the rest of the British West Indies will be turned over to you and your government, after this war which we are preparing to start for Africa's *freedom* is completed.... (in Chevannes, 1976:277, emphasis added).⁶⁸

Although Henry claimed the weapons and explosives were for use when they repatriated to Africa, the government did not accept the explanation. A search was made for Henry's assistant, who was found dead in the Red Hills area of Kingston. A manhunt for the killer(s) ensued. Before the manhunt ended, two British soldiers were killed. A week or so later, five people were arrested, one of them being Henry's son, Ronald Henry. Ronald had recruited a guerilla force while in America, which included African Americans and Native Americans. Ronald was tried and hanged, while his father received a ten-year sentence. It appeared the Rastafarians were truly ready to wage war against Babylon, and the Rastafarian-related newspaper accounts of this period reflect a widespread angst. The judge who sentenced Henry to ten years of hard labor called Rastafarian ideology a "wicked doctrine" (Nettleford, 1972:88), echoing the sentiments of the conservatives, Christians, and elites.

The *Report*, a direct result of the Henry affair, was carried out soon thereafter. One of its recommendations (see above) was to investigate the feasibility of migration to Africa. Under PNP sponsorship, an “unofficial” Mission to Africa was formed, and in 1961 a delegation, including three Rastafarians,⁶⁹ visited five African nations.⁷⁰ While the probe into migration to Africa gave some Rastafarians a sense of fulfillment of prophecy,⁷¹ the government was simply carrying out its migration policy. Migration was and remains an unofficial development and employment policy for Jamaica, and it made practical sense in an era of growing Black awareness to add Africa as an outlet to complement emigration to America, Britain, Canada, and other nations. The “Majority Report” on the Mission to Africa noted the warm welcome received by the delegates, but dwelled on problems of migration, which included the issues of adjusting to African cultural norms and Africa’s desire to attract skilled and not poor emigrants.

The Rastafari delegates wrote their own “Minority Report” which focused on the willingness of African Governments to “co-operate in resettling people of African descent within their ancestral borders [sic]” (Nettleford, 1972:69). A Working Party on repatriation was formed in 1961, and they recommended a second “technical” mission to Africa which was carried out between January and April 1962 (visiting Nigeria, Ghana, and Ethiopia). While West Africans were clear in their desire for skilled emigrants, Ethiopia was willing to accept Jamaican peasant farmers who would accept Ethiopian citizenship. The Jamaican government even submitted a settlement proposal to the Ethiopian Court, but the plans bore no fruit, as shortly after the technical mission returned, the PNP lost elections to the JLP. The Rastafarians did not give up; Alvaranga, Mack, and Samuel Clayton formed their own delegation and toured Africa for 15 months. They reputedly delivered the signatures of 10,000 Rastafarians to Haile Selassie, I (Nettleford, 1972:71). They also picketed the United Nations during a visit to New York City (Nettleford, 1972:71).

In 1962, Rastafarian leader Sam Brown ran for a seat in Parliament in the general election on an independent ticket, the *Black Man’s Party*. Nettleford interpreted Brown’s move and similar organizational efforts by other Rastafarians of that time as betraying a “willingness and desire to participate in the normal power process of the country despite the doctrine of Exile” (Nettleford, 1972:77). However, Nettleford cast a patina over the truth. Sam Brown explained to me that he ran not because he wanted to be a part of the “system,” but so that

he could advocate for “the poor, the infants, the shelterless, the starving, and the sick” and so that he could “shake up Duke Street”; he felt that poor Black people could improve their situation only by empowering themselves, which included taking state power.⁷² The latter view caused him and similar Rastafarian groups to be branded communists and marxist-leninists. Yet, his rhetoric is more consistent with the Black moral economy of Rastafari and suggests how even some of the most perspicacious observers have contributed to misrepresenting the movement. Brown’s foray into politics led to a dreadful state crackdown. The police raided his “camp” in April 1966, arrested him, beat him, and destroyed his home and headquarters. The thousands of Rastafarians in the area suffered as well, as the government began evicting them for squatting, destroying their communities soon thereafter. This created such tension that a state of emergency was called in October of the same year (Barrett 1968 gives a good account of this event).

In April, 1963, the Coral Gardens affair occurred near Montego Bay. There are two general versions of the story: “official” news reports and those of Rastafarian witnesses. Not surprising, the Rastafarians hold the police responsible for reacting to their prejudices against the Rastafari, and official accounts hold Rastafarians responsible. The official versions are published and accessible, so I will offer the Rastafarian version.

The incident began with an apparently innocent bearded man being beaten by police and given a jail sentence (people called the man a Rastafarian, but a witness to the affair says the man was not). Upon release, the man and some assistants sought revenge and set a gas station ablaze and killed a couple of citizens. In retaliation, the police and soldiers went into the hills where it was thought the man lived and killed some Rastafarians and declared an open season on Rastafarians. In all, eight people lost their lives, including three Rastafarians and two policemen; more than one hundred Rastafarians were arrested by police on charges ranging from vagrancy to being suspects. Some of those who remember the crisis claim that Prime Minister Alexander Bustamante sanctioned the use of deadly force against all Rastafarians. For some time, Rastafarians in that area feared being caught in public. The gains from the Mission to Africa were lost, and it may be that the subsequent political change that put the JLP in power is the reason the incident took such a drastic turn. Nonetheless, the Rastafari on the western part of the island were like outlaws with a bounty on their heads.

Slowly, the popular consciousness was changing, spearheaded by intellectuals and

artists. For example, performances put on by Jamaica's National Dance Theater Company (NDTC) began to address social issues. In 1964, Rex Nettleford and the NDTC put on a play called *Two Drums for Babylon*, a story that revolved around a middle-class woman who became involved with Rastafari. The middle-class and Jamaicans in general held great disdain for Rastafari, and for a middle-class person (especially a child) to involve him/herself with Rastafari meant scandal and shame for his/her family (this did not stop some of the alienated middle-class offspring from adopting the faith as a part of the third generation of Rastafari).

When Our God Comes: The Visit of Haile Selassie, I

Will you be ready when Rastafari trod [comes]?
 Will you be ready when Rastafari trod?
 It must be morning noon or night
 Let your heart be pure and right
 Will you be ready when Rastafari trod?
 I n I ready when Rastafari trod (rep)
 It must be morning noon or night
 Let your heart be pure and right
 Will you be ready when Rastafari trod?

This Rastafarian chant was created before the visit of Haile Selassie, I, to Jamaica. On a rainy and cloudy April day in 1966, the most significant event in Rastafarian experience occurred. On the 21st, the God of the Rastafari came to Jamaica.⁷³ It is an event deeply etched into the memories of the elders. It confirmed their identity, their ideology, and rendered more meaningful all the tribulations they had experienced. Some Rastafarians spent days walking carrying "crokus" (burlap) bags full of ganja from the far end of the island to reach Palisadoes Airport in Kingston to greet the King.

As is revealed in the life histories, a vivid body of lore has been built upon this historic visit. These chronicles confirm Rastafarians' beliefs in the divinity of Haile Selassie, I: 1) The breaking rain was preceded by seven doves; 2) as soon as His Majesty's plane came into sight, the rain stopped; 3) His Majesty wept upon seeing the multitudes awaiting him; 4) the Jamaican authorities were rendered helpless by the crowds, and it took Rastafarians to bring order; and 5) the first person to greet His Majesty was not a head of state but a Rastafarian. An "official" account offers a sense of the pandemonium and fervor of that day:

There was no less than 100,000 people at the airport to meet him. The Rastafarians

numbered at least 10,000. The morning was raining and many people were soaking wet. Before the arrival of the plane the Rastafarians said that “as soon as our God comes the rain will stop.” This turned out somewhat like a miracle, because the rain stopped as soon as the plane landed. The brethren responded with a roar of joy and surged out on the tarmac, each one pushing to get a touch of the plane. When the Emperor saw the people, the flags, the Cheering and the singing—he wept. He later told us at the cocktail party that he never dreamt he had such a following in this far away country....The Rastafarians were not interested in protocol or official welcome, their explanation was, “This is our day! This is our God! It is him we come to see. It is we who welcome him!”⁷⁴

One of the patent aims of the government inviting Selassie, I, to Jamaica was to get him to publicly announce that he was not God. To their chagrin, he did not, although public statements were made to that effect. For instance, Nettleford has said that His Majesty denied his divinity (1972:42), but numerous first-hand accounts refute his claims. Equally mortifying for the elites was Selassie, I's, request to invite Rastafarians to the special occasions planned in his honor. Not only had the Rastafarians' God come, but he requested the audience of his followers. Government was the enemy of the Rastafarians and to be invited to King's House (where dignitaries were entertained) to sit amongst diplomats and royalty told them that they are truly a special people. Ras Dizzy remarked how “He [Selassie, I] never run I away nor ask that I not call him master. Instead at the end of my prayer the Lion of Judah lifted his hands high and spoke in Arabic. His own interpreter then spoke back in English and said the King said Peace, Goodwill, and Power to the Righteous” (Ras Dizzy, cited in Owens, 1975:103).

The authorities who spurned the Rastafari were now forced to sit with them. Ras Trevor Campbell wrote in the Rastafarian weekly, *Ethiopia Calls*, that

For the first time in the history of Jamaica Ras Tafari Brethren and persons of Back-to-African movements were officially invited to Kings House, Glory be to the visit of the Emperor Haile Selassie I. Although we were born here, the privilege was never granted to us until April 21, 1966...It was a mixed assemblage at Kings House. The Ras [Rastafarians] were there, the aristocrats were there, the peasants and the outcasts. It was a real occasion of the mixing of the haves and have nots. It took Ras Tafari in person to occasion the reality that “all men were created equal...” The King of Kings and Lord of Lords did not think himself too high to leave his High Throne in Ethiopia to sit on a chair in King's House among the servants of the earth.⁷⁵

An assistant to Prince Edward summed up the visit this way: “His [Selassie, I] coming lifted us from the dust and cause[d] us to sit with the princes of the country....”(in Barrett, 1968:124). Selassie, I, presented medals imprinted with his likeness to the Rastafarians who

attended the state functions. Many of the still-living recipients like Ras Trevor Campbell remain activists, affiliated with one or another Rastafarian organization.

A month after Selassie I's visit, a Jamaican senator suggested that because the Jamaican people showed such ardor and love for the Emperor, that he should be made Head of State of Jamaica instead of Queen Elizabeth, II. This proposition went over well with the Rastafarians, who all along had been clamoring to renounce the British monarchy in Jamaica.

In 1968, the "Walter Rodney Affair" occurred during the same time that Jamaica was solidifying its own variant of the Black Power Movement (see Chapter Four). Toward the end of the 1960s, "rock steady" and "rude boy" music began to be used by some musicians to make social commentary, both forms drawing attention to the horrible conditions of ghetto life, the latter especially highlighting criminality and nihilism. These subtle shifts in popular consciousness reflected people's growing awareness that the social improvements expected to spring from political independence and decolonization were not happening. The system had not improved and, in too many cases, Black individuals simply took the place of White leadership, continuing the same behaviors. Some could even argue things were getting worse for poor people. It was this concatenation of processes that facilitated the rise of Rastafari-inspired reggae music, much of which, especially in the 1970s, offered very critical social commentary on Jamaican society, especially politics, race, class, and poverty.

The Early 1970s: The Cruelty of "Politricks" and "Rasta Your God is Dead"

The 1970s was another period of intense social change and a watershed decade for Rastafari and Jamaica. It was an extremely violent decade for the nation, with politics and the allocation of state resources being the root of the conflict. The PNP and JLP were literally at war well into the 1980s. Each party armed thugs in order to maintain control over communities of voters. These thugs, commonly called "gunmen," indiscriminately killed each other and any citizen who happened to get in the way or vote contrary to their particular stronghold. Rastafarians condemned this conflict and garrison-State mentality as "tribal warfare."

In the 1972 national election, the charismatic and intellectual politician Michael Manley, son of the founder of the PNP, took a populist tack in his electoral campaign and used Rastafarian lexicon and symbolism to appeal to the majority black and poor population

who were beginning to rediscover themselves through the positive messages found in Rastafarian and Black Power ideologies. Coupling this with the tenor of the National Liberation movements, Manley garnered massive support among the majority black population who dreamed aloud that “better must come.” Part of the infusion of Rasta influence into the national election can be attributed not only to Manley, but also to his coterie of campaign personnel working at the grassroots level. D.K. Duncan, for example, sometimes wore a tam (headwear associated with Rastafari) and used Rasta phrases at PNP rallies (Waters, 1989).

As more people began to view Rastafari as a powerful, positive, and appealing expression of blackness, the numbers of people professing Rastafari began to markedly increase. Some life history accounts suggest this trend began around 1968-69. From this point forward, it seems that it was the positive dimensions of blackness that attracted many people to Rastafari, not the bedrock of the ideology and identity that *Hailie Selassie is the Messiah returned and that the Rastafarians are his chosen people because they are the only ones who acknowledge his return*. This was problematic since it created tensions between the authentic Rastafarians and those whom, at most, only gave occasional lip service to Hailie Selassie, but looked and behaved in many ways like Rastafarians. Instructive of this trend were the young middle class individuals who professed Rastafari in the 1970s, and the large number of individuals who were drawn to Rastafari through the influence of Bob Marley and reggae music and not a steadfast commitment to truth, justice, freedom, and righteousness.

SUMMARY

This chapter has built upon chapters 3 and 4 by highlighting the emergence and development of the Rastafari. I have focused on the actors and events that significantly shaped their identity as a group. The backdrop provided by the preceding two chapters provide context to the forces and events that sustained the practices and beliefs from which the Rastafari drew. These chapters draw attention to how the Rastafari re-shaped extant traditions and beliefs. While much of the focus has been on things “happening to” Black people, their agency clearly comes through in the way they consistently struggled to implement more satisfying social institutions, relationships, and self-conceptions. External occurrences can come to bear upon a people’s sense of themselves and their group during

extraordinary periods, and this work has sought to spotlight these episodes.

Now the personal identity issues will be addressed by drawing upon the life histories of the first and second generation Rastafari. Given the historical contextualization, explanations for becoming a Rastafari, such as “Inborn Conception,” or “righteousness,” or “truth” can now be seen as a dialogue with the past and present. Also, the nature of their identity-transforming Encounters, personal confrontations and conflicts, and the need to draw us-them boundaries can be seen in relation to the traditions and experiences they draw from. The drawing of boundaries is a function of group identification, but is necessitated for the Rastafari because of how Jamaican society perceived them, and their fundamental need to maintain group commitment.

ENDNOTES

1. Ras Sam Brown was an organic intellect of the highest order. He wrote numerous treatises and monographs, poetry, hymns, memorized much of what he wrote, was an organizer, and a fiery militant who brooked no compromise. When I met him he was in his mid-70s and still ornery. At a rally I once reached out a hand to help him onto the stage. He quipped: "Go away! Do I look like a cripple to you?" and proceeded to scramble up on his own. The epigraph is taken from his Twenty-One points of the Rastafarian Movement, points 3-5.
2. From the beginning of British rule, poor Whites have been a part of the population. Some were ex-convicts, fugitives, and/or indentured servants. These Whites were seen by elite Whites as lesser; even some slaves saw them as inferior, for instance, because some had to walk to their destination, unlike more powerful and wealthy Whites who rode used horses. The extent to which their ideas of freedom, truth, righteousness, etc. differed from the dominant Whites and Blacks remains to be thoroughly explored.
3. As a group, Rastafarians meet at least two antisystemic criteria: (1) they repudiate those economic, political, and social institutions seen as unjust; and (2), developed their own model of empowerment and solidarity.
4. Shepperson divides Ethiopianism into four eras: 1) 1611-1871; 2) 1872-1928; 3) 1929-1963; and 4), post 1963 (1968:249). But since he does this in the context of Ethiopianism in Africa I do not use his periodization, although the first two eras are applicable to the Western hemisphere since this is where the ideology is born and diffuses.
5. William Scott argues that Black people moved to the more neutral identification as a result of debates about whether they should remain in America or remove to Africa. Those who felt, for whatever reasons, and there were many, that they should remain in America, felt they should assert an American nationality by abandoning the customary self-definitions African and Ethiopian. As Scott has argued, most Blacks discontinued defining themselves as African and Ethiopian in favor of "colored" around the 1830s (1978:6).
6. The quote is from "A Charge Delivered to the African Lodge on June 24th, 1797, at Metonomy [now West Cambridge] Mass."
7. It is only recently that research had made clearer the significant extent to which American and Caribbean Blacks of the late 1800s and first third of the 20th century supported radical left agendas and organizations (e.g., Robin Kelly's *Hammer & Hoe* (1990); Roderick Bush's *We Are Not What We Seem* (1999); Winston James's *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia* (1998)).
8. This was not accepted by Whites during slavery and colonialism, and mainstream Christianity still finds heretical Black interpretations of the scriptures.
9. The contradiction, if it can be called such, was that the Ethiopianists, especially the South African ones, used the slogan "African for the Africans," criticized White ideological supremacy, while relying upon the foundation and liturgy set by White Protestant Mission Churches from which they seceded (Sundkler 1964:54).
10. Tabb goes on to note that the organizational and institution-building of religions (e.g., churches) often absorbs the energy and resources that early on are directed toward the vision of justice, and over time originally radical visions become establishment organizations (1986:xv). This has not been an issue for the Rastafarians since their organizations have been small and ephemeral. In this way the "loose" or "disorganized" dimension that captures the attention of scholars serves a functional purpose: the prevention of ideological and moral ossification.

11. Also cited, differently, in Schuler 1980:105.
12. There has been a strong “political” tendency within the Rastafarian movement since its birth, yet scholarly, as well as popular, focus has been upon Rastafarians’ messianism, culture, and ideology, promoting a view of them as apolitical (Price, 2001). To not see Alexander Bedward’s camp as an organized force is to overlook the ways in which poor people form associations, and the difficulties they face in maintaining them. The definition of political practice has to be flexible and encompassing, especially since the “vast majority of Jamaicans never were integrated into these [supposedly mass political and labor] movements (Gray, 1991:xi), or else analysts will continue to fail to make the connection between the sometimes ephemeral forms of association and social action.
13. Cf. Smith et al. 1960:20.
14. I do not pursue the literature beyond the seventies because the cutoff point for the second generation Rastafari is 1972. I aimed to scrutinize those studies that were published during the time of second generation Rastafari as these provide some insight into how the Rastafari were portrayed at the time.
15. Henriques’s connection of marxism and Rastafari in the early 1950s raises some interesting issues. For one, Jamaica had a numerically small left at this time, and the extent to which any of them were in dialogue with Rastafarians warrants investigation. Based on reading the literature and the life history interviews, my understanding is that leftist ideas did not really penetrate the movement in any significant way before the 1960s; even so, that marxist-leninist tendency in the Rastafarian movement was itself small. Equally interesting, the exact quote from Henriques (1953) can be found in Smith, Augier, and Nettleford (1960:28), although no reference to Henriques is given.
16. Simpson outlines the doctrines differently in subsequent articles. His original outline of the doctrine can be interpreted to include repatriation to Ethiopia, although he does not explicitly state this in the first publication.
17. Quoted in Barrett (1968:100-101); emphasis added.
18. I have outlined the six themes: 1) Whites are wicked hypocrites, and slavery and colonialism provide a profusion of examples to support their claim; 2) the Black man is superior to the White, hence this helps explain why Whites have spent so much time promoting the idea that Blacks are inferior and uncivilized; 3) Jamaica is full of false prophets, and ministers and police are the worst; this idea is extended by implication to politicians; 4) Jamaica is a hopeless hell for Black people; 5) revenge: Whites must eventually succumb to the rule of Blacks; and 6) Africa is Black people’s heaven and major prospect for redemption in this life.
19. First published in *Social & Economic Studies*, 1955.
20. Quoted in Barrett (1968:99-100).
21. First published in 1962 in *Millennial Dreams in Action*.
22. The research for the *Report* was carried out in a “quick and dirty” fashion over a fortnight, beginning July 4, 1960. The *Report* team acknowledges that they were supported by the *Institute of Social and Economic Research* of the University of the West Indies, the home of the team
23. “The Rastafari Movement in Jamaica: A Study of Race and Class Conflict” and “Political Cultism in West Kingston,” are the two essays. See the bibliography for this chapter.
24. The phrase “is said” is employed and can be interpreted as “here say” or more matter-of-factly of what is reported.

25. Sample taken from the Kingston Corporate area and four rural parishes.
26. Brother Dee, well into his eighties, said he saw the dreadlocked man on several occasions, usually on a donkey pulling a cart. He said he didn't know if the man was a Rastafarian since he was not that familiar with the faith at that point. Corroborating such statements is made more difficult by that fact that uncombed hair is not that uncommon among Jamaicans who suffer from mental illness.
27. This does not mean that there are no authentic Rastafarians in England.
28. I am a member of this organization and witnessed the nomination and election and some of the challenges that ensued.
29. What would be useful are biographies of Rastafari women. This would help grasp why some are independent and refuse gender subordination while others do not challenge it where it occurs.
30. See the interview of Robert Hill, Scott 1999:135-144, hereafter referred to as Scott 1999.
31. Like Bedward, Garvey, and the early Rastafarians, Ethiopianism in South Africa was seen as a threat. South African colonial authorities apparently confiscated a copy of *The Holy Piby* and filed away quotes from it, which Bengt Sundkler then quotes from in his *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*.
32. There are two versions of *The Holy Piby*, a larger and smaller one.
33. Dreams and visions are a focal aspect of Rastafarian ideology and identity, especially among the first and second generation Rastafarians. Much of their explanation of events in their personal lives and occurrences in the larger world are interpreted in relation to dreams and visions. Especially prominent are visions and dreams of Haile Selassie I and major and minor biblical prophets, who speak to the dreamer or visionary, warning of impending danger or showing a course of action.
34. Earlier, Mangena M. Mokone, who opposed racial separation, interpreted self-government of the African Church to be spearheaded by Africans (Sundkler 1964:39), e.g., African for the Africans.
35. Dwane left the Wesleyan Mission Church over the issue how to spend the money raised to support the mission network. He and other leaders decided to affiliate with the African Methodist Episcopal Church of the America. Dwane visited the U.S. to obtain this affiliation (Sundkler 1964:40). Founded in 1816 by the Black preacher Richard Allen around 1830, the AME had withdrawn from the White Methodist Church in 1787 because of apartheid; the AME began mission work in Liberia in 1820 (Sundkler 1964:40). Dwane helped incorporate the African Ethiopian church leadership into the AME, and even asked for financial support to visit King Menelik of Ethiopia and to expand into Sudan and Egypt. In 1900 Dwane formed the "Order of Ethiopia" (Sundkler 1964:40). Unfortunately, Dwane and others came to feel that American Negro missionaries posed the same problems of rule and control as White missionaries, and proceeded to lodge similar criticisms against the AME Black leadership as against Whites (Sundkler 1964:42).
36. He visited England in 1894-95 and soon thereafter, visited America (Sundkler 1964:40))
37. In November 1932 Howell had just returned to Jamaica from New York City (Hill, 1983), which makes early 1933 a reasonable estimate; the police file, which Hill has seen and I have not, likely begins in late 1932 See Scott (1999:122). Cross-verification of this has yet to be confirmed as far as I know.
38. Based on personal experience, it appears that the street meeting or gathering occurs only sporadically. Why this has occurred is not clear, but alone this has not hampered the growth and spread of the movement

39. Barrett calls the 1930s the “decade of despair” because of the concatenation in Jamaica of the Great Depression, indifferent colonialism, violent hurricanes, an inept political system, and the great labor rebellion (1968:69).
40. Some groups went through a phase where they even rejected the Bible. They spurned all written materials; some argued that humanity and God preceded the Bible, hence communication with God does not depend on written words, but through inspirational communication.
41. In South Africa Ethiopianism was also seen as a threat to the status quo.
42. Rasta Ivey remembers listening to Howell, Hibbert, Dunkley, and Hinds give street sermons in the early thirties.
43. Hinds might be one source of the belief of the first and second generation Rastafarians that ships would be sent to ferry them to Ethiopia. One version holds that Selassie I himself would send the ships, while another holds the King of England would be responsible for sending the ships. Mamie Richardson of the EWF continued the propagation of belief in the arrival of ships from Addis Ababa to Jamaica, even though she was speculating based on what the EWF in New York was doing. Even as late as 1998 I spoke with one elder Rastafarian woman who believed that a ship was coming to pick up those who were ready on August 1, 1998, to take them to Jerusalem and Ethiopia, whichever they chose. She said her dreams told her America would send the ships. But this too is an old idea. Monica Schuler showed that indentured African laborers who came to Jamaica in the mid-1800s and were unable to return talked or dreamed of ships coming to get them. After all they arrived on ships.
44. The St. Thomas area became a bastion of the Jamaican Labour Party, a conservative, pro-business political party.
45. Despite some overlap in listeners and followship, these early leaders had core constituencies. These cores are likely the roots of some of the ideological differences between groups within the movement, exacerbated by a tendency to create small, independent units, organized around charismatic leadership.
46. Smith et al. mention Dunkley’s presence in Morant Bay as a kind of sidebar, failing to comment more on why Dunkley would be in St. Thomas at the same time as Howell. Was he competing with Howell for followers? Did he feel strongly that his interpretation of Rastafari more superior to that of Howell? Or was the attitude of the people of St. Thomas more conducive to the message they were promulgating?
47. Post gives the example of how the St. Andrew Civic League denounced the Rastafarians, and how Dunkley and his followers engaged in a fight with by-passers (1978:192).
48. The series was republished in installments in 1937 in the paper *Plain Talk*.
49. Philos’ article is still circulated among today’s Rastafarians in Jamaica (I too have a copy that has apparently been mimeographed dozens of times).
50. Whether Philos knew about the Nyabinghis in Jamaica or if they took the name from the article is not clear.
51. Early pictures of Howell show him to be clean-faced.
52. “Youth” does not denote adolescence; the term derives its meaning relative to the age of the referent. For instance, a 30 year-old is a “youth” to a 50 year-old.
53. Earth foods include tubers and air foods are those that grow from trees

54. I believe this gist of the disdain for material goods is based on the recognition that the more material goods one has, the more they are invested in Jamaica, capitalism, and Babylon, and unlikely to want to give these up to migrate to Africa.
55. Personal communication with Donald Robotham, August 2000.
56. Although a few Rastafarian leaders exhibit autocratic tendencies, such behavior is not tolerated by most, and such individuals are often verbally challenged about their behavior.
57. As told to me in an interview with Brother Dee. A similar story is recounted in Chevannes (1994). I believe that the Ras who told Chevannes the story traveled during the 1950s with the elder I interviewed.
58. A pseudonym.
59. Interview with Brother Woks, October 14, 1998.
60. Mamie Richardson reinforced this belief.
61. These early migrants to England formed the *Afro-West Indian Brotherhood* in the 1950s (Cashmore 1979:309).
62. The Niyabinghi drum ensemble consists of three drum types: the bass; funde; and repeater. The bass, the largest of the drums, carries the rhythm, the funde syncopates and the repeater, the smallest of the drums, carries the melody. By the late 1950s Rastafari ceremonies relied only upon the three drums for music. However, earlier there was a range of musical instruments employed. Simpson noted that the Rasses used tambourines, rattles, rhumba boxes and guitars, saxophones, violin, and banjo. Why these instruments were dropped is unknown. Smith et al. claim that the Niyabinghi dance grew out of an earlier drumming and ceremonial function known as Burru (which I have spelled Burru), which has some affinity the religious-music traditions of Kumina (1960:13, 14) What follows draws heavily from their account since little is written of Burru. They remark how musically, Burru was based on the rhythms of three drums, the bass, funde, and repeater. A dance also known as Burru accompanied the music. One function of the Burru ceremonies was that of a re-incorporation rite. When prisoners were released from prison the people of their community might sponsor a Burru ceremony, held on their night of their return. Those who knew what the drums signified would join the ceremony, and according to Smith et al., Rastafarians sometimes attended these ceremonies, as they were community members. The Burru people were associated with communities of extreme poverty, and are dated from at least the 1930s. Smith et al. (1960:14) imply that Burru people were or became a cult patronized by criminals, and this link brought together Rastafari and criminals. Many of the criminals smoked Cannabis, grew beards, and later locks, as either "cover" or because they sympathised with the Rastafari, not because they were adherents to the faith. This further complicated matters as criminals who were not Rastafari were assumed to be so by Jamaican authorities. Hence Rastafari became associated with criminality. However, the Burru ceremony was taken over by the locksmen and the Burru dance replaced by the Nyabinghi dance and their cry "Death to the White Oppressors and their Black allies!" (Smith et al. 1960:14).
63. Testimonies from Sister Ecila and Sister Pearie.
64. A detailed account of this event is offered by Smith et al. 1960:16.
65. As mentioned dreams are an important path to becoming a Rastafarian, and even to maintaining commitment to the identity. Chevannes noted that 13 of 29 Rastafarians that he interviewed reported having visions (1976:271).
66. Smith et al. 1960:15-16.
67. Ibid.

68. It is possible that Henry's assistant, "Beckford," wrote the letters without Henry's permission as he was one of Henry's followers founded executed, and Henry denied writing one of the letters, although both were signed by him (see Chevannes 1976).
69. The Rastafarians were Mortimer Planno, Filmore Alvarrango, and Douglas Mack.
70. The nations were Ethiopia (1 week); Sierra Leone (1 week); Ghana (1 week); Nigeria (2 weeks), and Liberia (six days), plus stops in New York City and London.
71. Others believed naught would come of the trip (Bones 1986:41).
72. Interview with Ras Sam Brown, May 1998. Duke Street is where the Jamaican legislature meets. Brown's run for politics did cause a great stir within the movement. Several groups who had developed a loose coalition— the "spiritualists led by Meshack, Shadrack, and Abendego, as did Mortimo Planno, another great Rastafarian— left to form their own groups; the spiritualists formed their own headquarters nearby, and Planno went over to the EWF.
73. A great deal of effort on the part of Rastafarians and Black Nationalists had been exerted for over a decade to get the Jamaican government to invite Selassie I to visit Jamaica. Government was uninterested. The African Nationalist movement was especially active on this matter. When they learned in February 1966 that Selassie I was to visit Trinidad they again requested government to invite him to Jamaica. An affirmative reply was received from the Ethiopian government and the news was announced to the public. All Black-oriented groups were exited about the news.
74. Dr. M.B. Douglas, President of the Council on Afro-Jamaican Affairs. Quoted in Barrett (1968:123).
75. See Barrett 1968:124.

**PART THREE:
BECOMING AND BEING RASTAFARI**

CHAPTER SIX

ENCOUNTERS, VISIONS, AND BIG QUESTIONS: COMING INTO RASTAFARI

So in the beginning, so in the end. There were thousands of people with Christ or God, whatever you call him--the Master whom they crucified. You have people who were with Him, and you have people who fight Him [they were not with Him]. Well, so in the beginning, so in the end, and that is why even you come now to be a Rastafari. You were in the beginning seeking out when you hear about Jesus, Lord and Christ. Because they did not call Him one name, and you wanted to know and see Him....Some people hear and say, "Yes it is true." And some hear and say, "No, it is not so." It is the same said thing. (Octogenarian Rasta Ivey, 1998).

I now turn to the life histories themselves to show why and how individuals come to identify as Rastafari.¹ Through personal accounts of experiences and memories, the connections between Nigrescence, religious conversion, watersheds in the development of a Black moral economy, and the conflict-laden evolution of the Rastafari are revealed. Especially important are the ways in which the first and second generation Rastafari see themselves as living embodiments of the past. Slavery remains central to their identity as Blacks in the West, though it ended nearly one hundred years before the first Rastafari appeared. Their conceptions of rights and values associated with the Black moral economy come to the fore in investigating why they took on the faith of Rastafari. An important current in the reasoning behind their interpretation of these thematic concepts necessitates each person taking full responsibility for his/her implementation of these ideas as a part of their behavior and belief repertoire. This cannot occur until the person concludes that something is wrong or unjust about the world around him/her. Becoming aware of injustices and being miseducated are a part of the Encounter and seekership experiences on the road to Nigrescence.

This chapter focuses on the "why" aspects of the identity equation by exploring pre-Encounter and pre-conversion issues, and the factors and catalytic Encounters that spark exploration of the identity and ideology of Rastafari (seekership). For the first and second

generation Rastafarians, coming into the faith was a moral, religious, and racial issue. “Truth” and “rights” (righteousness, justice, and equality) are the keywords to understanding their world, in addition to how they unite the many themes of Rastafarian identity. Consequently, discerning “why” requires linking social and life history because a person’s concern with the thematic concepts of truth, justice, righteousness, redemption, Black liberty (freedom), and a Black God are an engagement with a long history of social agitation and Ethiopianism, as described earlier. It is a person’s concern with these venerable traditions and concepts that frames their engagement with and exploration of the Rastafari faith; they also are attracted to rhetoric and information that addresses racial and justice concerns.

Addressing the “why” aspects of the identity equation can bring into relief the role of social change upon identity, as discussed in chapters one and four. The encroachment of extra-local occurrences upon local understandings, such as the Depression and World Wars I and II, can amplify the effect of an Encounter upon the person. Their “old” way of understanding and explaining things can be undermined by these occurrences, necessitating a new paradigmatic world view in order to reestablish an identity equilibrium. In this case the existence of at least a hint of an alternative identity path is necessary. For the early Rastafari this meant coming into contact with the Rastafari, even if only fleetingly, or to hear about the crowning of King Ras Tafari through mainstream venues like Jamaican newspapers, or by being privy to conversations about his crowning. Still, the influence of extra-local occurrences upon the interviewees changing their identity ranged from slight to nil.

In this chapter, I discuss the role of significance of the need of there being at least a hint of an alternative in growing into Rastafari, and the symbolism of “seeing” and “vision” in their identity and ideology. Next, I explain Pre-Encounter and pre-conversion issues as these relate to blackness, religion, and Rastafari. Included in this discussion is analysis of the Rastafarian conception of their identity and conversion and how it makes them living embodiments of the past. Finally, I show five aspects of the Encounter experiences of first and second generation Rastafari.

A Hint of an Alternative Identity Path Necessary

Once a person has experienced an Encounter, it is important that there be at least a hint of an alternate identity path for the seeker. A person cannot become what he or she is

unaware of. At minimum, one must have vague ideas about potential identity options. If not, psychological problems may develop. *This is a central aspect of identity conversion.* A person may have no intention to convert, but simply knowing that there are other identity possibilities, especially attention-grabbing ones like the Rastafari or the Imam who engages in daily ritual, can plant a seed in the sub-consciousness of a person.

Since Rastafari emerged in St. Thomas and Kingston, how did others outside of these areas learn that there were people who held Haile Selassie to be the Messiah and redeemer of Black people? One early source of diffusion was the traveling evangelism of the first Rastafari leaders who moved mostly through the eastern parts of the island. During the 30s and 40s, Rastafari like Rasta Ivey spread the beliefs as she traveled between town and country selling ganja. She took time during her travels to disseminate the message to those who would listen. She recollected that “some do not like to hear it and some like [to] hear it” (Rasta Ivey, 1998). Given Black Jamaica’s general familiarity with the symbols of the Bible and Ethiopianism, locals got a firsthand glimpse of Rastafari, seeing elements they already were familiar with, and some which were new, such as the controversial claim that the Messiah had returned as a Black King. Some were fascinated by the idea and others rejected it.

Later, diffusion of Rastafari transpired through the dispersion of the Howellites at Pinnacle in 1954, and through the efforts of committed Rastafarians like Ras Brenton, who traveled across the island during the late 1950s and early 1960s, spreading the message of Rastafari. Rasta Ivey and Ras Brenton were not active recruiters, but spread the core elements of their beliefs and identity by holding meetings, traveling to and from city and country to peddle goods, and by visiting other areas of the island for ceremonies.

Just seeing Rastafarians on a regular basis planted seeds in the minds of some impressionable folk. Brother Woks saw Rastafarians from an early age and this influenced his later decision to move into the identity:

From the early days as a little boy when I lived in Trenchtown...Rasta used to come around me....It is a ghetto and a lot of Rastases were living there...whenever one was coming from prison, for example, [if] police raid and may find a man smoking weed, and him may go [to] prison, when he is coming out as a Rasta, they always give him a welcome with drumming, a kind of chanting-like (Brother Woks 1998).

He even remembers how they identified themselves:

I can say he [Rastafarians] has some form of identity because as a little boy I saw them wear a pom-pom....[It is a] woolen material...with the green and the red and the [gold or] black border and things like that. Like a little ball...a little round thing.... Some of them carry it on the top of the tam. The pom pom could also be worn on the shirt with the button of His Imperial Majesty (Brother Woks, 1998).

Years later as Brother Woks moved into the faith he drew upon these early memories.

Prior Religious Framework

Nearly all Rastafarians have familiarity with religion prior to coming into Rastafari, and this provides some structure for Nigrescence and religious identity conversion. Religion and Ethiopianism converge with mis-education and dissatisfaction with society as primary sources of the questions and tensions that drive the convert-to-be to seek answers and identity-based resolutions. It is not necessary that the seeker might have been a religious practitioner; it is only necessary that he is able to utilize a religious and racial framework for viewing the world. All of the interviewees came from backgrounds that had a religious orientation, ranging from Catholicism to Kumina. Some reported that they came from devout religious households while others noted that their parents were nominally religious.

The Importance of “Seeing” and Being Visionary in Rastafarian Identity and Ideology

The life history interviews were guided by questions and concepts drawn from Rastafari discourse. After discussion of personal history concerns about family members, prior religious experience, and education, I moved to the crux of the matter: “When did you become a Rastafarian and why?” I typically phrased the question as “When did the I first ‘sight-up’ His Majesty?” This was usually sufficient to elicit discussion about motivations and the process of identity formation and conversion.

“Sighting up” is an indigenously understood term that applies to coming to grips with the recognition of Haile Selassie, I, as an important figure, although it does not require that the person has accepted Haile Selassie, I, as God. Metaphors dealing with seeing—visually, prophetically, critically, and incisively—are central to Rastafarian identity and ideology. The core of Rastafarian self-definition, “I,” can also mean “Eye,” and the plural, “I n I,” doubly expresses the metaphor by emphasizing the visionary qualities of the

individual and group (“I n I” has other meanings such as “man” in God and God in “man,” but these are not discussed here); the final syllable of Rastafari is construed as “Rasta-Far-Eye”² marking the capacity of Rastafarians to “see” (i.e. to know) things “invisible” or unknown to non-Rastafarians (Ras Boggs). To “sight up,” is to “see” things missed or unknown to others. This makes the authentic Rastafarian feel enlightened and superior to non-Rastafarians who are thought of as blind and ignorant.

The Nigrescence model points to mis-education as what makes Nigrescence possible. Brother Yendis makes the point from an inside perspective as he explains why he is Rastafari. He emphasizes searching and “seeing” as a fundamental part of becoming Rastafari. He emphasizes the import of dispelling the myths, of peeling away the layers of mis-education that have taught his contemporaries to look to the sky for a spirit who would descend to earth:

Look here, Rasta is a concept, Rasta is a religion, Rasta is a faith, Rasta is you. You make yourself to be a Rasta. And in order to be a Rasta, you have to seek first the kingdom of God, and all things shall be added. So when you find out [about] the kingdom, if you want to go on to other things [you can]...I man sight up Rastafari [through how] I read I Bible, and I a talk ‘bout other things [to elders], and when I read certain things whey [what] Christ say and certain role whey Christ rule his disciples, me start to understand that Christ was a man who walk[ed] upon earth like we. We were taught that that was a spirit, but when you start read you Bible and we see whey Christ do, and Christ break bread, and walk with his disciples....We [Rastafari] keep away from this concept of spirit now, and a look for action, [and a] practical framework. We find out say, you know something? The Pope and the Jesus whey them a tell you bout, a no real something, you know? A something in a Africa [that Rastafari need to deal with].

The identity transition of the elders is about more than Nigrescence; it is a religious transformation consistent with many aspects of religious conversion. The existential questions about the meaning of life, the importance of visions and dreams as messages and blueprints for action, and the racial identity of God and religious figures come to the fore in ways not always consistent with the Nigrescence focus on mis-education about Black history and culture (although concern with racial identity of God is about also about White hegemony and mis-education). Thus, some elements of religious conversion models help clarify the identity formation process. Nonetheless, the typical authentic Rastafarian pursues a course of education and re-education that continues throughout life, which is “structurally” supported through reasoning sessions (debate, discussion, analysis, reflection, usually carried

out in conjunction with the use of ganja).

PRE-ENCOUNTER, PRE-CONVERSION, AND INBORN CONCEPTION

According to the Nigrescence model, the Pre-Encounter Black either places little to no emphasis on Blackness, sees Blackness as a stigma that circumscribes how he/she is viewed and treated, or has an anti-Black attitude. Although the Nigrescence model is mainly drawn from the experience of African Americans, the same general types exist among Caribbean Blacks. Beresford Henry's study of Black "corporate" identity supports the case. Henry classified Caribbean Blacks living in England into five types: West Indian, Colonial Settler, Civil Rights Black, Black Nationalist, and Pan Africanist (1982). The "West Indian" knows he or she is Black and identifies with his/her island heritage, but avoids confronting Whites and racism, holds dear British values, and keeps away from Whites when possible. The "Colonial Settler" seeks assimilation into British society, seeks interaction with Whites, and has little contact with Black organizations. The "Civil Rights Blacks" model themselves after African Americans and express a reformist orientation aimed at enlightening Whites and Blacks about Black experience. The "Black Nationalists" make race a core-identity concern, are politically active, and are not reluctant to confront racism and White society. The "Pan Africanists" shun participation in White society, refuse reformism as a solution to Black oppression, and make Africa a central identity and political frame of reference (Rastafarians in England are included among this group). Like Nigrescence theory, these categories show a range of variation in core aspects of Black identity, confirming a consistent pattern of diversity throughout the Black diaspora. However, it is the first two that are most relevant to the Pre-Encounter phase in Jamaica.

The Pre-Encounter Black versus the Early Rastafari

One way to comprehend the differences between Rastafarian and non-Rastafarian conceptions of Blackness is through examination of the relationships between and ideologies of Pre-Encounter Blacks and Rastafarians. This shows what the Rastafari convert-in-process was moving away from as he/she entered seekership. Central factors were the influence of European world views upon Black behavior, attitudes, and intra-racial relations.

Despite the existence of a Black moral economy and entrenched native religions,

White minorities such as European and American missionaries exercised great influence on the thinking and behavior of Blacks. However, this does not mean Black culture failed to maintain its own integrity. Ras Mas came to nearly the same conclusion while talking about the Blacks and religion of his parents' time and before (the first third of the 1900s and before): "In those times, them Africans who struggle in the country, you find say them live [a] simple and humble life. They were proud and intelligent people. The majority of people were more inclined to the endorsement of the White people religion at that time" (Ras Mas, 1998).

Ras Brenton emphasizes similar concerns in a different way:

...our [Black] people never have much management in government in the fifties. It was the Europeans who was running things. And some people a say it was better [than today]....Some people say it [late 1990s] is the roughest time them ever see, but them never see those times when the English man used to rule us down here and do us all manner of things. By ten o'clock we had to go to bed. Now we can go to bed 12 o'clock, 1 o'clock, 3 o'clock (1998).

Ras Brenton stresses how life under the British compares to the present. As under slavery, the control of the British over the Black populace circumscribed time and activities outside of the capitalist wage-work cycle. Such control bred great resentment among some Blacks, although others wax nostalgic for that past. The Rastafari found fault with British and Pre-Encounter Black conceptions and sought to transcend them.

Racial pride and loyalty were of paramount importance to the early Rastafarians, as it was to the Garveyites and Ethiopianists (the two often overlapped) and to some extent, the Bedwardites. Black and White, as races and colors, served as contrastive metaphors used to talk about the world. That Whites oppressed Blacks colored the imagery of everyday conversation and common analogies: "Look when them throw coconut milk in black coffee, it loses its potency. The coffee no strong again, and coconut milk always rises on top to keep black coffee down. You have to keep stirring to keep it on a balance to make black coffee have any strength come through. So, be Black and be proud" (Ras Mas, 1998). Even the simple act of making coffee with coconut milk and the import of Black pride in this mix is used to demonstrate how Whites oppressed Blacks—the milk rises to the top, covering and keeping the Black "down." Regardless, such anecdotes do not mean that Blackness was treated monolithically.

A complicated perspective that condemned White and Black oppressors had

developed in Jamaica by at least the mid-1800s. For the early Rastafarians, the concern took the form of criticizing Blacks who went out of their way to discipline and punish other Blacks. The oppressive and White/British-oriented Blacks had no primary loyalty toward other Blacks, no desire to condemn White society as oppressive, and were bearers or proclaimants of “false” historical information. These Blacks took care to disapprove of, or discipline, those Blacks who deviated from British-defined social norms. This was a source of social conflict and a means of in-group racial boundary creation. Rasta Ivey recounts how under and after colonialism Black authorities were harsher and more vindictive than Whites toward fellow Blacks such as herself, especially if they held contrary political and religious views. Arrested in the 1940s for militant street preaching, Rasta Ivey recalled how twice she went before a White magistrate who was urged by a Black court official to harshly discipline her, and in both cases the White magistrate ignored the Black man’s claims and dismissed the case. She adds that “If [the] police get me, a White man [magistrate] might charge all 10 or 20 shillings; a Black man [magistrate] might charge all 1000 or 1500 shillings...if it [is] jail [a person is facing] a White man might hand out a 30 day, 6 month, or one- or two-year sentence where [a] Black man might pass all [of a] ten-year sentence.” Although ten years seems overstated, the point is that some Blacks sought to be tough on other Blacks to show Whites and conservatives they could keep control without being influenced by a sense of racial camaraderie that suffused the messages of the Bedwardites, Garveyites, Rastafarians, and some Black sections of the nascent nationalist movement. Thus the early Rastafarians understood Blackness to have liberating and oppressive tendencies. The latter fell heavily on those Blacks whose frame of reference depended on relating to and emulating Whites. Brown people were also implicated as being oppressive and antithetical to Rastafarian understandings of Blackness. What is more, Browns were groomed to take the authority positions of Whites when colonialism ended, which seemingly would have rallied more Blacks to be critical of emulating White and Brown attitudes and behavior, and to not reject Black nationalism (Rastafarians, for example, called the two political parties “Brown man government” and called for “Black man government”).

For Black nationalists, a conspicuous division among Blacks involved how a Black person related to the colonial society, Whiteness, and Blackness. The colonial influence created an environment that facilitated Black deracination, supplying the context for making

the Nigrescence Encounter an eye-opening experience. The early Rastafari's conception of Blackness was built upon the platform carried by a Black minority who held and perpetuated Ethiopianism and internalized the protest and hardships experienced by his ancestors.

This intra-racial dynamic played a part in the police and society coming to be called Babylon³ and their association with "wickedness" and injustice. Rasta Ivey repeatedly emphasized that under colonialism the police were Black while their superiors were White. These Blacks were seen as protectors of the "wicked" and "rich" (Babylonians); they were seen as a part of a "wicked system" that oppressed Blacks and upheld White (and class) privilege. Accordingly, many of the early Rastafarians, certainly by the time of the 1938 Labor Rebellion, were taking the view that they must fight Babylon because Babylon was responsible for the plight of Black people in Jamaica, and, hence, "Babylon must fall." This Biblical imagery was literally and figuratively interpreted to mean both the police and the society are evil and must be challenged until they fall. Some took the metaphor to heart in the most visceral way.

Brother Yendis provides a detailed perspective on the Pre-Encounter Black and how his outlook and attitudes conflicted with advocates of Blackness like the Rastafari. I quote him at length:

When me was a youth, me used to see White governor, White governor. We used to see White police officer, White, you know....And them time there, anywhere Black policeman see him officer, anywhere him see him, he have to salute him and me see them things wiped away. Me don't even see no White people 'bout here [contemporary Kingston]. Black man a run the regiment, black man a run the police force. Black man a Prime Minister. Black man a this, Black man a that. Black man a Governor General. Black man a everything. But what happen with them Black man here now...them is the house slaves. There is a difference between house slaves and field slaves you know. The field slaves is the one what get the pressure all the while you know....Always under the pressure. So him no too like that one and that one no too like him. Well the house slaves always have something good to tell the boss, and keep upon that attitude right now. Well, [it is] the house slave what a rule we here now...what him a do, him just a show the boss say him can keep the thing in place for him you know. To show I better than you. I can keep the thing in place you know. Because from 1962, you look in a any of them...and see what change? Nothing don't change. The only thing that change...we change the White man and say White one go siddown [sit down] one side. And we sing [a Nyabinghi chant that goes] "Wonder why them [White man] no go way, We want go home a we yard [Africa]." So we only a sing say the White man them to leave here, so we a go home. Them man a workers for the White man only so them can keep we in order you know. Them man a do de thing politely, but time is the greatest factor and as we say, "We

believe in Jah.” And we are the children and we know is must good [that wins] over evil. Yeah, man (Brother, Yendis 1998).

In sum, one of the biggest criticisms the Rastafari have of other Blacks is that they have internalized an oppressive mentality, continuing the work of the White colonials. The Nyabingi chant that Brother Yendis makes reference to was a popular one and is still widely sung. It is testimony to their intense, threatening desire to be rid of the yoke of the Whites and to go home to Africa:

Wonder why the Whiteboy them no go way,
for we want go home a yard (rep)
Rastafari a go burn them out, burn them out,
burn them out a Ithopia (Ethiopia) land
Hot fire burn them out, burn them out
Burn them out Ithiopia land....

For the early Rastafarian seeker or convert, the Pre-Encounter, “West Indian,” or “Colonial Settler” Black had little concern for the economic and psychological well-being of other Blacks, and likely had little or no interest in Black history and culture. Consequently, the Pre-Encounter Black, along with Whites, Browns, the Christian churches, and the police and army, served as negative referents for Black identity formation among the early Rastafarians.

INBORN CONCEPTION: THE RASTAFARI THEORY OF IDENTITY

One of the first things I asked Rasta Ivey (one of the oldest living Rastafarian women) when I met her was how long she had been in the faith. She replied, “I been in the battle since 1918.” I was puzzled since this would have meant she was a pre-adolescent during Bedward’s last years and only twelve or so when Selassie, I, was crowned. But I knew that she was a seeker in the late 1920s. As we talked, I realized that “in the battle since 1918” referred to her earliest memories of life and not when she came into the faith or when she was born; by both our estimates she was born somewhere between 1906 and 1912 in the month of November.⁴ What this meant was that for her living begins with memories of life, and her life as she remembers it has been one of struggle—a battle. As I got to know her better and to hear her life story, I learned exactly what she meant by this. She was a fighter from birth to the present; *she was born that way*. Just like her predecessors seeking liberation and autonomy, she endured much violence and humiliation as a youthful and militant

Bedwardite, and later, as a path breaker for Rastafari in the 1930s and into the 1960s.

To what do the Rastafari see themselves converting (they would not use the term convert)? As emphasized, they see themselves as taking on a “truth” about God’s return and connection to Black history and culture, and this truth is embedded in religiously-oriented ideas about righteousness, freedom, and justice (see chapter 3). At root, the vision of the early Rastafari is about Black redemption, regaining humanness after the debasing experiences of bondage and race and class-based subjugation. The early Rastafari worked to make Blacks like themselves—the vanguard of humankind, beholden to realizing a true emancipation of humans from oppressing each other through mechanisms of race and class. Implicitly, they grasped that humans are socialized into accepting and promulgating oppression and inhumanity, and that systems are built around the perpetuation of structural violence. To abandon and destroy these systems and the behaviors they sustain required resocializing oneself and dis-embedding from that system and into a “higher” one. Thus, their movement was a critique of capitalism and how race and class are used to oppress within its systemic operations, and of Christianity proper and indigenous religions that failed to uphold fundamental tenets of brotherhood and sisterhood. (Indeed, this may be a starting point for those who are interested in how third and fourth generation Rastafari differ from the first two.)

It is a firm belief among Rastafarians that one does not simply convert to Rastafari. Indeed, they scoff at the idea. They adhere to the belief of *inborn conception*. This concept is both universal and particular. It is universal because they believe that everyone carries within themselves the general moral and spiritual disposition manifested by Rastafarians; most people, however, fail to engage or develop this inborn orientation. It is particular because it is Rastafarians’ explanation for conversion, the predicament of Black people, and how the past and present are embodied in human form. In their view, regardless of what precipitates or catalyzes one to manifest Rastafarian identity, they say the seed was already there. The person has simply engaged his or her “higher” self. Smith, et al., recognized this, although Rastafarians elide what leads to recognizing the Emperor as God:

The brethren do not speak of people joining their cult. In their view, the doctrine is in them at birth but unfolds and comes into consciousness when they recognise [sic] the Emperor as God and themselves become fully conscious. When this happens the convert makes a private vow or pledge to his God... that he will abide by the laws of

God and the rules of the [Rastafari] doctrine (Smith, et al., 1960:24).

Later, Kitzinger also detected the import of the idea of inborn conception,⁵ although subsequent scholars have failed to emphasize it:

A man may discover it ["art"; literally "heart"]⁶ in himself after living the major part of his life in dissolute unawareness....It was there all the time, but he did not know it. When a man expounds doctrine excellently, prays movingly, or argues a point convincingly, his listeners call out, "Art! Mighty art! Rastafari!" (Kitzinger, 1966:38).

To manifest "heart" or to be "heartical" is to be an upright or morally conscious person who has discovered that seed within. Ras Brenton's recollections of the widely-known Rastafari leader Mortimer Planno offer an example:

Mr. Planno was great in every way in Rasta business. He just knows it. He just born with it. He told me that he used to be down Foreshore Road sleeping in an old car for four years. Plenty Rasta man have not told me that. He slept in an old car for four years and read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation and interpret it for himself. Whatever he did not understand, he asked other brethren along the way still until he overstand [understood] almost everything that he read (1998).

Ras Planno, like others, immersed himself in study and investigation of information pertinent to the faith. But he also fits the characterization of the "curious disposition" discussed below since he evidently tackled the questions on his own initiative.⁷

The idea of inborn conception imparts ascriptive and trans-historical qualities to the group. It gives them primordial and ethnic-like characteristics through recourse to essentialized qualities. For one, slavery is seen as a punishment to Black people because of sins committed in the distant past:

And it is the wrongs that our foreparents and our ancestors have committed before the eyes of the Almighty why we were turned out to our enemies, to [slave] traders. That is what happen, you know. Our foreparents sinned in the sight of God and they were put out to their enemies as slaves to be ruled by enemies....people of a darker complexion were discriminated upon by peoples of a lighter complexion. People of a lighter complexion presented to us a White God. And bound us as Black people to worship this White God. We do so under strain and brutality and fear. Now, you believe those people who inflict those brutality and pain to us going [to] get away? You a joke man. When the day come for repatriation, people have to be charged. Throughout the whole world [they shall be charged], and those who are righteous and have done righteously shall be saved and those who call upon my name [Rastafari] also shall be saved (Brother Yendis, 1998).

Thus, the root of Black people's oppression is seen as ancient, and has dogged them up through the present. However, consistent with Ethiopianism, solace exists in the belief that

those who perpetuated injustice will be punished, and those who remain righteous and pursue truth (recognition of Selassie, I, as the Messiah) will be saved. In the Rastafarian vision there is justice although the world they live in is seen as filled with injustice.

Even though few people are born into the faith, “inborn conception” suggests there are attributes shared by Blacks and humankind and that a person is born into these. Ras Brenton’s conception of Black identity presupposes that Black people, especially Rastafari, are predisposed toward peace, freedom, justice, and equality. These qualities are ancient and it is the modern system, from slavery forward to high technology capitalism, that has led to the burying of these qualities deep in the psyche, waiting to be liberated. It is Rastafarian identity that makes previously denied liberation possible as a way of life. Ras Brenton expounds the basic doctrine:

...I and I prophesy that we were born that way [as Rastafari]. It is an inborn conception to be a Rasta man, and when you check it out, all Black people is Rasta because Rasta means peace and love, for instance. Freedom, justice and I-quality (equality). For these high qualities, we need to have a doctrine, but we need to also have peace and love among ourselves....anywhere. It is not that we have a different doctrine from them [Babylonians]. We used to have a different doctrine, but our doctrine was from ancient. These are some of the ways we used to be in ancient times. [For example] Ancient man never used scissors because they did not have any. But now a days people like the Europeans come about using scissors and comb for their own comfort. And at the same time, they use it to make money off us. So these are some of the systems that we are refraining from. We do not want to be no barber man nor trimmer man. We want to grow our hair like the tree....So once your knotty [dreadlocks] is alright man, it is your countenance and your covenant. We have made a covenant with Jah, according to Numbers, Chapter 6. We have made a vow of a Nazarene to fight against barbarism and all those barbaric systems. You figure me? So because of this, we are just born to be Rasta. Jah just made us this way. We are a special and peculiar people, they say. We don’t bow to everything. We do not nyam [eat] pork as they say. Some of us do not like any meat at all. And some will eat a little meat still, because man free to taste up what he wants to taste (1998).

The idea evokes trans-historical connections that collapse the time span between the distant past and the present. That actual time elapsed between the end of the enslavement of Jews in ancient Egypt and the end of slavery in Jamaica in 1834 and the existence of contemporary slavery—“mental slavery” as Rastafarians call it—is unimportant. Implicit in Ras Brenton’s discourse is the imagery of fighting and freedom: fighting against injustice and barbarism; and freedom from scissors; free like the tree; free to eat as one sees fit. In this view, they see themselves born as fighters against injustice and for freedom.

Tapping into the connection between the past and present is empowering for them:

...the Rasta in those days [1940s] did have some power. When I back up a chant [sing a Nyabinghi hymn], I could feel that power. I could a feel the rhythm of the ancestor[s] there, you know, and it direct me....that chant was something you would sit there and meditate and feel the vibes, feel the African vibes in a you. It is an authentic thing and it was there, and people welcome[d] it.... (Brother Yendis, 1998).

Inborn conception also implies incarnation and recycling of life. Nothing is new in this perspective:

So as in the beginning, so it is in the end. You fool the people some of the time, but you cannot fool them all the time. What is hidden from the wise and prudent, is revealed to the babe and suckling. Whatsoever is yours a man cannot take it away because you have it from the beginning and you will have it in the end. Nothing is new....Things can only go and come. A man cannot fool you....Yes. Some [people], but not all. What is for a man, you cannot take it away. The Emperor was from the beginning and he will be to the end. From creation. Nothing new. People not new. Look at the little baby who is being born. He should have a flesh fresh as a ninepence, but he looks as if he was here before. Look at the baby who just born. Look if he looks new. Look if it is not the same old flesh he has on (Rasta Ivey, 1998).

Tacitly, Rasta Ivey has invoked the Ethiopianist tenet that what Blacks had in the beginning they shall have in the end—that ultimately justice will reign. Haile Selassie, I, in this view is not really new, but a continuity from the past, the re-embodiment of Christ cloaked in new raiment and wearing a crown of gold instead of thorns. From the Rastafarian perspective, many people fail to understand how the past relates to the present, and the role of Blacks in this context. Therefore, one aspect of seeking truth for them necessitates understanding this relationship, something which Christianity in Jamaica cannot do because, after 2000 years, Christians are still awaiting the return of their Savior, while the Rastafari claim he has already returned. What is more, most Black Christians do not approach Biblical lore from a Black perspective.

Through their idea of inborn conception, the elder Rastafari see themselves as contemporary manifestations of the Africans and slaves of the past. They are the living embodiment of all the injustices, struggles, and triumphs experienced by their Black predecessors. Some go so far as to make connections between themselves and ancient Biblical characters. Ras Mas, for example, explains why he is a Rastafarian by straightforwardly situating himself as a link, figuratively, between the past and present:

I was called to this [faith]. Same as Jesus Christ called his followers. And I was one who walked with Jesus Christ in that day. And this day when he return[ed] in a new name [Rastafari], the sheep hear his voice and hearken unto it. So, that is why I am a Rasta man because I walk with [my] Father from the foundation of creation. [It is] Not a thing that you really learn. We have been here for a longer time and through the inspiration, through inspiration, this may arise again [faiths like Rastafari] (1998).

He adds: "If I wasn't a Rasta, I would be nothing" (Ras Mas, 1998).

Ras Mas and others like him joined the ideas of inborn conception and perpetual re-embodiment. These Rastafarian see themselves as the past—a past that they believe has repeated itself and will continue to do so unless they become the vanguard that obliterates the institutions and thinking that prevent the realization of peace, unity, and an end to oppression. He points out that the convictions that gave birth to the Rastafarian movement and the oppressive forces that helped shaped it still exist and will continue to maintain the Rastafari and to spawn new movements. Pursuit of ideas of truth, justice, righteousness, and redemption will continue to inspire new critical and spiritually-oriented movements.

Tension: Incompleteness and Dissatisfaction with the World

None of the elders voiced being dissatisfied with whom they were prior to Nigrescence conversion. Some did feel that they should be something "more" than they were; that is, they felt they could be more righteous, just, or even better informed. "Incompleteness" better describes this state than "dissatisfaction." It manifests as a nagging feeling that is difficult to articulate, but is expressed through finding one's "real self," implying low stakes in the current or prior identity: "'I now look at myself as a proper person.' 'I wasn't myself before'; and 'I didn't know ourselves'...now we're making positive steps to find our true selves" (Cashmore, 1979:313). To the extent that there was dissatisfaction, it was with the local and wider world in which the converts lived, and not with themselves:

I used to attend church like other youth, but my mind was not there. My mind and heart was not in these [sic] church. It kind a come to me like a drone situation. I don't see no militancy and no uplift in the church. The looks of the church from I was a boy...is like it is associated with death....I did not too fancy the church, but as a youth, I was under the control of my parents. I had to go. Sometimes, I had planned with other boys and don't bother go a church. [I] Take the money given for collection and buy candy and go 'pon a hill that was round so....(Ras Mas, 1998).

In sum, several issues differentiate the Pre-Encounter Blacks and the Rastafari-convert-to-be before the Encounter (and definitely after the Encounter). These include: conflicts over the extent of Black solidarity, conceptions of what constitutes “proper” behavior and social relationships, religious ideology, and the eternalism and Ethiopianism intrinsic to the idea of inborn conception.

ENCOUNTER & SEEKERSHIP

In this section, I have combined Nigrescence and religious conversion elements to provide a snapshot of Rastafari Encounter and seekership experiences. The Encounter stage focuses on the catalytic experience(s) that leads a person to personalize that experience, resulting in a change in attitude or perception. The religious conversion literature draws attention to subjective and objective states prior to and during conversion; it also demonstrates that some people are curious seekers prior to the religious equivalent of an Encounter. Several elders fit the latter description. The Encounter can take many forms: witnessing a revealing or a shocking event; dreams, visions, and insights; meeting a special person; or having a curious disposition, to name a few. Seekership describes the general state of the person who has had an Encounter, reached a life turning point, or who has a naturally curious disposition and may or may not have decided to commit to Rastafari. A person can be in a state of seekership before an Encounter, especially those I label as having a “curious disposition.” They are intellectually inclined and typically open to new ideas. They are tolerant to the extent that they are willing to hear other points of view before making a judgement about their values (the curious type is discussed in detail below).

Turning points are anxiety-producing episodes that occur during the life course. Examples include unemployment, loss of a loved one, serious illness, and a near-death experience. They can cause a person to re-evaluate themselves and/or ponder the meaning of life. Turning points and Encounters are similar in how both can precipitate an identity change. They stimulate “breaking points” that indicate a person’s customary understanding of life and the world has been thrown off kilter.

The themes, patterns, and behaviors associated with what is considered to be an authentic conversion experience vary according to social milieu and its social history and religious traditions. This points to the importance of using history and cultural milieu to

ground the understanding of personal and group identity. For instance, two interviewees recounted how it was hearing the rhythms of Nyabinghi drumming that awakened their consciousness and put them onto the path of seekership. A Jamaican myth holds that if a person listens too carefully to the Kumina drums, he or she will fall into a trance and follow the rhythms to their source. Although it was not Kumina but Nyabinghi drums that enraptured both listeners, the idea that drums can mesmerize people and animate spirits are widespread beliefs. Dreams are another established route to conversion in Jamaica, among a range of religions. This tradition is traced back at least to the late 1700s, as the Native Baptists rejected use of the Bible preferring to rely upon dreams to “...reveal the of God....” (Turner, 1982:94).⁸

Sighting Up His Majesty: Dreams, Visions, and Insights

Dreams and visions, and the insights drawn from these, are the most common ways in which Rastafarians-to-be to experience an Encounter and enter into seekership. Insights are also derived through study and reflection. However, study for the first two generations of Rastafarians typically came after the Encounter.⁹ While a dream consists of images that a person experiences while asleep, a vision can occur while awake or asleep. The dreams are usually rich in Biblical imagery and symbols. These dreams and visions provide cues and clues for social action, and play a role in the identity-reformation process. Several interviewees claimed to have envisioned Haile Selassie, I, himself. These dreams all have similar themes: the Emperor is riding a white horse, carrying a sword, well-dressed, or some combination thereof.

Brother Bongo told of some visions he had in the early 1950s. I asked him if he remembered his first vision, and he vividly recited the story:

The first one [vision]...[came to me] right down by Charlotte Street there coming from the east....[I saw] His Majesty in his khaki suit in command like he reminding that you have a work to do....[It] just appear....I was seated on the beach....It was night because on the beach we would sit and watch the moonlight and watch the planes over Palisade Airport....So it was down there the revelation came from. I don't know [why and how it happened], but the beach always carry reasoning. Spiritual reasoning....So it was there it developed and I started to read. That is what get me. I took to the Bible a lot and at nights, read myself to sleep (1998).

He then told of another vision, this one having similar motifs. He saw “His Majesty in [the]

vision [dressed] in [a] military suit coming across the heavens. More than once [I saw it], and [each time] it gave me strength” (1998). Bongo Trevor’s visions were a part of his Encounter and move toward Immersion and Emersion. His visions, study, and reflection worked in conjunction during the early part of his identity transformation.

Prophetess Esther provides another perspective on how visions can affect Nigrescence among the early Rastafari. She is the epitome of the spiritualist tendency among the Rastafari, although her journey into the faith is unusual. She mixes Rastafarian, Christian, and indigenous religious images and ideas, apparently developing this fusion on her own. I first met her in 1998 at an annual Rastafari Centralization Organization conference. She agreed to share her life story. When I reached her house a week or so later, she met me with the utmost urgency. She said, “He wants to know if you will stand up to be a leader to those [Rastafarians] that are over there [in America] that separate and don’t have a leader to lead them and to teach them” (1998). I asked, “Who is ‘he’?” She declared, “The spirit.” Surprised, I asked, “What spirit?” (since I knew that revivalist and other indigenous religious tendencies had been purged from the movement during the forties and fifties). She said, “His Majesty and Jesus.” I nodded affirmatively and said, “I will speak to them. I will gather them and I will teach them.” As if to let me know the seriousness of the matter and how legitimate was her communication with these supernatural entities, she said, “I will speak to him and let him know, because he says it is what he wants to know, and he is very, very anxious to hear or to see the representing of the land [Ethiopia]. Who will stand up and say they will take that responsibility to look about the land for those that want to go [home to Ethiopia]” (1998). Prophetess Esther then launched into a most mesmerizing story.

Prophetess had been hearing voices (the spirits) since the age of nine and she communicates with them; she also has visions. Her Encounter is so compelling that it deserves treatment at length.

...when I was 9 years old, I was sitting in the class one day and I heard somebody speaking to me. I turned around and looked all over the school. I don’t see anybody, but when I come back steady, and sit in my seat, I heard the voice speaking to me.... I start to look on the teacher. Teacher not saying anything. Teacher sit at the desk. I look around on all the children them. I see everybody doing them work, but I continue hear the voice saying to me, “I come to speak to you. I come to speak to you.” So I [am] looking to see who speaking to me. [the voice kept saying] “I want you to listen to what I am saying. I want you to listen to what I am saying.” I get up and look all under the bench to see if is anybody. I see nobody. I get back in my seat

and start to write what the teacher give us to write, and the voice still saying, "I come to speak with you...." And for a whole day until school over in the evening, I hear the same thing (Prophetess Esther, 1998).

Prophetess shares her Encounter with her father, who apparently is not shocked to hear that his young daughter is hearing voices.

Me say, "Dad, the whole day in school somebody speaking to me, but it is not a woman. It's a man, and him keep telling me say, I come to speak to you. I want you to listen to what I am saying to you." Daddy say, "You hear that baby?" Him [daddy] say, "this is a spirit being speaking to you. And him don't say anything else?" Me say, "No, Daddy. Him only telling me that him come to me, and want to speak to me, but him want me to listen to whatsoever him saying to me." [Daddy said] "God want you, me dear. God want you, and you see, Him send the spirit to speak with you, and if it's not Himself speaking to you, it's an angel. Listen carefully [to] what him say to you and come back and tell me." [That] Night I went to me bed. I wake up next morning alright. I didn't get no dream (1998).

Now a twist emerges in her account, making it consistent with Ethiopianism: the first is Jesus and he claims to be from Africa. However, the Prophetess claims to have known nothing of Africa before the spirit's visit. Still, this is consistent with Ethiopianism's linking together Africa, Blackness, and Biblical figures. Moreover, slavery and injustice are introduced into the narrative. But the Jesus familiar to most Christians has nothing to say about slavery nor Africa. The Jesus speaking to Prophetess Esther is fully concerned with slavery and wants it completely abolished and his people sent home to Africa. As she speaks for the "spirit," it seems they both agree slavery is not yet abolished:

[The first spirit] Him say, "I tell you yesterday that I come to speak to you I am coming far from a place name Africa, and my people is in slavery in Jamaica, and I want to deliver them, and I want to take them out of slavery, and I want to free them." Me say, "Then sir, who must I say speaking to me?" Him say, "You ever hear anybody talk about one man name Jesus?" Me say, "Yes, sir. For the church we going to teach us all the while about Jesus." Him say, "Well, I am Jesus speaking to you and telling you that I come from far, from Africa, and I come here to speak with you. I want you to hear me. I want you to listen to me. I want whatever I am going to tell you to do, I want you hear me. I want you to do it." Me say, "Yes, sir." Him say, "I want you to stand up and to teach my people what I going to teach you" (1998).

She then offers more detail about the spirit's perception of the plight of Black Jamaicans:

"Tell your father, say my name is Jesus and me come from Africa, and ask him if him know a place name Africa." Me say, "Yes sir." Him say, "My people is in bondage; my people is in slavery taken away from the land of Africa and bring to the Western

Hemisphere by the British Government. When you going to speak to your father, ask your father if him know anybody in the world name British people....[and] British government. They are the ones who take away me people from Africa and bring them here and turn them into slaves. I come to deliver them and I come to give them deliverance." Me say, "Yes, sir" (1998).

The imagery of thievery, oppression, bondage, and freedom now are personalized in Prophetess:

My father say, "You know who is Jesus? When you go to church on Sunday morning, what parson teach you say?" Me tell him say him say Jesus died for us and shed his blood for us. Him say, "Then a him come to you and tell you say him name Jesus?" Me say, "Yes, Daddy, him say him name Jesus and him come to free Him slave people them for a for him people the British people take away from Africa and bring them come here and turn them into slaves." Him hug me up and him kiss me and him say, "Dear D [Prophetess's nickname], Dear D, Lord Jesus through you in your baby stage, and him tell you say him name Jesus and him tell you say him a come from Africa?" Me say, "Yes, Dad, him coming from a far place name Africa, and him coming here because of the slaves. Him say if the slaves was not here, him wouldn't have to come here, but because the people who come here come from Africa is his people. British people thief them away from Africa and carry them come here so him have to come here now to do a work. To save them." Me father say, "This is great. Dear D, you born for this purpose, and if Him is Jesus, Him is the Son of the Creator being. Through you, who is nine years old now, and Him telling you those things?" Me say, "Yes, Dad....Him want me to stand up and see to it that me deliver the people and bring the people out of slavery." Him hug me up, him kiss me and him say, "Make me pray fi you baby" (1998).

At the age of eleven, a second voice comes to her, and this one is more focused on Ethiopia, slavery, and injustice. It is Haile Selassie, I, himself:

When me complete eleven and going up now to twelve, I hear another voice speaking to me and say.... "I would like you to know who speaking to you." Me say, "Yes, sir, the first gentleman that was speaking to me tell me that his name was Jesus. Who you is now? What is your name? If you want to speak to me, and Jesus speaking to me and telling me that he come to free his people." Him say, "Is the same thing that Jesus want you to do to free his people, it's the same thing I want. I want the people them free. I want the people them come home." I say, "Come home where?" Him say, "Africa." Me say, "You come from Africa too?" Him say, "Yes." Him say, "I am a king, and I am sitting in a place name Ethiopia." Me say, "Ethiopia? You is sitting in Ethiopia?" Him say, "I am King Haile Selassie." Me say, "Sir, Jesus is different from you?" Him say, "Jesus is Jesus. And I am King Selassie, but the two a we moving together. So the two a we come to speak with you because Jesus want you to lead His people and me want you to stand up and lead the people. For the people for Jesus is my people and my people is Jesus' people. For all my people is taken away from Africa and come here as slaves. So me want them to come home to me. [the Creator said] His Majesty Selassie on me left hand. Lord Jesus on

me right hand.” [I asked my daddy] “You ever hear any name like that...?” Him say, “No....me never know anything about Ethiopia” (1998).

Prophetess demonstrates several things here. First, the theme of going home to Africa takes on greater urgency as the second voice, the King of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie, I, is now speaking to her. The King concurs with what Jesus is asking her: to help deliver [redeem] the slaves home. Second, Prophetess does what few Rastafarians do— she gives central recognition to Jesus. Many Rastafarians see Selassie, I, as the Christ returned, inaugurating a new era, just as Christ’s first coming diminished the preeminence of the Old Testament rules. What is more, few Rastafarians accept talk about Jesus in the same breath as Selassie, I, unless it is in reference to Selassie, I, as the successor to Christ. Prophetess, then, is a holdover from the earliest Rastafarians who combined Christianity, indigenous religious practices, and the new beliefs. She is in the tradition of Bedward, the class leaders or shepherds, and more specially, Claudius Henry (of the Rastafari-related scandals of the late fifties and early sixties; see chapter four). Finally, the Prophetess, a country girl from a country family, claims to know nothing of Africa or Ethiopia, as do her father and mother. Both Prophetess and her mother claim to know nothing of Kingston! My probes to determine the veracity of the claim suggest this is the case. I asked the same question in different ways: “So you never read about Africa before that?” “Just through the spirits come talk to you, you know it?” She replied “Only when the voice come talk to me....The first in my life me ever know say one place there [is] upon the earth name Africa. And it is the same spirit tell me about Kingston” (1998).

So then how can she make such a connection? I suspect that she does indirectly know of Ethiopia through Ethiopianism, but was not directly told of it. As an impressionable young person, she probably heard the stories and pieced it together, just as Rasta Ivey determined that “the five [different sources of Rastafarian ideology] is become one.” (1998). This does not minimize the Prophetess’s experience and beliefs— it simply illustrates the diversity in the movement and the commonality of its themes: slavery, justice through redemption, a powerful affection for Ethiopia-Africa, and an association of truth with these beliefs.

Tension develops for the young Prophetess. The fact that she hears voices causes a teacher to reject her as a student taking private lessons after sixth standard. While

Prophetess's father has been lovingly supportive when she talked of her visions, her mother does not believe her. Prophetess reminisces how her mother would say, "She don't know how pickney [young child] at that age can talk say something a talk to her, and she hear man a talk to her. Then that mean say she a get off her head. She no right...." (1998). To compound an incredulous situation, the voices are threatening to take the Prophetess away from her parents because the mother is so inattentive: "Me say, 'Daddy, Lord Jesus say him going [to] take me away from you and me mother, and the King which is Selassie say the two of them [are] going [to] join and take me from you because my mother can't understand what me saying to her. She just can understand, but she don't want to understand'" (1998).

While this part of her life story might reflect deep-seated psychological animosities and fears, it is still a source of tension to the eleven-year-old. To complicate matters, her beloved father dies around two years later. It is only when the Prophetess's predictions begin to come true that the Mother acknowledges that her child is special. This happens when the Mother's long missing stepson returns home from America to take Prophetess with him to live in Kingston. Prophetess had for more than a year said the two voices said a man was going to come and take her to Kingston so she could begin the work of redeeming the slaves. As the Prophetess tells the story, the stepson had visions in which a man dressed in a full white suit and a white helmet with a sword at his side came to him: "Him [the well-dressed man] say, ... 'It is you [the stepson] I want.' I want you to go the Captain and ask him now for a leave. Two weeks leave. And when you get the two weeks leave, stop in Kingston and leave from Kingston to Hanover to your father. I want you to go to your father and your mother and tell them that you come to take your sister to Kingston'" (1998). Therefore, tension took three acute forms: voices, ostracization attendant to hearing voices, and speaking about Africa and a Black King, and the disdainful attitude of a primary family member.

Prophetess's route into the faith was a long, drawn-out process, driven by her Encounter and communication with two primary spirits, Jesus and Haile Selassie, I, part of a trinity linked by the Creator. She received her mission supernaturally, directly from the spirits, and took it to heart: "I say, 'Mama, nothing going to stop me [from reaching Kingston].... I must go, because Lord Jesus have a work for me to do. Not in this country [region], but in Kingston.' His Majesty come back and say, 'I have a work [for you] to carry

through but not in this country.' So I say, 'Beg you pack me grip.' That is how I get to come into Kingston" (1998). Unlike other Rastafarians, Prophetess's unique views apparently developed through her own understanding of the religious institutions and practices she was already familiar with, such as the Memorial Tabernacle's foot washing ceremony, instead of attending Rastafari street meetings and ceremonies. She built a small church, which is also a deviation from the norm of the Dreadlocks Rastafarians, but not unheard of among the older ones (more shall be said about this in chapter seven). Her model is more akin to the Revivalist shepherd, although still compatible with the respected and venerable Rastafarian elder who provides religious, spiritual, and cultural leadership.

Thus, Brother Bongo and Prophetess Esther illustrate two ways that visions (as a kind of dream) function as Encounter experiences. The vision shakes up the person's extant worldview, while pointing to an alternative identity path. But such transformative visions and dreams should be understood to be working in conjunction with other experiences that make them take on the force of an Encounter. Prophetess Esther's family was enduring economic hardships and her relationship to her mother was not solid; Brother Bongo was a young man dissatisfied with his job and colonial society. Still, there are thematic commonalities in Prophetess's and Brother Bongo's rhetoric and experience: slavery, Africa, justice, and redemption. As I have argued, these are themes consistent with the Black moral economy and the ideology of the early Rastafari.

"The World Not Right": Existential Questions Come to the Fore

Something causes a person to seek answers to questions that hitherto had been unconsidered or treated as unimportant. While the Encounter shakes up a person's world view in a way that makes him/her take the experience to heart, it also brings to the fore questions for the convert-in-the-making. These questions are generally existential in nature. The first and second generation Rastafari were individuals choosing a path and ready to take on the risks and responsibilities of their actions; they were concerned with morality and truth. Like Kierkegaard's concept of "dread," they were grappling with the feeling of "general apprehension" of God's calling each to take a stand and commit to a particular way of life. Humans have long wondered what is their purpose in life, and those elders who became Rastafarians took the challenge head on. They made choices and took to them with

conviction, although the development of conviction and commitment occurred over time. Those seeking Rastafari framed their concerns and apprehensions in terms of truth, justice, righteousness, and redemption; these propelled their efforts to learn about Blackness and Rastafari. Learning the meaning and usage of symbols and imagery associated with Ethiopianism and pan-Africanism is an important part of the process.

Sister Amme is a model of the Nigrescence and seekership process. She did not “put on her covenant” (grow dreadlocks) until 1978. However, she first “sighted up” during Haile Selassie, I’s, visit to the island in 1966. The response of Jamaicans to Selassie, I’s, arrival led her to seriously wonder if he was truly the Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah spoken of in Revelations. She wanted to know “the truth” (1998). Her second Encounter occurred a year or so later. One night she was sitting by an open window. In the distance she could faintly hear drumming. To get a better listen she went out onto the street. She found the rhythms so captivating that she said,

It come in like the drums them was calling me—pulling me [toward them]. I said to myself “I want to go [to] where those drums are.” I hailed a bus. I don’t even bother go upstairs and tell nobody [that she was leaving]. I get on the bus and say, “Driver, you hear the drum them?” Him say, “Yes. Over a Bull Bay the Rasta them hold a ‘Binghi [Nyabingi ceremony].” I said, “Put me off there.” I reach and follow one little path in [to] some bush near to [the] sea. I see a heap of Rasta people. Them is [sic] chanting and beating the drums. I just watch and listen. I never join them. But I was captivated still....Late in the morning I go home.... (Sister Amme, 1998).

Twelve years elapsed between Sister Amme’s initial existential self-questioning in 1966 and finally taking the step of publicly declaring her faith and commitment by growing locks in 1978. This bespeaks the length to which to the seekership, immersion, and emersion phases can last. In between, much happens.

Sister Amme’s experience is a classic example of Cross, Jr’s, mis-education and re-education thesis. After being confronted with a new way of thinking about, and being in, the world, she began to question people knowledgeable about the movement and to engage in serious study. She sought out literature on Africa and on Ethiopia; she spent hours in the Institute of Jamaica reading “historical documents.” She began to read the radical literature of that period, such as the writings of Guyanese historian Walter Rodney. As a result of these things, she not only began to identify as Black, African, and Rastafarian, she began to see “certain things as unacceptable; just wrong” (1998). Sister Amme was finding injustice

everywhere she looked, and this further radicalized her. She began to pay attention to the struggles of Third World nations to overthrow colonialism, and became angry because she had not “known better” all along, and that so many people do not see the injustice that she could now see as systemic. Her identity transformation occurred during one of Jamaica’s turbulent periods: There were the Rodney riots of 1968 and periodic moments of national emergency resultant from political conflicts.

Sister Amme’s struggle to grasp what “truth” meant in the context of her identity change and various local and extra-local frictions involved not only coming to think of Selassie as God, but also realizing that mis-education was at the root of her “blindness,” and that her inability to see the problem worked to maintain systems of oppression. Her questioning of the sources of the nature of political and economic oppression within the world-system underscores Rastafari conceptions of justice. Also, Biblically-based, justice involves a conception of basic material and psychological needs being met, and not being involved in actions that thwart the independence and autonomy of others, or that prevent the fulfillment of humanness. One of the Rastafari mottos that bring their conception of justice to the fore is “man free.”¹⁰ This is an acknowledgment of the fundamental human rights of the individual. Each person is responsible for ensuring that he or she promotes “I-quality” (equality) and justice. In these ways, Rastafari puts the burden of reforming the world on the shoulders of each person.

The bedrock of the meaning of truth for the Rastafari and the convert-in-process revolves around recognition of Haile Selassie as divine and correcting the distortions surrounding Black history and culture:

...you must know that the White man painted Jesus as a White man using one of the Pope’s images to portray the [same] Christ that they [are] now worshiping...[One image of the White Christ] was painted by Michael Angelo, one of the world’s greatest artists. From his time until now there is this White Jesus. Before that there was no [conception of a] White Jesus¹¹ [some have called him] Jesus Christ of Nazareth, Jesus Christos¹² in Amharic, Jesus Christ in English, but it is the said man and [he] is a Black man. There is certain parts of his life that they did not tell us.... (Brother Bongo, 1998).

To discover the possibility that Christ is Black and to then know this with assurance can be a consciousness-raising unveiling. Moreover, the Black Christ perspective is consistent with Ethiopianism and its emphasis on Africa and the Black identity of Biblical figures and their

modern incarnations. This is a part of a “truth” which has been suppressed; to discover it challenges one’s existing worldview, while it invalidates the outlook of those who hold onto mainstream conventions.

Truth, though, is inextricably bound to the other thematic concepts of the Black moral economy, as exemplified by Sister Amme. She discerned that important parts of what she had learned of the political economy of Jamaica and the Third World were not the full story, and, hence, justice was subverted by hegemonic ideologies that present narratives of religion, history, and politics from the perspective of the oppressors.

Rasta Ivey spent much time investigating the various religious and racial organizations in and around Kingston. Slowly, she began to eliminate them as she concluded they were not satisfying her quest for truth and righteousness. She quickly eliminated the Pocomanians and Native Baptists, equating them with foolishness. They were not dealing with the past, especially slavery, in a way that appealed to her. Ethiopianism made much more sense.

I don’t business with them [Pocomanians and Native Baptists]. It was not something sensible. You are not a dove. You are a human being, and when you coming up, they say you are a dove. I look at you. You are cool, but you are not cool as dove. So I just put them together, and it is not right. See the right thing here. Rastafari in Ethiopia. Ethiopia is the right land. Not Jamaica. I understand from I was born that I was a slave. I know slave [people] was here...Some did not come as slaves, but when they came here, they became slaves. Some came to see their families because if you have family you want to see them wherever they are (Rasta Ivey, 1998).

Rasta Ivey felt that the image of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and their followers as (White) doves is inappropriate for Black people. It was this kind of thinking that she sought to get away from. Implicit in this excerpt is an anti-mainstream religion view; people are not animals and God is not a spirit. The right thing, the truth, is Ethiopia and Rastafari, and Rastafari is God in human form. She ties her understanding and concerns to the slaves and the past, leaving open the suggestion that some Africans left Africa to find missing family members.

Rastafari conceptions of righteousness are bound to those of truth. Righteousness involves a morally-rooted, justice-based conception of beliefs and behavior. These are drawn from the Bible and the teachings and speeches of Haile Selassie, as well as the activities he involved himself in. These and the Bible provide the framework for the rules and norms that guide Rastafarians. Another dimension of the Rastafari interpretation of righteousness has a

secular orientation. A person is expected to not be involved in any forms of oppression, which are “wickedness” and “evilness.” Thus, righteousness applies to a clean lifestyle, and it is the righteous, they believe, who shall inherit the earth.

Brother Bongo, an activist Rastafari, offers some insight into these points:

...the divinity of His Majesty, apart from His Majesty's personal divinity as the Almighty...is accepted by all Rastafari brethren in truth....when His Majesty visited Jamaica in 1966 and [he] saw the brethren and sistren gather at the airport and see [sic] their enthusiasm for righteousness. He noticed, he knew, the lack of the format, the true principles of the livity [righteous living] that go with the faith....His Majesty wept (1998).

In Brother Bongo's statement, we see that even considering the diversity within the movement, there are shared core principles such as truth and righteousness common the older Rastafari. Brother Bongo later affiliated himself with the Ethiopian Orthodox church, but the definitions of truth and righteousness for him remain the same.¹³

Brother Bongo's claim that Christianity does not represent righteousness is an example of what makes the Rastafari controversial among non-Rastafarians, its link to Orthodox Christianity in Ethiopia and Haile Selassie, I, notwithstanding. Referring me to a document presented to the Ethiopian government by several Rastafari groups, asking that they be recognized as Ethiopians, he said it gave His Majesty the full ground to send the Ethiopian Orthodox Church [to Jamaica] therein, as Christians, as Ethiopian[s] originally is (sic) Christian. So it is true Christianity, and when I say Christianity, true righteousness because Christianity is being diluted” (1998). By “diluted,” Brother Bongo is referring to how he sees that the many Christian sects do not implement the rules and teachings they are supposed to, such as to administer justice and assist the poor, and over time have moved further away from the basic teachings of Jesus and the Bible as they split further into denominations and focused their attention on institution-building and maintenance. The failure of Christians to agree upon and follow their basis principles has long been recognized as a reason that explains ongoing denominational factionalism.¹⁴

Brother Barody, a second generation Rastafarian who came into the faith around 1960, at the height of anti-Rastafarian sentiment, also had big questions from early on. He tells a story of how at the age of seven or eight, while attending a Catholic school, he asked an abbot if God was Black or White, but got no answer. Although coming from a family in which Blackness was a salient identification (his parents and grandparents were Garveyites),

this question dogged him until he came into contact with the Rastafarians. For him it was the mistreatment he saw heaped upon the Rastafarians that served as his Encounter. Thus, even those socialized into a strong pro-Black identity can experience an Encounter that reorients their worldview.

Ras Burrell, a second generation Rastafarian, described how as a youth he was driven to seek knowledge about “truth and rights.” He felt he could not articulate the questions but felt them “deep within me.” He paid close attention to different ideological competitors: the revivalists, the Pentecostals, Garveyites, and Rastafari. Like Rasta Ivey, he determined that it was Rastafari that was representative of truth, righteousness, and other core Black moral economy principles.

In becoming absorbed by existential questions about life, God, justice, and evil, Rastafari like Rasta Ivey, Sister Amme, Brother Barody, and others represent what I call having a curious disposition (discussed in detail in the following section). The cases presented thus far draw out some of the tensions that result from the Encounter, seekership, and the move toward the new identity. There are many sources of tension and anxiety that come with the conversion experience. A significant one involves gaining a grasp of group norms and the meaning of various beliefs and practices. This becomes more problematic where there is heterogeneity in beliefs and practices within the group. The elder Rastafari play a role in alleviating tensions by serving as the equivalent of an information clearinghouse on the group’s beliefs, practices, and history. They may also assist in relieving tension and focusing identity development when they provide confirmation that the convert-in-process is on the right identity path. Some of these concerns are addressed in the next chapter.

Seekership and the “Curious Disposition”

Some people are seekers before they experience an Encounter or turning point. The Encounter or turning point only reinforces what they already felt or thought. People of this sort have an intellectual orientation; they are organic thinkers and philosophers. The person with a curious disposition might be engaged by existential questions prior to an Encounter. Brother Yendis caught the spirit of this disposition when he pointed out “If you are a conscious one who [is] looking to see the Redeemer, then the signs will show you that this is

real" (1998). These signs, as we have seen, require some time to make sense of, and intense study and observation are means toward this end. Study and observation seem almost "natural" for seekers because of their curiosity. At the same time, they are especially likely to be dissatisfied with status quo religion and society.

Ras Mas is an exemplar of the curious disposition. A first generation Rastafarian and an important leader in the movement, he was an outstanding intellect. Born in 1924 into a family where both parents were Garveyites and Seventh Day Adventists, he was socialized into Ethiopianism and Black nationalism, so racial awakening was not a part of his coming into Rastafari. He met or knew all of the founding Rastafarians: Robert Hinds, Joseph Hibbert, Archibald Dunkley, Bishop Brown, and Leonard Howell. He met Marcus Garvey at the age of five and this made a permanent impression upon him:

I go [to] Edelweiss Park with me old man and from the gathering there to the little house [porch] that Garvey and his lieutenants was sitting on....I say to me father, "I want to talk to Marcus Garvey." Them say, "Sit down and behave yourself. [You are] Too rude." I say, "I want to talk to Marcus Garvey." Me mother say, "I will spank you," and start to screw [wrinkle her face to] get me quiet. Me father look pon her and say, "Make him go on." Thousands of people in that place [and]... it look to me I cannot see how I would find back myself to go back to my parents. I walk, I come down the balcony beneath and reach the grounds. I walk from cross the grounds...go up on a little three-step place....[At the moment] Marcus Garvey and some more man upon the verandah [in a room] behind a desk and I go up there and I stand up at the table [on the verandah]. Me head can barely catch the table. I stand up at the table. I don't know what [to] say now. I see a short man [Marcus Garvey] come out a inside room...him come right a the table to me. [There are] Other dignitaries sitting round the table you know. Him say to me, "Son, what do you want?" I say, "I would like to read that big book, sir." Him put him hand upon me head and say, "You will read it one day son." And I really read it you know (June, 1998).

Ras Mas was always inquisitive and in school wanted to learn more about Africa:

It was an inspiration that was in me. When the teacher a teach, showing us geography, I was more enthused with the map of Africa than any other map in the atlas. So, I had a conscious opinion of Africa. My daddy was a Garveyite. My mother also because she had to go along with him. So, from a little boy I was conscious of certain things. I went to Edelweiss park [where Marcus Garvey often spoke] with me mother and father (June, 1998).

The study of Africa was not a part of Jamaica's educational curriculum. As he moved into his teens, Ras Mas became increasingly dissatisfied with the status quo. He felt that the church (Seventh Day Adventist and others) and even the established religions did not satisfy his needs. He said he "sensed the Rastas had a message and I was attracted to the way they

did things.” He began to listen to the messages of the itinerant and Rastafarian street preachers of the late 1930s and early 1940s. The emphasis on Black redemption, Ethiopia as home, and the return of the Messiah as a Black King were provocative and engaged Ras Mas. He studiously read any material on Africa and history he could gather; he combed through the Old and New Testaments to check and double check the claims being made by the Rastafarians. Gradually, Ras Mas took up the faith and became one of its most impassioned defenders, articulators, and teachers.

Ras Brenton is another example of the curious disposition. Being brought up in dire poverty did not diminish his critical and inquisitive thinking skills: “I was always thinking, ‘Why is it Black people have to be suffering like this?’ You see me? So that is why I actually become a Rasta man, because me come see the Rasta man a cry out against the sufferation [oppression, anguish] and me have to cry with them too because me see say it [they are] right” (1998). While it is not clear what first drew his attention to the plight of Black Jamaicans, he identified with their critique of the injustices surrounding them. During the time he was moving toward Rastafari (the late fifties and early sixties), it was a particularly repressive era for the Rastafari, while at the same time their militancy and activism began to capture the attention of middle and upper classes (see chapter 5).

The Encounter, Seekership, and the “Special Person”

Coming into contact with a “special person,” a Rastafarian, can serve as an Encounter and nudge one into seekership, as we saw with Brother Yendis in Chapter One. Such Rastafarians possess some kind of striking and charismatic qualities. It could be their appearance: dignified, awe-inspiring, humble, or attractive. Or it could be the mistreatment a person observes a Rastafarian receiving. Or it could be a Rastafarian taking a stance against injustice and wickedness or heartfully expounding doctrine. As discussed, literacy among Blacks was low in Jamaica during the early twentieth century, thus charisma and the spoken word carried a premium.

Like many Rastafari, Brother Yendis’s Encounter came from witnessing what he interpreted as an act of injustice committed against a person undeserving of it. I offer the story here in some detail:

[in 1947] me and my old man walk and between Mullings Grassyard....and Tivoli

Theatre....There was this Rasta man a push him cart coming up and we was going face him to the east. He was going to the east also....I see a police man stand up and do so to him (gesture) turning him back. The police want him turn back. "I tell you to turn back," said the police, and the Rasta man say "Why you a turn me back for? Me a go 'bout me business." The police lift up him cart and turn it over. I was a little youth, and say to my father, "Papa, what him do that for?" and my father say, "Is Rasta," and we gone. I go inna myself and say something wrong (1998).

That such a young boy could be troubled by what he saw brings into relief the centrality of justice and righteousness to Rastafarian identity. Brother Yendis did not fully understand what had transpired, and his father did not explain it, but he knew what he saw was wrong. This vignette points out the capriciousness the Rastafari of that time experienced, especially at the hands of the police. The larger society often witnessed these occurrences, but how many were moved like Yendis to continue contemplating the experience weeks later, and to change themselves and their beliefs to oppose the injustice?

Brother Yendis goes on to talk about how the experience raised questions for him: "About two weeks after that, I talk to my aunt's friend....I said 'You know me and Papa go a town and a policeman come up to a Rasta man wearing short pants and shirt and do him somthin'...and she say 'A Rasta that.' That kinda get me shaky and make me feel something must [be] wrong with Rasta....." (1998). At this point Brother Yendis does not know what to make of his Encounter. He senses the injustice and is impressed by the Rastafarian man's composure in the face of abuse from authority. Still, he thinks maybe there is something wrong with, or bad, about the Rastafarians. The Encounter does not leave and he personalizes it and becomes more critical of other things around him. Truth became an important concern for him, and he soon came to the view that the established venues that were supposed to be promoting truth, were, in his view, not about truth. He became disenchanted with the world around him.

At that time [early 1950s], you have 'nough little Rasta place all over, especially [in] Trench Town. Little after that [you have] Pinnacle and in the sixties most of the Rasta have to get out of town [Kingston, because of brutality bandied by the police and JLP sympathizers]. Every Sunday morning, we go sit down beside the radio because me say one a them day ya [there], the parson man a go tell me the truth. That we say all the while you know. Yes, we say one of these fine Sunday mornings, one of the parson man a go tell the truth. Them youth here lucky now, because them have the chance to say little things Them don't get to understand the pressure. Them don't get to understand the strain. Them don't get the chance to understand the holocaust what I and I have to go through. Rasta lose them life for this [faith] my

brethren. Sistren get beaten. Sistren have to take up them things and run with it (1998).

Brother Yendis had apparently been looking for the truth and expected to find it with the church and parson, like his parents. But after many sermons, there was no truth for him, just mis-education and injustice. He laments and rejoices that today the young generation of Rastafari do not face the same threats and have more “freedom,” but at the same time, he believes that they do not fathom the extent of the brutality experienced by the elders and do not recognize, generally, that it is the struggles of the early Rastafari that made possible their relative freedom.

Octogenarian Rasta Ivey has said it was her search for the truth that led her to Rastafari in the early 1930s. Her search was a lengthy one since she had been attracted to Africa-oriented movements since she was a teen in the 1920s. She was drawn to charismatic individuals and groups and their messages. She followed Alexander Bedward, knew Marcus Garvey, and listened to the messages of the Salvation Army and Leonard Howell, although affiliated with Robert Hinds (whom she refers to as “our leader”). During the time that Rasta Ivey was listening to the messages of Bedward, Garvey, and the Salvation Army (before Howell and Hinds), in her own words, she said she was “searching” and “listening.” “What were you searching and listening for,” I asked? She replied that she wanted to know about the “Black Christ...[and] Black people...I want[ed] to know when redemption was coming” (1998). She is a prototype of the curious disposition and at the same time was influenced by a charismatic “special” person.

What Rasta Ivey [and some of her contemporaries] did during the late 1920s and early 1930s was “piece together” the teachings of Bedward, Garvey, the Salvation Army, Howell, and Hinds. The Salvation Army, although a White-led organization, preached that a “Lion of Judah would break all chains [of oppression]” and that “blood and fire” would come hand-in-hand with redemption and the return of the Messiah. The same idea of a Lion of Judah comes directly from the Book of Revelations and suffuses Ethiopianism. She repeated, like a mantra, that “The five become one...the five become one” (Rasta Ivey, 1998). What she means is that the messages of the different individuals and groups had a common denominator and were summed to their total within the framework of Ethiopianism and Black nationalism: they emphasized the coming of a Black Messiah,

“upliftment of Black people,” an end to White oppression of Blacks, Black redemption and repatriation, and Black liberation. These ideas and messages converged with those of Howell and Hinds who were preaching that Haile Selassie, I, was the Black Messiah that had been spoken of and used several books of the Bible to interpret and explain why this was so.

Brother Dee, a first generation Rastafarian born in August of 1912, traces his course into the faith as a result of existential questions and a special person. For him it was Leonard Howell, a Rastafari founder, who precipitated his search. He listened to Howell’s discourses on Haile Selassie, I, Black redemption, and communal living, and wanted to find out more about his teachings. This led to intensive study of the Bible and reasoning (intensely debating, discussing along with the use of Ganja¹⁵) with Rastafarians he met in the streets. He, like many of the first and second generation Rastafarians, spoke in terms that conflate Whiteness with capitalism, colonialism, and imperialism. He equated wealth and the power to control with being White. Rasta Ivey, of the same era, uses similar language and allusions. This is understandable, since their experience was firmly bound by sharp racial distinctions. The British and most other Whites controlled most of the society and its wealth; thus, for them, capitalism, colonialism, and imperialism meant Whiteness. The home nations of these Whites—especially Britain, Italy, and America—were unabashed capitalists and imperialists. When I asked Brother Dee about Black capitalists, he quipped, “Black [people] nuh have nothing.” Although Marcus Garvey and his followers advocated Black capitalism, the poorest of the poor probably knew few or no examples of Black capitalists. What bothered the early Rastafari in this regard were the Blacks who emulated Whites to the point that they too were oppressors, or accepted oppression, thereby legitimizing it.

Brother Barody, picking up the faith right after the Prince Edward convention in 1959 and the release of the *Report* in 1960, was taken in by how the Rastafarians were mistreated for their beliefs, which he felt were not outlandish. While he did not single out one person who might have precipitated his Encounter, the treatment of those Rastafarians he saw and heard about caught his attention. He felt that this was an injustice and sought to better understand what it was that about the Rastafarians that made them outcasts. He was searching for answers to questions about race and God, and neither the churches nor educational institutions had answers. He slowly came to identify with Rastafarians’ “sufferation” (poverty, abuse, suffering) and trials and belief in a Black God and King that

had returned to redeem Black people.

Sister Ecila became a seeker as result of Marcus Garvey's teachings. She is a former UNIA member and Presbyterian. Interestingly, she defines herself as a Garveyite instead of a Rastafarian, although she holds Haile Selassie, I, to be divine and the Christ returned, and is a member of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Like Prophetess, she too is from an earlier era in which Rastafari was more easily blended with other Ethiopianist-oriented belief and value systems. Sister Ecila said it was Garvey's references to Haile Selassie, I, and the Biblical passage that Ethiopia shall stretch forth her hand to God that shook up her worldview: "From that time [of firsthand experiencing Garvey's teachings] I never stopped seek seeking His Majesty." She said her search involved much reading and study. Given Ecila's account, her Encounter with Garvey must have occurred before he became disaffected with the Emperor. Moreover, Garvey never saw the Emperor as divine. Thus, Ecila's account demonstrates the import of the influence of local cultural tradition, in this case Ethiopianism and the Black moral economy. The suggestion that Selassie, I, was an important symbolic figure for Blacks along with Biblical references to Ethiopia and Egypt were powerful enough to push Ecila into seekership and toward the Rastafari faith.

Listen and be a Good Learner: Exploring a New Group Referent

One way that Rastafari-to-be learned about the new group referent outside of study was to listen to Rastafarians expound their doctrine. From their emergence through the late 1960s, Rastafari "street" meetings were not unusual, even given the threat of violence. Other venues for learning Rastafari culture were their ceremonies, "indoor meetings," and informal gatherings. The Black convert-in-process tended to hang on the margins of these gatherings, watching, listening, learning. In this regard, Ras Brenton had this to say:

...me is a man who would sit and watch them [Rastafari] because I wanted to learn more from them....me come because me want to learn because them say the humblest calf suck the most milk. And me no want suck the most, but me want learn as much as me could a possibly learn so that me can defend me faith anywhere me go. Because the Rasta man say him no fear duke, lord, nor baron [White colonials]. So when we go amongst them [non-Rastafarians], we still have to tell them about His Majesty....A Jah make it go so, still, to prove who is who and what is what (1998).

He used various strategies to get closer to the cultural and historical information he needed to orient himself within the faith:

I remember, we use to use Planno's [a great leader in the movement] yard....I used to go there regularly to get counseling there and that is where I get to learn [the] most about it [Rastafari] because I used to go to him yard, where him is. And when we go there, chalice a burn and me was a chalice man, so I had to sip chalice because I used the same chalice to get to them too, to get reasoning out of them. Seen? So when the chalice a run, I was always pronto....I just sit back and watch what is happening and take it in. I did not do anything more than take in the reasoning. Now and again, I would make a point because I know man loves to embarrass man. Sometimes I feel like they will want to embarrass me too. I sit in and listen and be a good learner (1998).

Ras Brenton's observations were so intense and regular, he drew the attention of the Rastafari he was learning from. Because he was so quiet and aloof at this time (he is normally extremely long-winded) he acquired the name "Simple Simon." This was not because of a deficiency in intellectual acumen, but because of his silent, demure, intense expressions. It seemed as if he were "dumb" (unable to speak) when in effect he was in an intense learning mode. His behavior was compared to that of a dull-witted person. He claims the nickname did not bother him because he visited them to learn and therefore their poking had no impact. Yet, if he were more sensitive, this could have been a source of tension that caused insecurity, or maybe even lead to dropping out of the Nigrescence process.

Brother Woks, who had grown up among Rastafarians, spent less time on the fringe, and once he took on the faith, he moved quickly to participate in group activities, in this case it was a position of responsibility in the Ethiopian World Federation:

Before I reached 20 years of age, I came to know of His Imperial Majesty....but during that time, I did not start out to do the actual work such as attending meetings and so on. It was not until I stopped stage dancing....By 1960 [he had moved toward Rastafari] I left [the] stage show. That time, I had an Afro hair style [a combsome Rastafari]. After I left the stage, having the concept of His Imperial Majesty, I immediately became a member of the Ethiopian World Federation, Incorporated. In less than a year, I was appointed to the Executive Body (1998).

It is likely that his prior experiences allowed him to avoid the usual distant observation characteristic of the Rastafari convert-in-process. He still gave the occasional listen as he felt the urge: "I go to meetings and things like that you know. [I] Stop and give a listening ear to men like the late Mr. Leonard Howell and Mr. Dunkley and the late Mr. Hibbert (Brother Woks, 1998; Hibberts was his godfather).

Even though Rasta Ivey insists Rastafari was always within her, she too watched and learned, exploring the variants in beliefs and doctrines, putting the pieces together as we saw:

“But it [Rastafari] is in me from the beginning. From I was born, it was in me, but is to have the understanding. I was watching the people. I went to Pocomania. People are dropping [in ecstasy] and I was there night and day, and I did not drop” (1998). Thus, exploration and study are primary to coming to identify as a Rastafarian, even though their theory of inborn conception asserts that the essence of Rastafari already resides within a person.

SUMMARY

The life stories drawn upon here are about identity formation in the broad sense that the way in which a person has come to be who he or she is is the result of innumerable experiences. The ones that people remember or tell as important to their lives and who they are help us to fathom the content of their identity and worldview. However, stage and phase models of identity and the transitions between them are blurred in the real world. There are no incontestable markers that indicate where one phase ends and another begins. Still, the themes associated with given stages do appear in people's lives in a way that allows empirical investigation. I have picked out some of those experiences and reflections that illustrate identity formation (Nigrescence and religious conversion) at work.

There are two main paths into Rastafari: a spiritualistic one where the Encounter involves mystical experiences and one that typically is triggered by a real-world Encounter (Price, 2001). This demarcation, though, is not binding; there are exceptions. The triggering Encounters take the form of dreams, visions, insights, and concrete experiences such as witnessing an eye-opening occurrence, meeting a “special person,” or having a disposition that can be called “curious.” These catalysts awaken a person's consciousness to new considerations. This leads to the exploration of new group referents (e.g. other Rastafarians and Babylon), and potentially in assumption of a new identity. The beginnings are characterized by a search for information and peripheral observation—standing on the outside looking in—trying to learn and understand the new group norms, belief, and culture.

To come into the movement means that the person already knows something about the Rastafarians, therefore the hint of an alternative identity path is necessary. But a hint is all that is necessary, and this means that all one needs to know is that Rastafarians exist and that they are different from the rest of society. This difference, though many-faceted, revolves around “seeing” and “knowing” contrasted against blindness and ignorance.

For the Rastafarian convert-in-the-making, the Bible and Ethiopianism provided symbolic and interpretive frameworks that encapsulate and define truth, justice, morality and righteousness, and history. These are embedded in personal and group identity and actualized and institutionalized through everyday interactions and activities. The Bible and Ethiopianism carried great weight for the first two generations because of a dearth of other types of media and sources of information.

The shared definitions of truth, justice, righteousness, and other thematic concepts involve a Black critique or rejection of White renditions of Biblical, national, and world history. Thus, whether or not God is Black becomes a burning question for some, pulling them into seekership in pursuit of answers, which are thought of as *THE TRUTH*. The belief that ultimate truth(s) can be known and acquired is important to affirming a person's investigation and attainment of the new identity. Rastafarian identity is partly an antidote to how Blacks have been socialized into approaching the Bible and history from a White perspective; it functions in a re-socialization capacity. Major Biblical and historical protagonists have been portrayed or insinuated to be White and, consequently, Black history has been ignored and denigrated and European history glorified. It is unsurprising that the adventurers Henry Morgan and Francis Drake are treated as great in White accounts but are seen as pirates and thieves in the Rastafarian perspective. Nevertheless, reaching such a critical perspective does not come automatically. It requires an *Encounter* that opens the person's eyes and mind, and subsequent (re-) socialization into the perspective, involving a period of intense study, reflection, and observation.

Pre-Encounter and pre-conversion components relate to Blackness and Rastafari through illustration of various permutations and understandings of Blackness and how they come into conflict with each other, yet provide the grounds that sustain the Black moral economy that Rastafari perpetuates. Coming into Rastafari nearly always presupposes an already extant religious framework. Rastafarians have an indigenous theory, "inborn conception," that explains how the past and present are connected, and why and how people come into the movement in the absence of recruitment mechanisms. Still, it is the search for answers to big questions and the tensions growing out of the realization of being mis-educated and of being dissatisfied with the world that are the primary factors that move people toward Rastafari.

The Encounter phase is the beginning of seekership in the Nigrescence model, but the life histories show that seekership can continue into immersion-emersion stages. Identity transformation is a solution to the challenge that has shaken up the person's worldview and the questions that arise from the experience. The convert-in-process engages in study of historical and contemporary literature that helps to make sense of the challenge, how it relates to the self, and points toward how to resolve the issue: adoption of Rastafari. The conversion process is fraught with tension. The convert-in-process may be rejected and ridiculed by family and friends, members of the group to which he is attracted might appear aloof, or the person feels a sense of incompleteness or dissatisfaction with the world.

Like their Black forerunners, the early Rastafarians lives are marked by trials and tribulations; they tend to see their lives as full of tests that try their faith. Confrontation and morality permeated the essence of their experience—whether it was a rebuke from family or friends or an inclination toward withdrawal from the “wickedness” of society.

Rastafarian identity functions as psychic and social response to racism and discrimination experienced by Blacks develop, as Cross, Jr's, Nigrescence model suggests. It provides an alternative blueprint for life and explains the past, present, and future in ways consistent with the experience of Black people in Jamaica. In this way, it is an indigenous religion and identity. But its ethos—truth, justice, righteousness, redemption, and liberation—are universal in their appeal to oppressed people, which is what makes the identity attractive to those outside of Jamaica and unfamiliar with Ethiopianism and the norms of a Black moral economy. For most, though, coming to identify as a Rastafarian does not occur by virtue of being born into an environment where these things already exist. Something has to happen to bring the person to question him/her self and his/her surroundings. Although extra-local forces and social change influence identity-reformulation, the life histories do not suggest that these forces were the primary precipitators of the identity transformations. The triggering event remains the Encounter, although other experiences, character dispositions, and emotions help give the Encounter the force that leads some persons to take it to heart and others to ignore it.

ENDNOTES

1. **Reader's note:** For the sake of clarity, I have made some minor editorial changes to verbatim excerpts used in this and the following chapter. Where they are repetitive in particular excerpts, common patois words such as "dem" [them], "mek" [make], "gwaan" and "gwine" [go on, going on, gone on], "fi" [for, to] and "pon" [upon], have in most cases been written as their standard English equivalents. I have tried to maintain the flavor and language of the interviews by not changing syntax. Pseudonyms have been used in all cases except two: Rasta Ivey and Prophetess Esther. Both insisted that I use their real names; they understood the importance of their experiences and of sharing them. Plus, they want people to know who they are.
2. It also is understood as Rasta-for-I, emphasizing the group-individual dialectic.
3. The term Babylon was originally used only in reference to Jamaica and the police; over time it took on broader meaning to include protectors of the status quo (like the police and soldiers), Western society, and capitalism in general. The biblical Babylon was once a thriving commercial and cultural center, near modern-day Baghdad, under the rule of King Hammarabi (ruled 1728-1686 B.C.) Babylon was soon colonized by the Assyrians, who imposed their own King. Other succeeding "foreign" kings took the throne, including the son of a Chaldean, Nebuchadnezzar, who exiled the Jews and razed Jerusalem. The Babylonians were polytheistic, and the King was also a priest and leader of a despotic priestly caste; but a moral code of behavior and ethics was not required by the Babylonian gods, which is the opposite of the single God of the Hebrews. The Hebrews of that time were worried about their people who were coming under the sway of Babylonian culture. It is this later Babylon that serves as such a brilliant allegory for Rastafarian beliefs. Unfortunately, it is mainly readers of the Old Testament who fully grasp the allegory.
4. Rasta Ivey could have been born as early as 1906 which would have made her twelve in 1918. Sometimes she talks as if she were around six in 1918 and at other times she sounds like she could have been on the verge of her teenage years.
5. Kitzinger was among the first to ask "How does a man become a Rasta? 'A Rasta man born that way. A Rasta man have **inborn conception**....' Joining the Rasta faith is simply the outward sign and symbol of something he has always known inside himself, whether or not he has been consciously aware of it or not" (1969:246).
6. The term in standard English is "heart," with a silent "h." This describes an awareness of God, nature, and righteousness. It is also used to refer to those Rastafarians who exemplify morality and righteousness in deeds.
7. I have not yet interviewed Ras Planno.
8. The Native Baptists shied away from associating with those Blacks who attended the mission churches, viewing them as puppets of the Whites (Turner 1982:94). This draws attention to the long-lived critique of Blacks who ally themselves with Whites and their institutions.
9. This does not rule out study being a source of an Encounter. This is more likely, I believe, for third and fourth generation Rastafarians who have access to a greater store of literature on Rastafari and Black history, in addition to having higher literacy levels.
10. Some might argue that the Rastafari fail to follow their conceptions of justice and freedom to their logical conclusions—complete liberty—because of their patriarchal conceptions of the role of women in the movement. But many of the Rastafari men and women, especially the older ones, do not see this as a dilemma because they are following Biblical rules (see chapter 5 for a discussion of gender issues within the movement).
11. I assume the interviewee to mean among the rank and file.

12. A distinction is made between the blond, blue-eyed Christ and Black conceptions of Christ. The former's name is pronounced 'Jee-zus' and the latter 'Jess-us.'

13. This is an important point since among the Rastafari there is disagreement about whether they should operate 'churchically' (the use of a Rastafari church as their place of worship) versus the maintenance of their traditional worship and ritual structure, the open air tabernacle.

14. One explanation for this is that Christian religions over time get caught in the dynamic of organizational maintenance versus mission maintenance. The energy and resources required to sustain a church and organization take priority over the mission (following the teachings, such as commandments to do justice and assist the poor; see Tabb 1987).

15. Ganja is not a prerequisite for reasoning.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE INVESTMENTS, SACRIFICES, AND REWARDS OF BEING RASTAFARI

Like many instances of conversion, individuals are gradually socialized into Rastafari. Re-education and re-socialization are a primary part of growing into the new identity. Until the identity is thoroughly internalized, the identity formation process is fraught with tensions, anxieties, and uncertainties. While these feelings do not end with Internalization, the likelihood of their having a negative impact upon the person diminishes as long as the person remains committed to the new identity and beliefs. New challenges to the identity can arise over the life course, and social and technological change are two importance sources.

I begin by showing five inter-related and tension-laden aspects of building and erasing the old identity: 1) miseducation and re-education, 2) defensiveness about the identity change, 3) the implications old ties bring to bear on the new identity, 4) the need to disparage the old identity and self, and 5) the estrangement of family and friends. Several attachment and detachment processes are involved in building and maintaining the identity and group: investment, sacrifice, mortification, renunciation, communion, and transcendence (Kanter, 1972). Next, I briefly consider some issues of commitment and Internalization. I end by focusing on factors that sustain and challenge commitment and ongoing attachment to the identity and group.

Just as intrusive, macro-level social changes can challenge the explanatory relevancies associated with specific group identities and world views, they can also challenge a person's commitment to the identity developed in the process of solving the issues that the Encounter brought to the fore. Social change can make a person's capacity to maintain commitment to the identity and group more difficult by introducing factors that spread thin a person's attentions and obligations.

STAGE THREE: CONVERSION, IMMERSION, AND EMERSION; SEEKERSHIP AND CONVERSION AS A SOLUTION TO QUESTIONS, TENSIONS, AND NEW CONCERNS

Seekership, in the case of the interviewees, turned into gradual engagement with the new personal and group identity. In this way, it functions as a potential solution to the dissonance associated with the Encounter experience(s) and, where relevant, the more encompassing issues raised by changes of extra-local origin. The real work of identity change begins during the Immersion and Emersion (IE) phases. The IE phase is characterized by a search for information and prototypes of organizations and associations that furnish the convert-in-process with vital information about the identity and new reference group orientation (RGO). This phase of the identity transformation process also has its sources of tension, which are related to how the convert-in-process and his or her surrounding community react to each other. The Immersion aspect of the IE phase can be especially tense because the convert-in-process may be angry and defensive.

Mis-Education and Re-Education: Blackness, the Bible, & History

A central thesis of Cross, Jr's, revised Nigrescence model asserts that deracination and mis-education make Nigrescence possible. This holds true for the Rastafarians, although the religious aspect adds new considerations. Those people moving toward the Rastafari faith were hungry for information about Black history and culture; it had been denied them as a part of their formal and informal education (excepting those already familiar with Ethiopianism and Black Nationalism). Re-education and re-socialization are investment processes, a person's start toward building a stake in the new group and identity.

One of the questions I used to get at how a person came to exalt Blackness and Africa was "Did you learn about Africa in school?" Invariably, the answer was "No," at least in a culturally meaningful way. Brother Bongo had this to say about his experience: "No African literature was distributed in school. We had a literature with a story about Bombo, African boy, a boy in the jungle. That was the only story about Africa. Most of the times...colonial slave masters was the main history. Sir Francis Drake, Christopher Columbus.... Henry Morgan... [and] John Hawkins" (Brother Bongo, 1998). One of the books that first opened Brother Bongo's eyes (aside from the Scriptures) was *Ethiopian*

*Cultural History.*¹

Brother Bongo's sole memory of learning about Africa in school involved a caricatured Black figure, "Bombo," reminiscent of America's stereotype, "Little Black Sambo." That Brother Bongo latched onto a book on Ethiopian cultural history is unsurprising given his state of seekership and the validity Ethiopianism holds in Jamaica. Simultaneously, his experience accentuates how slavery and colonialism contributed to a legacy of deracination, even in a predominantly Black society with an established Black moral economy. Yet, slowly, Brother Bongo had developed a critique that threw his miseducation into relief. His formal learning was filled with teachings about "slave masters" and White "pirates" whose exploits were canonized. Brother Bongo and his peers sought to re-educate themselves as "Ethiopians" proud of their land, heritage, and association with the Messiah who also hailed from that land: "...we develop[ed] ourselves through reading. This man will get a literature and pass it onto that man, and we sit and reason, and the inspiration of His Majesty always stays with us because it is his wish that anywhere two or three are gathered together touching anything pertaining to His Majesty, he is always there to guide and strengthen I and I" (1998).

Ras Brenton pointed out another stereotype foisted upon young Black Jamaicans of his generation:

...once ago, them used to tell we say Africa is the dark continent and no man can go there and survive because is only lions there to eat you....And now we a get to realize say that no real. Some of these things go so, but a no really true. A lie, as you say, them a tell upon Africa through them want control the rubber tree as me always a say. Them control the rubber tree so them can make all tyre [sic]....Out a our rubber tree. Number one. Number two, them control the gold mines in South Africa.... (1998).

Ras Brenton finds hypocrisy behind the myths and tales of Africa. Although Whites had little to nothing good to say about Africa and proclaimed falsehoods to impressionable Blacks who internalized the negative information, they were busy extracting the continent's riches. It is making these kinds of connections that makes the person's old beliefs and perspective untenable. But whether a person will continue upon the path of identity reformulation cannot be determined simply by becoming aware of new information.

Concluding that what they knew and had been taught about Africa, their existing identity, and their condition in Jamaican society was wrong and an obstacle to being who

they believed they ought to be, the early Rastafari sought to address the matter in various ways. Brother Bongo and a small coterie of his associates developed a regimen that included exercise, study, and discussion, along with the use of ganja to facilitate inspiration. They were serious because they gathered at least twice a day. Through their reasoning sessions and study, they surmised that they were still enslaved, and that part of ending their mental enslavement necessitated leaving wage employment. Around this time, they were beginning to manifest their covenant—the public display of their identity and commitment. This brought new tensions and uncertainties into this phase of their identity transformation:

...we always seek to reason on the higher level of reality. My clique. That is when we touch eighteen, nineteen. So we find ourselves gathering, start working out [mentally and physically] you know. [This was] About 1958 into 1960. During the 60s, I was working at a woodwork shop by Norman Road...where they made big settees, big furniture for export. At midday, we used to go by the beach and burn the herb and reason. [We] Follow up in the evenings; we go and reason touching the works of His Majesty. We started to penetrate the history of His Majesty and Africa generally and go right up into our history to know who we are and where we coming from. At a time, we realize that working out there in Babylon just keeps our minds enslaved to the Babylon system. It does not give us any time to think of ourselves and think of the future. So I come to the conclusion that I would leave the work. But, before we leave the work, the consciousness start show on us as we start to let the hair grow now, and beard started to spring up (1998).

Growing into the new identity in the case of Brother Bongo and his brethren required moving away from the routine and relationships associated with the old identity. Pursuit of information related to the new identity and ideology are an integral part of seekership and the IE phase. Through this process, a person explores the new group referent, especially its norms, beliefs, and practices, and learns how to rationalize and justify the need for his/her identity change.

Brother Bongo “sighted up” His Majesty around the same time as several other young people his age. They began to “move together,” creating a community of their own. One of the preoccupations of the first and second generation Rastafarians was learning Amharic, an Ethiopian language. They reasoned they needed to learn the language in preparation for repatriation to that land. It also supported their identification as Africans and helped to create psychic and social boundaries that solidified their differentiation from the surrounding society. Most Rastafarians of that era knew at least a few words of Amharic. For instance, “Wadada” (love) and “satta amasagana” (give thanks) are Ethiopian words widely

used by Rastafarians when they greet each other or part company. Rastafarians like Brother Bongo sought to become fully competent in the language:

...we got acquainted with Amharic language. We got a document with the alphabet and he [another young Rastafarian], having a book shop and in the literature circle, came upon a dictionary for interpretation of Amharic to English—translating Amharic to English. The first word we find is “Wadada,” meaning love; second word is “satta amasagana”—give thanks. We go on and find “Kibbilahamla”—glory to God. Then we started to put word and word together. First of all, we ran down the alphabet of Amharic....We go as far as that we could recite the whole 276 characters by heart (1998).

Learning Amharic was a means by which to gain respect from fellow Rastafarians and to show their commitment to the faith and Blackness. But this required study, and usually a teacher (sometimes an elder Rastafarian) or a study group.

Socialization is an important means by which the first and second generation Rastafari came into the movement and solidified their identity. An important part of early engagement with Rastafari involved listening to and studying what veteran members of the movement do and say: “Through that [the ostracization, scorn] me move amongst the Rasta them, and go all ‘bout them there and try to get argument [insights, teachings, reasonings] from them, and [I] study them more and learn more from them because me a study them from before me put on me knotty” (Ras Brenton, 1998). His move toward Rastafari drew him negative attention from community members and pushed him further toward Rastafari, for protection, respite, and to learn more. He did not make his vow to the faith (putting on his “knotty” or dreadlocks) until he grasped the fundamental norms and practices of the group. His participation during the early phases of engagement was fringy; he “moved” amongst them, but quietly.

Study of the Bible is fundamental to Rastafari identity development and a key way in which a person comes to identify with the past and make it relevant to the present. The same medium used to miseducate Blacks becomes a tool of reeducation. During the IE phase, with the aid of those more experienced in the ways of the group, the Bible is read through new eyes. A critical consciousness is applied to old understandings. The Bible furnishes a framework for defining the thematic concepts of truth, justice, righteousness, and so forth.

We read ourselves the Bible and [for] those early [first] Rastafarians that was the decision they all come to, listening to Mr. Marcus Garvey, and [seeing] the coronation of His Imperial Majesty, and reading from the Bible. So, we all come to

that decision because I read the Bible for myself and I prove that those brothers who were long before me within the struggle are perfectly right....The Bible is the thing that bring me stronger to the light because the Bible is like a compass. It is the spirit that holds you firm. As His Majesty says, a person without a religion is like a body without any soul. We have to have a religion though government does not recognize the Rastafarians, who over the years, are agitating for recognition that the government should recognize us as a religion. Notwithstanding, we still know that this is a direct religion and it is religiously political (Brother Woks, 1998).

I asked Brother Woks, "How does the political come in?" He replied, "Through black nationalism. From the mere fact that you really fly a flag, that is politics [Then there are]...the atrocities committed against our ancestors, and...they raped Africa and it is the reason why we are here" (1998). He ultimately grounds his grievances in slavery and the spoiling of Africa, the slave trade and colonialism.

Brother Woks offers perspective on how Ethiopianism can be political, combining religion, politics, and grievances. The Jamaican government refuses to officially recognize the Rastafari as a religion, and he feels that part of the reason is because both "fly a flag." The Rastafari see themselves as a nation, with their own flag and politics, just like Jamaica. Their flag is the flag of Ethiopia, and their politics that of humanism and Black Nationalism of the Ethiopianist variety.

Although Brother Woks gives credit to Marcus Garvey for awakening the Rastafari to the coming of a Black King, Robert Hill claims this is a myth that has no supporting evidence (1983). Nevertheless, the idea that Garvey prophesied the coming of an African king who would redeem Black people is a widespread belief. Garvey, the anti-Rastafarian, anti-communist, and Black capitalist, remains an inspiration to Rastafarians, although most ignore these aspects of his works. He is treated as a prophet who brought together activism, education, Black pride, and the hint of alternative identity path which the first Rastafarians developed through their reading of the Book of Revelations in particular. Brother Woks makes the point well:

Hearing Mr. Marcus Garvey preach, teach, and encourage Black people to rise up because if we are not able to see ourselves as a Black race, nobody is going to show you. So we have to rise up and show other nations that we have all the capabilities. Now, when Mr. Marcus Garvey talked about a king shall be crowned in Africa, and when that time comes, Black people deliverance draweth nigh. These informal groups that usually protest against injustice and against the colonial masters by seeing and hearing Mr. Marcus Garvey they check with the Bible. So on checking with the

Bible and reading Revelation, Chapter 5, there is a question asking “Who is worthy enough to open the book and to loose the seven seals thereof? No man in heaven, nor on earth, nor beneath the earth is found worthy to open the book and to loose the seven seals thereof.” So John, in his vision cried. He wept and a spirit said to John, “Weep not. Behold the lamb who was slain. The Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah shall come, and he is the one who is found worthy to open the book and to loose the seven seals thereof. Look on his gesture and look on his thigh and look on his style and it is written that no man knoweth but he himself. [He is] King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah. Elect of God and the Light of this world. Out of his mouth has cometh a sharp two-edged sword. With it, he shall smite the nation.” So the brothers said, “This is him that Mr. Marcus Garvey is talking about. This must be the man that Mr. Marcus Garvey is talking about....” The King of Kings, The Lord of Lords, The Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah, Elect of God and the Light of this world. That is the basis from which we all come to the acknowledgment that His Majesty is the returned Christ seated on the throne of David (Brother Woks, 1998).

To read Revelations alone is insufficient to grasp why Haile Selassie, I, is understood to be the Messiah returned, or how to make sense of the tendencies of Babylon and other apocalyptic prophesies. Connections between the Rasta ideology, the present, and the Biblical and secular past must be made, such as learning the theory of inborn conception, and developing an alternative and critical understanding of history and historical figures such as Christopher Columbus and Sir Francis Drake. Understanding the history that culminates in the future predicted by Revelations is probably the most essential aspect of Rastafarian identity and ideology.

Defensiveness, Aggressiveness, Moral Superiority, and Identity

Cross, Jr's, Nigrescence model indicates that the Black convert-in-process is sometimes excessively romantic, defensive, or aggressive about the new identity during the Immersion and Emersion phases of identity development. He/she is in the process of growing into the new identity so these displays may serve to mask personal insecurities regarding not being thoroughly familiar with the norms, practices, and beliefs associated with the new identity.

The early Rastafari were notorious for verbally abusing certain non-Rastafarians, especially Christians, the petit bourgeoisie, and authorities, from the 1940s into the early 1970s. Their famous apocalyptic cry, “Fire Bu’n(burn),” has made many a non-Rastafarian tremble with trepidation. To call “Fire Bu’n” upon a person is to damn, denounce, and insult

them as wicked people. Other cries include “Judgemant” (judgement),² “earthquake,” “lightning,” and “thunder.” All allude to elemental forces that have the capacity to destroy, and are prominent in causing disasters during Biblical times; they also refer to the power of God, implying the Rastafari have control over these forces. To call for lightning, for example, is a symbolic threat. The youthful elements and those new to the faith are those most likely to be most aggressive, defensive, and confrontational in their identity. But as time passes and the person moves into Internalization and commitment, he/she tends to mellow out, and confrontation becomes a situational behavior and not a part of the person’s day-to-day operation.

Ras Brenton grew out of his confrontational mode a long time ago, but he proffers insight into what it means and how it is used:

I been trying to show them [young Rastafari] these things, you know, but sometimes they don’t accept it. Me no bother bu’n them with no fire. Me just allow them [to continue without being defiantly challenged]. Me pass them stage there now [confrontation, defensiveness]. Me no bother bu’n them with the fire, me just allow them, and next time me an them can either reason it out or otherwise. Them hold on to what them hold on to [beliefs].... you got to hold on to what you hold on to, but I am holding on [to my beliefs] the same way too.... I ain’t going to let you take me off my track, because me come here like a king, priest and prophet, as the Rasta man would say. So me is either king, priest, or prophet, and me come here to prophesy down Babylon kingdom because that is what me been trying to do most of the time. Prophesy down Babylon [and] say them fall, and we see them a fall this day. For it is them who keep we in downpression [oppression] and the Rasta man also say, “The cry of us will be in them house.” So, every time we cry out it a reach in a them house so that them have to feel it in some effective way that it a worry them (1998).

Even though the young people sometimes frustrate him, Ras Brenton now refrains from damning or insulting them for not agreeing with his views and beliefs. His identity and beliefs are secure and he recognizes that not all people walk the same identity path that he did. He just “allows them” to hold to their views with the understanding that it is better to leave open the door to further communication. Ras Brenton is more concerned today with making sure that they keep Babylon on her “toes.” The Rastafari of old were intolerant of those not open to or critical of the faith. Interestingly, this tendency has resurfaced among some segments of the young male Rastafarians of the late 1990s, being publicly advocated by some youthful Bobo Shante Rastafarian performers who say they will not stop “bu’n fire.” The paradox is that the Bobo’s have been the least confrontational and most escapist among

the Rastafari, known for living within walled compounds.

Just as the Dreadlocks of the 1940s were the militant arm of the Rastafari movement, a youthful militant arm of the movement exists today, and many of the more negative occurrences attributed to the movement are associated with these quarrelsome cells and individuals. They have given new purchase to the “fire bu’n” practices; some are especially aggressive in their efforts to remove Jesus Christ from the Rastafari pantheon. These contemporary zealots have drawn the attention, and sometimes ire, of young and old Rastafarians. They can be bumptious in promoting and defending the doctrine, creating tensions within and outside of the movement. For instance, a young Rastafarian, Desmond, visibly aggravated, searched out a group of elders for aid in resolving a troubling paradox. The young man had not too long ago committed to the faith, if the short length of his covenant (dreadlocks) is an indication. He complained that he was getting too much contradictory information. Out loud, in a room in which two elders and some other Rastafarians were present, he shrilly, but rhetorically, asked, “Why some of them [young Rastafarians] say bu’n book, bu’n Bible, bu’n Jah? How them a go bu’n Jah?” The youth felt that his fellow young Rastafari were too militant, creating an atmosphere of repression since anyone who spoke contrary to the bu’n philosophy would almost certainly get shouted down and insulted. Confusion was stamped upon his brow. Before Desmond could finish, one of the elders went to a cabinet and retrieved a book containing a collection of Haile Selassie, I’s, speeches. Immediately, he began to read a speech, first choosing one the Emperor delivered to the Trinidadian Parliament in the mid 1960s. The speech emphasized the importance of tolerance and spiritual progress. After slowly reading the speech, often pausing and repeating key words and phrases like tolerance, for emphasis, the elder then offered his analysis:

Those who are so quick to bu’n everything are not following His Majesty’s words, which for example in His Majesty’s speech on material and spiritual progress, he asks that people be tolerant of other faiths and beliefs; second (speaking loudly for emphasis), it is important that we allow for difference as we do not seek unity of ideology; third (in a loud tone), [Selassie, I, asked us to] organize and centralize (Ras Grantly, 1998).

After Ras Grantly finished, the other elder reiterated the same points; and then a small amount of herbs were divided among those who wanted some, and a general discussion of

the issues ensued. Desmond left much calmer and more focused than when he arrived.

Desmond thought he was on the right track in moving toward Rastafari. But he was confused by messages he was receiving from people he was identifying with, and his confusion stirred anger since he did not know what to make of what he thought and whether it was correct because of the signals he was getting from these younger Rastafarians. The conflict centered around potentially competing values (what he thought and what he thinks they think) and making a choice: Where do I fit in this? Do I want to be associated with such obstreperous people? Am I on the right track? Ras Grantly, by using Selassie, I's, speeches as a source of information and interpretative framework combined with analysis and contextualization, provided a possible resolution to Desmond's tensions and continued direction toward Rastafari identity development. Although inter-generational cooperation was the case here, there were pronounced intergenerational conflicts in the late 1990s, as was the case during the 1940s.

The defensiveness, aggressiveness, and patina of superiority work well for those still unfamiliar with the identity and ideology. They are not yet steeped in the new norms and ideology to the point where they can defend it, or decide to not engage belief challenges because their level commitment to the identity makes them comfortable to the point that they can rationalize ignoring certain identity-related confrontations. As Brother Woks notes, "...when one can really defend his philosophy to a certain level, the fighters realize that this is not a person whom you can ask any and every kind of question except those questions are based on [sic] an intelligent manner. But if you are going to ask him some stupid question, then you will find yourself in trouble" (Brother Woks, 1998). But not all Rastafari go through the aggressive fire bu'n stage; some, see it as too excessive:

...when I was coming on from a youth, a lot of [strong] sentiment[s] usually were expressed during those times. Them burn literature, them burn everything. If you even have on clean clothes and things like that, they would burn you too. You even wear a watch and things like that, a pen pinned to your pocket, they would burn you. Looking clean, they burn you. If you speak with a female, they did not too much like that because they feel that you fleshy....Those things are not right [calling for celibacy] because God created a pair of people, male and female and all creatures. That is part of what set back the Movement....(Brother Woks, 1998).

Brother Woks believes that the aggressiveness of some Rastafari militants of the late fifties and early sixties expedited the repressive reactions against them, creating a negative

stereotype of the group. But as discussed earlier, the issues addressed by Brother Woks were indicative of in- and outgroup conflicts, a normal part of ethnogenesis and group development. Within the group, there were collisions over ideology and social practices, and outside the group, the militants made it easier for authorities to justify suppressing the Rastafari.

Demons of the Old Identity: Disengagement and Sources of New Tension

Because a person has experienced an identity transformation attendant to a new outlook and relationships, it does not mean he/she will not face further challenges to whom they have become and what they believe. Their past may haunt them for some time to come. Outside of complete disengagement, old relationships can create problems for the new identity by raising the specter of old loyalties and how to change (or even completely eliminate) them so that they are consistent with the new identity. Ras Brenton found himself trying to “satisfy” a church woman whom he had loved as a child by letting her try and comb out his dreadlocks (she was appealing to his affection in order to “undo” his locks as she found them unbefitting a young man who should be a Christian). It was the pain of having a comb pulled through his matted hair that led Ras Brenton to question his beliefs and loyalties, ultimately rejecting the elder woman he respected in favor of Rastafari:

...me remember one time, me dread, and a church woman whey me know name Miss Grant. She was a good friend of mine, because she had a son and me and him was good friend and through that we have to love her more....the woman never stop till she influence me and tell me 'bout make she comb it out [his dreadlocks] for me... and through me a try to satisfy her feelings, me dissatisfy myself. Because when the woman done comb out my hair, before she even done, me a feel pain in a me head. The woman pressure me to comb out the locks...me have to stop her part of the way you know, and see how me a give this woman her heart's desire. She get blind now, me a tell you. Must be Rasta blind her some say. Because she a comb out my hair what never want to comb out because it dread already....When she done comb it out Rasta, the whole of my scalp in a fire. So me take a oath and say, me would never make a woman do that again because she come like Delilah upon me (1998).

Ras Brenton's attempt to please an adored female figure had the contradictory effect of making him more resolute to not make such compromises in the future. He had to take a stand vis-a-vis his faith and prior loyalties. His faith took priority over prior loyalties. He is regretful that he let her persuade him to get rid of his locks, and seems to feel responsible

for her going blind—it is as if both of them should have known better.

Many elder Rastafari converts-in-process found trouble holding their employment as they moved into the faith. For the most part, their ideal is to be self-employed and independent, although they are critical of capitalist market forces. A different permutation of this is the way that the Black moral economy thematic concept of freedom manifests in Rastafari ideology and behavior. In this context, freedom is synonymous with autonomy and independence, values important to the Rastafari and the peasantry. But the capitalist market under the hegemony of Browns, Whites, and various elites in Jamaica and England conspired to continually foil their aspirations (Chapters 3-4). The most militant Rastafari forswore employment of any kind and moved into the hills or bush to live hermitic lives. Others were dependent upon status quo conventions such as wage employment (albeit marginal and unstable given the economy). Those who were not self-employed found themselves facing decisions whether to publicly avow their faith or to keep it “undercover.” For those already growing into the new identity, wage employment became a problem associated with the old self. The new self necessitated new strategies and networks that the convert-in-process had to work out. A new equilibrium had to be reached.

Brother Bongo:

At the work place, they said they could not tolerate the loose hair, so we have to trim and shave to continue the employment....management told I that personally... “You have to trim. If you don’t trim, Monday morning, you cannot come back [to work].” That was the Friday evening after pay. Well, it was between getting another pay bill and keeping the covenant. By that time, we [had] developed full consciousness. That paybill cannot help us. We want to research and know whom we really are. Monday morning, I just went for my tool box and left the work. That time, I was living by Cambridge Street in Franklin Town. It was my family’s place and they, too, started to take resentment for my faith and the growing of my hair; so there was a policeman in my aunt’s husband’s family....and being a policeman, he was strictly against Rasta and said he did not want any Rasta on his father’s premises....So I had to leave the home at Cambridge Street. I thought it over, and that time, I had a girlfriend.... I say to myself, I will have to leave this place and I am going to build a tattoo [a makeshift dwelling].... My girlfriend said, “Anywhere you go, I am going to follow you.” I said, “You go back to your parents, because this life that I am going to take is not for you [at] this time. It is a rugged life...I am going to make a trod right now.” Eventually, I start to prepare and get my material together by Charlotte Street on the beach. Eventually, I had a brethren who we worked same place and he took on to the faith too and we linked together, and the both of us moving in the same direction, and we decided and built a tattoo down by Charlotte Street (1998).

Brother Bongo found all manner of challenges related to his old self and these were sources of tension. He had to quit his source of income and his family was upset with him because of his move into the Rastafari faith and “new” attitude toward work. At this point, he was ready to move away from society and take on the Nazarite vow. He was even prepared to walk away from his girlfriend for his new beliefs.

Mortification, the disengagement from the old identity and its ties, has as its complement the inculcation of new standards of meaning, value, and reward. It creates tension and anxiety, but also carries the potential resolution of these. Thus, mortification involves investment, sacrifice, conviction, and the promise of reward. “We have to keep the faith. The faith is peace, perfect peace and love, perfect love, and from we have the love of Jah, miraculous things can happen. So we just have that faith of love. [Mortimer] Planno [a great Rastafarian leader] used to sing a tune, ‘We leave our homes and families just to travel with the chord of love’” (Ras Brenton, 1998). The demons of the old identity may never completely disappear, depending upon how the convert approaches the problem. Some persons seek to completely sever all ties to the old identity, while others are more discriminating in de-linking from previous relationships tied to the old identity.

“I Am No Longer a Babylonian”: Rejecting and Disparaging the Old Identity

In order for the new identity to fully take hold, it is important to differentiate one’s new self from the old one. This may take the form of disparagement or outright rejection of the old self. It is a form of renunciation combined with mortification. Both help separate the person from the world and ties of the old self and minimize potentially disruptive factors that threaten the cohesion of the group. The Nigrescent convert can then proudly proclaim “I am a new person, a vast improvement over the person I was before!”

Brother Bongo and many of his fellow Rastafarians wanted nothing to do with Jamaica and Babylon, and so adamant were they about this that they wanted to completely renounce Jamaican nationality in favor of Ethiopian nationality. These efforts were more than rhetorical. A great deal of time and energy was expended:

Our program was “Ethiopian Nationality Claim for Resettlement to Ethiopia.” So we decided to draft a resolution with the provision, by law, of our rights to claim our Ethiopian nationality. This provision would come by [under the jurisdiction of] the Ethiopian Constitution by His Majesty in 1965 and revised in 1978 and the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights that gives us the freedom to our religion and free[dom] to claim our identity, and the Jamaican Constitution also that makes provision for us to claim any nationality....we endorsed the resolution at a meeting, a street meeting...which was very well attended, at Coronation Market, over some 3 to 5,000 people....That was 1964, somewhere about that time, and that resolution was declaring ... our claim to our nationality. In it, we asked for audience with the Minister of Home Affairs of the Jamaica Government. It was the Honorable Roy McNeil at the time. So audience was granted to a three-man delegation from the Rastafari community to meet with the Minister to discuss the possibility of renouncing the Jamaican identity and claiming our Ethiopian nationality....Well, when the day came, we had a march of about some 200 followers with placards claiming our Ethiopian nationality, and [that] we are Ethiopians, originated (sic) in Ethiopia but was (sic) born in Jamaica, and slogans to that effect....All those placards were painted and the march was a peaceful demonstration (1998).

The Rastafari's adamant pursuit of renouncing Jamaican nationality alienated them from many Jamaicans, especially the ones who were boldly supportive of Independence and delighted to finally be able to call themselves Jamaicans, without the official British connection. Rastafarian efforts to renounce Jamaica were another way of reinforcing the identity demarcations between them and the rest of the society. It symbolized a renunciation of their old identities and comfort with the new one.

At the level of personal identity, most Rastafarians change something about their name, if only to add Ras, Brother, Sister, Queen, Princess, Bongo, or Congo as a prefix. Those baptized into the Ethiopian Orthodox Church are required to take on a new name, and among men, Selassie is a common one. It is another means to establishing the new identity and renouncing the old. Brother Bongo, who later joined the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, reveals a heightened and critical consciousness in explaining why he changed his name:

I man can declare I self as an Ethiopian national abroad because my name... [is changed to] Servant of the Trinity. I renounce John Brown which is my slave name; that is my slave master's name. I come of age and to the consciousness to my ancestral rights, my original rights, my original identity as an Ethiopian. So as an Ethiopian, I cannot be identified as John Brown. There is no such Ethiopian name as John Brown. It must be a slave that is named John Brown. So now that I am redeemed from mental slavery, I am now... [a different person... I and I ... need to get all the brethren at home and abroad to identify ourselves as Ethiopian nationals abroad.... (1998).³

By taking on the name Bongo (an equivalent is "Congo"), Brother Bongo exercised a counter-hegemonic move and an act of racial consciousness. Originally, Bongo and Congo

were terms that denigrated blackness and African phenotypic features by describing them as dirty and ugly. The Rastafari took these terms and turned them on their head and into honorific titles. For them Bongo and Congo mean Black pride. Important to Brother Bongo's second name change narrative in the preceding excerpt is the imagery of slavery and Blackness [Ethiopians]; his new name means that he is destroying the lingering vestiges of slavery at the most intimate level, personal identity.

Discovering oneself is crucial to a central element of Rastafarian *raison d'être*: repatriation to Africa. Because of the negative stereotypes of Africa that reigned into the seventies, it was not a place that appealed to the sensibilities of most Blacks. To renounce the West in favor of the East requires a consciousness steeped in self-reflection. If "you don't know yourself and you are not conscious of whom you are, repatriation has no use to you. You will be just running around again like a puppet, serving alien gods, idols, alien cultures, and customs. Sinning every day according to your administration, doing the works of the devil. Paying tribute to Baal. So you have to come to [recognize] these things...." (Brother Bongo, 1998).

"Damn Fool Turn Rasta": Family and Friends Become Estranged

Reaction of family and friends to the identity transformation can be that of astonishment and scorn. They cannot understand why the person is changing who he/she is, why he/she is forsaking the comfortable and known for the unknown, and in the case of Rastafari in the 1940s and 50s, the contemptible:

After me father died, I start grow me hair tall. Me father always a give me money to cut me hair when him was alive, and I bob and weave [evasiveness] him out. Me always comb it and pat it down and all them things there. After me father died, me mother she did not like to see me face hairy up so, but as you know mom all over, me know how to bob and weave her. And although she [later] became proud, one a the time she say she didn't know she was going [to] bring a ram goat (Laughter). Afterwards, when she see her son and see them lock courtroom door and try I behind lock and have to open the courtroom door and let me out she feel proud of me man (Ras Mas, 1998).

Ras Mas's mother was displeased that he had begun to grow his hair and beard, a sure sign that he was moving toward Rastafari. But being clever, Ras Mas found ways to avoid a full-blown confrontation with her, by "bobbing and weaving her out." She even remarked that

he was like a “ram goat,” meaning hairy, bearded, ugly, and rank-smelling (Ras Mas, 1998). Over time, Ras Mas became militant and literally went to fight against Babylon, and his mother became proud of his fight for righteousness and his victories against the “system.”

Even the most gradual move toward Nigrescence and Rastafari can be disconcerting to family and friends, especially those who are Christians or aspirants to petit bourgeois values. The marginal status of Rastafari made it difficult to grasp why a person would come to identify with them. Family and friends puzzled “Why do you want to be one of those people?” or “Those people are dangerous and dirty” or “They are mad!” Such disparaging epithets were commonly directed toward the Rastafari, and initial adjustment to being insulted was not taken easily, and was often met with counter insults such as “fire b’un.” But these conflictual interactions had the dialectical aspect of potentially strengthening the identity by pushing the person to further question him or herself about the identity transformation. “Is it worth losing family and friends?” they might ask themselves. All the interviewees found the faith more important than worldly concerns.

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of being ostracized is when it is family and friends who are the source of marginalization. Brother Yendis tells how his father reacted as he slowly grew into the new identity.

When the brother yah [Yendis speaking of himself] a turn Rasta you know, my father say, “Hey, hey, hey. See the boy a turn a damn fool man?” A him friend him a talk to, you know. “See the boy a turn a damn fool man? Look at the boy” [he said]. Him friend say to him, “Whey do the boy? [i.e. what is the boy doing wrong?]” My father said, “You no see? You no see him? Look upon him head.” The man say to him say, “Tell me something Brother D. Him a do something wrong? Tell me what him a do. Him a walk round and make trouble? People a complain to you?” [My father said] “No, no, no, no. But him no Rasta?” The man say to him say, “Well, alright, him a your son you know. And if what him doing is not committing any problem, allow him now man.” And from that my old man is a changed old man, you know. Yeah man. My old man [is a] change[d] man (1998).

Brother Yendis’s father’s ridicule illustrates the what so many of the Rastafari were asking of themselves and society. “If we are doing no wrong, but simply following our beliefs, why are we being mistreated?” It took a trusted friend of Yendis’s father to make the point stick: as long as Yendis does not cause problems, let him be; he is your offspring.

Ras Brenton reflected on some of the conflicts he faced. On one side, he felt he had disappointed his mother by not becoming her “Christian son” (he felt no remorse though),

and, on the other, he had to deal with a public who abused him because of his identity and faith. He defensively reacted by “burning them with fire”:

...[I] get a lot of bad names being a Rasta, but my mother never curse me. My mother tell me say she know I was going to be her Christian son. And a me same...she a look upon, like her Christian son [he was the one of all the siblings who really stuck by her], and me never even know ‘till when me turn big man and put on my dread locks. She a look upon me and a say to me say, “Boy, me know you was going be my Christian son, you know, but you no know, it is just life all over.” [But] She no fight me down, and me daddy no fight me down either. A just old nayga [nigger, literally] a fight me down, and me have to fight them forward. You no see it? Me no stop burn them with fire, and ease them off a me....Because me realize say me come with the God power, and is it me a defend, and me no make the heathen turn me back [from his move toward Rastafari] (1998).

Like Brother Bongo, Ras Brenton did not alienate himself from his family, although I got the sense that his mother was disappointed that he did become her “Christian son.” Those who did berate and abuse him were legion though. Much of it had a political orientation, although some came from competing religionists who could not fathom how someone could hold a Black man, Haile Selassie, I, to be the Messiah. It appears that Ras Brenton’s defensive maneuvers are mortification and boundary drawing mechanisms. Nonetheless, Ras Brenton trusts that his faith gives him power that he can use against his persecutors, and he uses it as he grows more committed to the identity.

The identity transformation does not always alienate kin and peers. Sometimes factors such as age at conversion, degree of independence, and the personality of the convert make it less likely that it will alienate family and friends. Brother Bongo’s mother could not afford to become estranged from her son even if she disagreed with his identity transformation: “Me is the only Rasta, but my brother does not fight the faith....When they saw me as Rasta, my mother was not in a position to fight the faith. I was on my own, and I was helping her at the same time. She was in England for a good while and when she came back, she saw me and my brother. I am Rasta and my brother was not. We had no cause to fight” (1998). Had Brother Bongo been dependent or his mother more religious (she was marginally involved with the Pocomanians) there might have been more trouble.

STAGE FOUR: POST CONVERSION; COMMITMENT & INTERNALIZATION

At some point, the person feels sufficiently comfortable enough with him or herself

and the new group references that we can say a new identity equilibrium has been reached. The new identity is now a normal part of one's identity repertoire and there is now a need or requirement to participate in the new reference group. This ensures the maintenance and survival of the group. However, the Rastafari have no enforced participation requirements, and this may help explain why it was thought the group would be a short-lived millenarian-messianic cult. What has been overlooked are the personal commitments the authentic Rastafari have to principles, religion, and Blackness. It is their personal commitment to make sacrifices on behalf of the group (threats of violence, ostracization, marginalization, forgoing pursuit of wealth) and to invest in it by taking on the identity, learning the traditions, and participating in the groups ceremonies and rituals. It is expected by the Rastafari by each participant in the group, but there is no leader or committee to oversee this. This is a part of the "free" ideology of the Rastafari. Each person is free to do as he/she pleases within the bounds of the group's moral and ethical norms; each person is responsible for his/her own participation in group maintenance.

While all of the interviewees reached the Internalization stage and moved on to long-term commitment to the group, some never reach this point. They may lose interest, change their minds, or remain indecisive, never reaching the Internalization stage. For those moving into identity equilibrium, there are still possible sources of tension and anxiety.

Identity Equilibrium and Re-drawing Psychic and Social Boundaries

During Internalization, new psychic and social boundaries are being more clearly drawn and observed than during Immersion and Emersion, but the convert is less likely to be defensive or aggressive in the identity (unless the identity calls for such behavior). The identity is positively asserted as one's normal self. This new self, with its religious and racial construction, exudes moral superiority. It is a way toward making mortification less problematic (tension-wise) and more meaningful. The elder Rastafarians used Ethiopianist, anti-Christian, anti-state, anti-elite, and racial constructions to erect their psychic and social boundaries.

An important boundary distinction involves distinguishing how the Rastafari are different from—or "higher" than—Christians. This is essential because there is substantial overlap between the two groups. Both use the Holy Bible as a consecrated text, but read and

interpret it differently. Both recognize Jesus Christ as a divine figure, but place different emphasis on his contemporary import. Brother Yendis points out that “His Majesty reveals himself to us in the form of Christ, and because of that, Christians take offence...but you must know the kind of Christian you are. A Christian is supposed to be a true follower of Christ, and if I and I say His Imperial Majesty has revealed himself to us in the person of Christ, then I and I must say that he is the man. We have no objection [with the Christians]....” (1998). But the Rastafari do have objections; theirs are just not as widely known as those the Christians have with them. The objections of the Christians are more easily heard, and because of the time-honored status of Christianity, their beliefs carry a normative weight that the Rastafari critiques cannot.

The Rastafari sometimes ridicule the Christians because they are waiting for God to return by appearing in the sky, whereas for them he has already returned, to mingle in human form among humankind. This belief is consistent with older beliefs held by African slaves of the early 1700s who had not lost their native religious beliefs (Turner, 1982). They found it incredulous that their captors and missionaries believed in a God who lived in a remote realm to which people would go after death, or worse, to hell. Hell was an especially difficult concept for them to grasp because they could not imagine an existence worse than slavery. Although a direct connection cannot be made between the beliefs of these early African slaves and the Rastafari, the beliefs are strikingly similar to the point that the Rastafari call Jamaica and Babylon hell and look to Ethiopia as Zion. However, these beliefs are fully congruent with Ethiopianism.

What the Christians are most emphatically damned for is their failure to walk the path of righteousness, especially in terms of the “truths” we have discussed. For the Rastafari, the Christian mission is no longer about justice, Black redemption, and the remembrance of slavery and the battle against mental slavery—only the Rastafarians are carrying forward the crusade:

When one says Christianity, we have to differentiate in this time because you see a Christian out there and his actions are that of a barbarian and he claims that he is Christian. He may say he is a Roman Catholic, he is a Baptist, he is a Pentecostal, but his behavior is Satan. So you cannot prove him to be a Christian, and you know Christianity is righteous living. So His Majesty seeing that we are righteous people, because all Ethiopians [Blacks] are righteous people originally. We only break away through captivity and through slavery and learn the ways of alien nations and

become aliens, and some of us lust and get lost along the way (Brother Bongo, 1998). Thus, Babylon, the Rastafarian conception of a modern re-incarnation of an ancient system of injustice and wickedness, includes the Christians. Black people, in the Rastafarian view, were originally a righteous people, but lost their innocence and purity as a result of ancient sins and through the tribulations they have since experienced, especially slavery and the class system raised on its foundation. Rastafari is a collective effort to reclaim that innocence and purity, a racialized moral vision of society. This separates them from the “barbarians,” rendering a sense of superiority: They are mentally emancipated. Emancipation from mental slavery means to cast away the shroud that deracinates Black people, to step away from and criticize the political and economic institutions that pit Blacks against each other and that decrease their longevity. It also means not being driven by material desires to accumulate or to lust.

Sacrifice & Investment: Self-Compulsion, Identity, and Group Participation

It was believed (and by some, hoped) that the Rastafarians would slowly disappear as modern society would relegate them to history’s dustbin. They had no direct recruitment mechanisms, wanted to leave the land they were born into for Africa, were mis-treated by society, and tended to be poor. Certainly their identity and ideology would be unappealing to younger generations, it was reasoned. Instead, the movement has continued to grow, although competing interests in a mobile, capitalist society are a source of danger to the group’s ideology, especially repatriation. But the first and second generation Rastafari remain a vibrant group organized around the core principles that have sustained them for the past fifty or so years.

What keeps the Rastafari movement alive is each person’s commitment to his/her vision of truth, justice, righteousness, and God. They make sacrifices and investments in this way, and this has kept the group vibrant. There are no prescriptions on how much time a person has to give to the movement, nor how much money must be tithed. This is consistent with their ideology of freedom and liberation; no one has rights and authority over another. Each must be responsible for him or herself in the service of truth, justice, and righteousness. In this way, they are almost anarchists, except for their submission to God (Haile Selassie, I, Jah Rastafari) and their desire for a theocratic state founded on the same

principles. That a movement defying central authority and rules is able to sustain itself must depend upon a tradition of commitment to a given set of beliefs so strong that individuals take it upon themselves to carry the banner of their beliefs. This does not mean that interaction and social networks are not the vital components that ensure that traditions and ceremonies are kept alive. It does mean the individuals must hold themselves responsible for participating in the life of the larger group. This self-compulsion is sometimes expressed as a mission.

Rasta Ivey is a model of commitment. From the late 1920s, she has seen herself as being on a mission, one that coincided with the work of other people, including non-Rastafarians and groups such as the Salvation Army. When asked about her early experiences with Marcus Garvey, she said she talked to him but did not work directly with him and the UNIA. Yet she felt they were on the same path; thus, she feels she worked with him:

I work with him [Garvey] because I am on the mission [of Rastafari, truth, justice, righteousness, Blackness].... I work with him because I have his mission. When he talked about Convention, he meant Coronation. We did not have the understanding, even myself at that time, but now I have the understanding....It is not convention, it was coronation he was talking about and [he] gathered the people.... Everybody was coming together. United. Red, black and green saying, "United we stand, divided we fall." When I put this together, I say this man is right. Even a man was pleading [Black Unity] in Mr. Bedward's days named Bishop Brown, telling about the Kingdom [to come], but you know when I prove that he was right, Leonard Howell bring him [forward as further support] (1998).

Rasta Ivey's mission overlapped with that of other Black and religious activists of the time. She interpreted Garvey's convention to be the equivalent to coronation because both would bring people together in the move toward a new Black kingdom. Her commitment and curiosity took her throughout the various groups pursuing their own versions of blackness, truth, and righteousness. But it was Rastafari that she settled on.

STAGE FIVE: COMMITMENT & ONGOING GROUP ATTACHMENT

In the Nigrescence model there is little difference between the Internalization phase (stage 4) and stage 5, Internalization-Commitment, outside of the issue of long-term commitment to the new identity. Analysis of the data, and the literature on religious conversion and group and movement participation, however, suggested that more emphasis

needed to be given to the mechanisms that support ongoing attachment of the group. Personal commitment is a decisive factor in the vitality and continued existence of the group. As a result, I have added factors that address commitment issues. Stigmatization, building and maintaining community, and competing interests are concerns relevant to the maintenance of the personal and group identity of the early and later generations of Rastafari. As emphasized, to manifest ongoing commitment to Rastafari does not mean that there will be no further challenges to a person's identity. If the person maintains the new identity, it is possible that he/she can recycle through phases of the experience as new challenges arise over the life course.

To experience a revelation or series of revelations that lead a person to reformulate his/her identity and to identify with a new group and its referents cannot alone ensure the survival of the group nor a person's commitment to it. There are many challenges, especially in mobile, pluralistic, technology-driven capitalist societies. The new identity must continue to remain internalized and there are many ways this can occur. Principal factors include ongoing mortification, a (self) compulsion to participate in the new reference group, especially its rituals and ceremonies. The larger society can assist in fostering group commitment by reinforcing personal and group identity by persecuting and marginalizing the group.

The elder Rastafari see "putting on one's covenant," or growing dreadlocks, as a sign of commitment—that a person is willing to bear the cross of Rastafari. This was especially significant prior to the 1970s, because it meant people were willing to endure the ostracization and marginalization of being a Rastafarian by publicly identifying themselves. Although authentic Rastafarians still view growing locks as a sign of commitment to the faith, the popularity of growing locks among non-Rastafarians raises contentious issues within the movement. Some see the popularity of growing dreadlocks as a vindication and legitimization of their beliefs. They point out that Babylonians want to emulate them but are too corrupt and weak of heart to take the moral and Ethiopianist stance required by Rastafari. Other Rastafarians see secular non-Rastafarian locks-wearers as disrespectful cultural thieves who profane their faith by popularizing and trivializing something that many have suffered, even died, to express.

Somewhere in-between the authentic Rastafari and locks-wearing non-Rastafari are

the nominal adherents whose attachment to the faith is marginal. In Jamaica, many of the latter people are public figures like public personalities and musicians. Hence, it is widely reported when these members announce they are no longer Rastafarians. Little to no effort is made to place their identity conversion into a larger context.

Since the mid-to-late 1970s, a growing number of people took on Rastafari faith, or so it seemed. It was a combination of Prime Minister Manley's 1972 and 1976 election campaigns, the growth in the popularity of reggae music, especially that associated with Rastafarian musician Bob Marley, and the achievements of the Black Power Movements in America and Jamaica that helped make Rastafari an identity appealing to a wider segment of Jamaica's populace. But for many folks it was the music and lifestyle that appealed to them more so than a genuine Encounter or a lasting desire to engage the Black moral economy and the ideas, attitudes, and responsibilities attendant to it. Thus, it is unsurprising that many renounce Rastafari later in their lives. Thus, the seventies are an important watershed for many reasons, including changes in the composition of the movement and the reasons that brought people into it.⁴ While Nigrescence Theory encompasses the potentiality that a person will not Internalize the new identity, and insinuates the possibility that commitment to the identity might later be jettisoned, I have explicitly sought to address commitment issues within the Nigrescence and religious conversion framework.

“No Cross, No Crown”: Sacrifice, Ostracization, Persecution, and Commitment

Ostracization and persecution can have the paradoxical effect of strengthening group and personal identity. The Rastafari are a prime example. Being singled out for ridicule, scorn, and verbal and physical violence strengthened the commitment of the elders when they were still “new” to the faith. Even some who became Rastafari can remember when they too held the Rastafari in contempt: “One of the things about coming up in those days as a youth [during the 1940s], I used to see Rasta as something to scorn....They were barefooted, they wore a piece of pants, no shirt, onion bag, and so on tie round them, going about their business. Sometime they identify [themselves as Rastafari] and sometimes they don't...but I know them is Rasta still” (Brother Yendis, 1998). These Rastafari were mainly the dreadlocks who had taken the path of asceticism and unyielding renunciation of Babylon, although some were combsomes [those who did not grow dreadlocks] as Brother

Yendis mentions identification as a concern. The Rastafari of that time who did not wear dreadlocks identified themselves by wearing red, gold, and green insignia.

The elder Rastafari see adversities related to their identity and beliefs as tests of their faith, an indication that they are a chosen and special people. It is a part of the sacrifice and investment into group. Rasta Ivey recalls how she suffered great brutality during the thirties for her belief: “Yes man. Them [police, Bustamante supporters, citizens] beat me up....Beat [me] up, [I got] kick[ed] up....[many times] Rasta man gone to jail, get lick down and all those things” (1998). But such challenges were insufficient to stop her from pursuing her beliefs and maintaining her identity. She has a reputation for standing up for what she believes in: “...they say I am a fighter. Whether I am a fighter or not, they say I am a fighter. They know I can fight” (Rasta Ivey, 1998). In the sixties, Rasta Ivey was sent to the asylum for her beliefs, this time because she got into an argument with a parson over repatriation. The police were called to quiet her. She ended up briefly confined to the asylum, just as some of her forerunners, Bedward and Howell, because of their commitment to their beliefs.

Like the Jews of the Old Testament, and Christ and his first followers, the first and second generation Rastafari expected—almost treasured—trials and tribulations that proved their identity and faith. However, it is in retrospect that such sentiments are expressed; to suffer a forced shaving or beating is a humiliating and possibly life-threatening experience that no one appreciates when it happens.

Brother Yendis believes that it is not simply the first Rastafarians that the authorities were seeking to suppress; it was their doctrine. He is correct that the colonial authorities saw them as a threat because of their anti-colonial, anti-state overtures (Chapter Four). But Yendis’s explanation has a fundamentally religious tone:

Is something plan....[from] 1937...everything [was done] to get rid of Howell. And is not Howell them want to get rid of either. [It] Is the doctrine because when we say Rastafari is God, it makes a difference to the world, and if we is a people who criticize...[the Christian’s] God and find our God, what people want to vex [get upset with] with we for, why people don’t understand say well, “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and all things shall be added?” So we no say people vex with we only because we a Rasta. No man, [are] we no[t] human being[s]? We are God fearing, we are honest, and we love we neighbor (1998).

Brother Yendis’s comments offer a glimpse into what the Rastafari of the thirties and forties were thinking about their faith and the reactions to it. Their claim that the Messiah

had returned as a Black King had serious repercussions for a society that had nourished both powerful institutional and cultural forces that simultaneously deracinated Black people *and* fed Ethiopianism and a Black moral economy. This made the drawing of psychic and social boundaries for the early Rastafari more important because they saw themselves as trying to live righteously while being persecuted for it. And again, the Christians are implicated in the persecution of the early Rastafari's search for truth and pursuit of the "kingdom of God," even though they too claim to be awaiting the return of Christ. But persecution of the Rastafari tested their commitment to the faith and identity.

Brother Bongo, who received a prison sentence for ganja possession resultant from a raid on the tenement yard where he lived, felt that his misfortune taught him new things and strengthened his identity and commitment:

Everyone meets there. The good, the bad, and the ugly is right in the prison. It was a test, and all during those times, I had my gold medal [given to him by Haile Selassie, I, in 1966] there with me in the prison. It was in [the] safekeeping of the warden. When I was leaving the prison, I did one year flat. I did not lose one hour remission because Jah was with me, and I was well respected on account of my principle, and I was a tradesman and a man of Jah, and anywhere you say Jah Rastafari every man has to look on you officially, especially in trouble. So, I leave prison and come out, and I develop a stronger vibes in Rastafari. I went on, and I find myself visiting the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

He also remembers the contempt sometimes thrown on the Rastafarians of the 1940s, 50s, and into the 60s:

You would be passing and sometimes you just have a fresh bath and come out and people going on the street and you passing and them say "Move dutty [dirty] Rasta boy." But that time you have man who resent your doctrine and is ignorant, and go on with even physical accusation and assault; he would want to assault you. You have to be wise and walk him out. You have to be clever especially in the city. Being a member of the community, [I] man know man from youth come up. Even to then, still they say, "Boy, him different and stuff," but them do not too press them luck. Sometimes you have to get dirty with them. Show them that you are a man (1998).

Drawing on analogies to life and crucifixion of Christ, the first and second generation Rastafari equate their identity and beliefs with bearing a cross. While this comparison calls forth an idea of burden, it is a burden they are prepared to bear:

Well, you have people who will fight [you]. The scriptures forewarn us that when you take up the cross and start to follow Christ, we have to prepare for people to say all manner of evil against you. You must. That is a must. No cross, no crown. You have to bear a cross. [People will say]...watch how the good boy start to a mash up

himself and all them kinds of things. All kinds of [deprecative] remarks are being passed (Brother Woks, 1998).

Expecting ostracization and persecution, they proudly carry their burden, even though some people see the move toward Rastafari as one of self-destruction and madness. Therefore, there must be something in the way of personal satisfaction and or reward to console the person during contentious times. First, expectations prepare the person for difficulty; second, they see themselves as special; and, third, they see bearing their cross bringing them a crown. The crown is a reward reserved for the faithful and elect; it is not for ordinary people. This abstract reward helps the person maintain conviction and commitment.

A considerable amount of the persecution of Rastafari was political at root. The right and the conservative outlook associated with Bustamante and the Jamaican Labour Party had no concern for the Rastafari. The emergence of reactionaries opposed to Black nationalism and the People's National Party's left-oriented platform after the 1938 Labor Rebellion coincided with a crackdown on the Rastafari. The left platform promising land reform and other programs appealed to the land-loving Rastafari. Eventually the left would offer the olive branch of integration: "Michael Manley say that before him left here...[that people should not] fight down the Rasta too much. [Manley said] Them should bring him [the Rastafarian] in a society too if him want come in. But most of them [politicians, their henchmen, and people associated with the opposition] want fight we out" (Ras Brenton, 1998).

Ultimately, the elder Rastafari now see themselves facing a contradiction—currently that of being stigmatized and appealing—which can be resolved only through the ending of the present system, as suggested by Brother Yendis: "If we don't change the system, we will forever tell the world that we are a set of no-good people, a menace to society, and all we do is smoke ganja, we no have no use. But anytime the tourist come, a we them a ask 'bout" (1998). The Rastafari remain outcasts as far as official government and church relationships are concerned. They have yet to be recognized as an official religion (which some of them have petitioned for) and even less probable is the possibility that the state will consent to decriminalizing marijuana as a group sacrament for ritual use. But the popularity brought to the group by reggae music, Bob Marley, and other performers, has made them a commodity that brings revenue to the island. Tourists buy Rastafarian art and crafts, come to smoke and

export marijuana, and, not infrequently, want to visit Rastafari communities. A striking example is the emergence of a cottage industry called “Rent-a-Dread,” mostly men, who cater to the desires of White female tourists seeking excitement and exotic romance (Pruitt & LaFont, 1995). Popularity, though, threatens the vitality and survival of the movement by commoditizing it and attracting nominal participants who will not attempt to develop long-term commitment to the group and identity by investing and sacrificing. Still, even with their newfound popularity, the authentic Rastafari remain at odds with the state and church, despite numerous efforts at dialogue and negotiation. This contestation maintains the us-them boundaries instrumental to group identification.

Identity, Communion, and Community

Ongoing group attachment is facilitated by continued interaction, especially participation in rituals, ceremonies, and other activities that create a feeling of being a part of a moral community. By moral community, I mean a sense of collective responsibility and shared identity, values, symbols, and purposes that bind people together in a way that makes them feel connected. This sense of connection enhances group solidarity. For the Rastafari, this is especially important since they have no enforced investment and commitment mechanisms. Communion refers to that sense of community that enkindles feelings of belonging to a larger whole, based in fellowship, brother and sisterhood, equality, reciprocity and sharing, group consciousness, and shared experience. It is a reward because it provides emotional satisfaction.

Rituals bind Rastafarian generations and insure the transmission of traditions. Two important ones are “licking the chalice” (smoking marijuana through a ceremonial water pipe) and reasoning, which occur formally and informally (as a ritual rather than an ordinary activity). To “lick chalice” means to smoke ganja as a means of consciousness-raising, and this is nearly synonymous with reasoning or meditation. Reasoning is an indigenous form of dialectical analysis and debate carried out in a group format, while meditation, a type of analysis and reflection, can be accomplished alone.

Rastafarians remain linked as a group through their belief in the divinity of Haile Selassie, I, their remembrance of slavery, their love of Africa, their Ethiopianist (Black) perspective, a continuing desire to repatriate, and their critiques of oppression. They come

together to worship Haile Selassie, I, on important days—April 21-23 (anniversary of Selassie, I's, visit to Jamaica), November 2 (Selassie, I's, coronation anniversary), May 5 (Ethiopian Liberation Day), May 25 (African Liberation Day), and so on. In addition to these ceremonies, the Nyabinghi is still regularly held for other reasons, and it is still not uncommon to hear cries of "death to all downpressors!" although it seems the youth use this phrase very little.

Repatriation and Black redemption remain of primary significance to the identity of the first and second generation Rastafari. In his mid-seventies at the time, Ras Mas proclaimed, "I not going to feel good till I go home. But I going [to] reach home. You see, I trod the way that the Honorable Marcus Garvey trod and the Honorable Marcus Garvey tradition is repatriation. That's why he went as far as to deal with the Black Star Liner ships" (Ras Mas, 1998).

Those who are most adamant about returning are those who are least able, either because they are too poor or in bad health. This has caused observers to speculate that Rastafarians see repatriation as a symbolic cover for a desire to escape material privation. All of the interviewees understand the troubles and poverty that plague Africa, even though they still think of it as Zion. They know life will not be easy there, but they cannot imagine it being worse than Jamaica. Still, repatriation is an idea that brings them together in spirit and as an organic group and movement. Repatriation is a sign that evokes and ties together memories and present concerns. The memories are of enslavement, of colonial and White hegemony and repression, and of Africa of pre-colonial times. The present concerns are of contemporary oppression and racial and class discrimination. Both provide them with reasons for why Black people should work in solidarity and relative independence, maintaining connections between the past and present as the elder Rastafari have tried:

...from the slaves come from Africa they been pondering to go back to Africa, and I come and learn that. I come and learn that the slaves did always want to go back. Some of them jumped overboard say them would try and go back and them never reach back. Them reach forward....Well I come up as a young Rasta and say the same thing. Say it is right for Black people to go back to them continent because the White people treat us too badly, and because of this, they influence everyone else to treat us badly. Because me is a man who come to the conclusion say including Black man, Indian man, Chinese man, every nation organize against the Black man eventually to keep him degraded, to keep us down, to keep us behind because they say we strong and we can take it in the sun more than them and they want us to stay in the sun and

labor for them and make them big and rich... yet they don't want to help us in return. So we must want go home forward where we can go build we own tabernacle, and build we own people and build we own selves instead of building other people everywhere. Because I man come to the conclusion say Black man build everywhere...and yet still when them [other nations are] to help him build up now, them a murmur and a quarrel, and no want do it. Them want money. And if you no have no money to give them, them no want do it. And sometimes you a give them the money, and them no want do it likewise (Ras Brenton, 1998).

Another relatively novel way the Rastafari are building and maintaining ongoing group commitment is through organizing themselves into units larger than the local "houses and mansions." The purposes of local organizations are many, but the chief concerns are to build greater solidarity, and to promote and protect their interests through a larger umbrella structure. Several key Rastafari interests are repatriation, legalization of Cannabis, recognition as a legitimate religion, and protection from police brutality.

Although the violence directed toward Rastafarians because of their beliefs has dwindled, it has not ended. One leader of an umbrella organization had this to say about the threat of violence and their organizations' perspective:

We...[will not] have that [police brutality and other types of discrimination].... Make something develop and the man them start disrespect Rasta and a do [all manner of] things [to them]. Any part of Jamaica you live [and] you a Rasta ...[whether] in country or in a the town, any part you live [and] you a Rasta... man a bruck [break] you skin same way you know (Brother Yendis, 1998).

Brother Yendis's statement shows that the threat of persecution because of belief in Rastafari remains a potential source of group solidarity; no matter where a Rastafarian is he/she faces the same kinds of troubles. By always being faced with the threat of violence, there is more willingness to band together when needed, to help protect each other. Also, it maintains that sense of being a "special" people that the Rastafari consider themselves to be.

"All a We a Rasta First": The Identity Provides a Sense of Community and Reward

To become a part of a new group and remain attached to it implies that it offers some reward or benefit to the person. For the elder Rastafarians, many significant rewards are psychological and abstract. A primary satisfaction involves the feeling of being a "special" or "chosen" group, of being morally superior, of being part of a Black spiritual vanguard whose purpose is to set an example for others to follow:

I and I the Rasses have to stand up for the teaching of His Majesty, and I and I have to...[demonstrate] discipline to the nation, set example, be a model for the [future] generations to come in righteousness. [We stand for] Clean principles. You have some brethren going around burning [damning, denouncing] God, burning Bible, burning this, and burning that. In a sense, [these] Rasta [s] come as a revolutionist [sic], wordically, and burn down all things that are not right in the sight of God. Now some of the youth say that they burn Caesar, in the true context, the churches preach Jesus, and it is the said churches that crucify the said Jesus....They say they are Christians this day...but those who were with Jesus at that time [of crucifixion], those are the ones with His Majesty in this [time].... (Brother Woks, 1998).

The personal satisfaction that comes with being part of a chosen people also comes with a great responsibility, a fortifying commitment, and a sense of investment, increasing the perceived magnitude of the reward. Brother Woks again shows how boundaries are created through critiquing the Christians. He implicitly acknowledges their affinities by making reference to a shared link to the distant past: The Rastafari and Selassie, I, are the same as Christ and his supporters.

As Brother Woks describes being a Rastafarian as bearing a cross in order to receive a crown (a reward), Ras Brenton corroborates his points:

So we still have Jesus Christ in Ethiopia, but we have him as the Black one, we do not have him as the blue-eyed one. He also said that he alone would not bear the cross. We will also have to bear it too. Every one of us will have to bear our cross. Rasta man says he has a cross to bear and a Jah to glorify. So, we go on glorifying Jah and go on bearing our cross. And we see Jah work out things actually for us because we are working with him. He says we must put him in remembrance and he will never leave us nor forsake us. So we have to keep him in remembrance. He makes things work out. Rocky though things may be (Ras Brenton, 1998).

Trials and tribulations are a part of the “cross” Rastafarians bear, but Ras Brenton makes the sacrifice and investment seem small while the reward is immense.

Another form of communion, community, and reward operate through a type of fictive kinship where all Rastafari are bound together through the father figure, Haile Selassie, I. There is a view that one can only know if one is a Rastafari through his or her works; “looking” like Rastafari and wearing Rastafari insignia is not sufficient to identify oneself as a committed Rastafarian. Thus, it takes time to know this. So, being seen as a part of the group does not come automatically and, hence, is a reward.

All a we is Rasta first. We have to say, His Majesty is the Almighty God and him is your father, then I and I supposed to be his son, and if I and I is his son, then me and you must be brothers. No? So it go. [If] Me father have two pickney, the two of

us must be brothers or sister. One girl and boy of the same father. Me no want get into this little backwardness of division into different types].... From you say Rastafari, I and I respect you. Sometime, we respect one what we no know of, you know. But because of the divinity of the love for Rastafari, we give that [him or her] respect. Some man what we know out there, we shouldn't a call him Rastafari you know, but as we a say, we don't know the ways of the I, but because of the divinity of the love for Rastafari, so it go.... Them have some thief and batty [bottom] man out there man. [They] Want [to] kill off people and murder. But since we cannot judge no man, he will be known by his works.... So anything a man a do in a the darkness, must come to light (Brother Yendis, 1998).

The faith the Rastafari themselves have in the power of their identity and beliefs reinforces their commitment, strengthening their conviction that they have made the right identity choice. This too is a type of reward. The person becomes testimony to the power of the identity and ideology:

Watch here, me get gun shot to me ass man. Me go in a train crash man. Is only the name Rastafari save me life. On both occasions when I reach death...is the name Rastafari I call upon. [Remember] The time of the gun shot when I tell you...[well] the whole I did not even tell you... [I] say the whole world go dark. It is only the name Rastafari bring back life to me eyes. And when I find me head a go [throb]... me...go in there [his head] and shake it out back. Is Rastafari I say you know...a brother say, "Mas, a word sound save you life, you know." A bear [pure] Rastafari I chant and I never stop because I know He is who have brought I through the gates of death many, many a time (Ras Mas, 1998).

For Ras Mas an immeasurable reward for holding faith in his identity and beliefs has been his passages "through the gates of death" without getting caught. By calling out the name of the Messiah, he has been able to access supernatural forces that protect and empower him.

Other rewards of group membership include a sense of their contribution to the fulfilment of prophecies, their capacity to see and interpret the prophecies as they were unfolding in the 1920s, 30s, and, 40s, up through the present. Then there is the self-satisfaction that comes with believing one is a part of a vanguard. Some of the reward, as with social and psychic demarcation, involve the sense of superiority in their vision and capacity to be a prophet:

Everything have to come to an end you know, me brethren. Because we here and preach[ed] "Free Mandela" and free South Africa...and then we see all them things happen....[But] Now you see a youth as a Black man say that ...[these things we prophesy] can't happen....[But it then] Come[s] to pass....Me know history man. Me know a prophecy. A man say, boy, look like the words a come to naught because nothing no happen...[because there is] still apartheid. That is why we...sing 'bout

Botha. About three or four years ago....Man just go to Mandela [and take him] out a prison and White man have to go a prison go [and] take him out and say [to Mandela], "Come, a your country, take it." You have 500,000 White people and we have 6 million Black people [who] can't get up on them feet. Yes, man. Mandela, the first Black President straight from the prison to the Presidency. Power to Black people all over the world and them not even take that as a sign and understand [its great significance]. [Now is] The first time a Black man is head of [the] United Nations. Secretary General of United Nations is a Black man, you know. Now, days gone by, that sound impossible....When me was a youth, me used to see White governor....White police officer; White, you know.... And them time there, anywhere Black policeman see him [White] officer, anywhere him see him, he have to salute him and me see them things wiped away....Black man a run the regiment, Black man a run the police force. Black man a Prime Minister. Black man a this, Black man a that. Black man a Governor General. Black man a everything. It is these things that Rasta people call for long time before it happen (1998).

Brother Yendis is suggesting that many of the things that they have longed for and prophesied would occur have come to pass. They called for "Black man government," "Black man time," an end to colonialism and "White man rule," that Mandela would be freed and that Blacks would regain the helm of South Africa. And from Brother Yendis's point of view, their canniness has been confirmed. Their calls for these changes were often religious in nature, being chanted at Nyabinghi ceremonies, pointing to what they see as the "power of the 'Binghi." Yet, as discussed in Chapter 6, Black man rule, especially in Jamaica, has been a disappointment for them, so now they are waiting for Rastafari time to rule.

From the mid-sixties forward, Jamaican society's view of the Rastafari began to favorably change:

Yes 1966. When His Majesty come a Jamaica, and the whole [of] Jamaica come look upon him [Haile Selassie, I] and see say, yeah, a this [is the] man them a talk bout. The thing change....Rasta get respect. Things have to happen to fulfill certain things. Like showing the world say this is Rasta country. This is Rasta country. Rasta birth here you know, but Rasta not manifesting him authority...Rasta don't have no authority round here. Rasta man come from any part of the world and them stop him from go a airport...and if contact [is] not made with me and me make some noise and do certain things 'bout it, it no done there so [it is a done deal]. We want authority man. We must become a mass force to reckon with in a the world. (Brother Yendis, 1998).

While the visit of Haile Selassie, I, to Jamaica improved the status of Rastafari and the veracity of their claims on him, they still lack power and are subject to arbitrary acts of discrimination. Brother Yendis, an activist in the movement, is often called upon to address discriminatory acts committed against Rastafari. For example, arbitrarily detaining

Rastafarians at airport custom points is a common occurrence throughout the Caribbean, including Jamaica. Typical reasons given for detainment are suspicion of possession of ganja, posing threats of sedition, or being a menace to public safety.

The recognition Rastafarians give to each other is a source of communion and community and reward. During earlier times of persecution, they identified themselves by their insignia, especially those who were not dreadlocks, and they identified their camps and yards with Ethiopian and UNLA flags or colors. Since the mid-late 1960s, their popularity and recognition have slowly grown. It is not uncommon to walk the streets of Kingston or Spanish Town and hear non-Rastafarians call out “Kingman!” “Rastafari!” “Blessed!” This provides satisfaction that one has chosen the “right” identity: “So when me hear a man a call me Rastafari or a Rasta man, me feel strong, me feel good because me know say is not me go out there to tell a man say, ‘See me, me is Rastafari, you know.’ No. Man [people] say, See a Rasta man there.” (Brother Yendis, 1998).

Threats to Personal and Group Identity: The Problem of Competing Influences, Alliances, and Interests

Competing influences, alliances, and interests always pose threats to maintenance of the new identity. But avoiding these factors is not easy without a thorough separation of oneself from one’s past identity, relationships, and choices. Having to live amongst the very people and conditions and institutions that the person sought to escape can create problems. All of these are sources of additional tensions and anxieties.

Brother Bongo, having been forced to leave the Rastafarian stronghold Back-o-Wall, found himself among the very conditions that Rastafarians loathe. Tenement yards are dwellings typically densely packed with families and individuals who live under these arrangements because of poverty and a lack of subsidized housing. These “yards” are known for being chaotic and the living arrangements contribute to gossiping, arguments, and even violence.

They were going to bulldoze Back-o-Wall to build Tivoli Gardens as it is at present. So we were shoved out of Back-o-Wall again. I had to take refuge in the cemetery, Ebenezer Cemetery. That is adjoining Back-o-Wall. From then, I took up residence back to where I started against the prison wall in Charlotte Street, east, down by the seaside.... It was a room in a tenement yard. Knowing that Rasta don’t enjoy tenement yard, I could not feel comfortable. Heaps of diversion [distractions, contention] come up, and you have to find yourself sharing with the works of

Babylon. You become like an ordinary citizen again until it reach the stage where I said, this is not it still. This is not it (1998).

Brother Bongo was completely uncomfortable among the “Babylonians” who confronted him with the things he had renounced such as rum and use of foul language. He was losing the identity he had worked so hard to develop, or put differently, he was unable to follow the norms and practices required by Rastafari. He had to leave the yard to buttress his identity. His departure was hastened by an arrest and 18-month jail sentence resulting from a police raid of the yard.

Not all converts will experience competing influences as a threat to their identity. First, it depends upon the requirements of the identity and ideology. Some are undermined by competing influences while others are hardly affected. Important negotiations with self-identity involve the person’s discipline and availability to the impact of social change, and the extent to which he/she is willing to sacrifice for and invest in the movement. Some of the older Rastafari continue to have little interaction with social life outside of the movement. Still, social change, especially of the variety discussed in Chapter One, appears to have come to bear upon contemporary Rastafarian identity in ways that are negligible for the first two generations.

The Emergence of Intragroup Class Conflict. Changes in capitalist development and technology have brought additional but new pressures to the movement. Jamaica, even though a peripheral player in the world-system, still has the trappings of a mobile, pluralistic, self interest-driven society. This has affected the Rastafarians by creating fresh intra-group contradictions rooted in class conflict. The growth of the international marijuana trade and the spread of reggae music, both becoming influential after the early seventies, have spread the movement and now threaten to weaken it. Both drew people into the movement for reasons different from the those of the first two generations. The attraction of ganja usage and reggae music as a part of a person’s identity and cultural repertoire drew many toward the faith instead of committing oneself to Haile Selassie, I, Blackness, and a mission of reeducation. These are secondary to many of the third and fourth generations who identify with the movement. The elder Rastafari recognize the division:

Even you own brother [now] want fight you out because from him have a money, the first thing him no want you come where him there because him no want you...[to

intrude upon his money source], and the second thing him a keep far from you. You can hardly see him....We call them the society Rastas who live in a the pocket of society according to the big man them [and] because them live in a de pocket of society so them is like society. We [poor Rastafarians] have our own society, but them no agree with it. They hardly want come near we because dem say we too down to earth and them is up town stylee (mod like those wealthier folks who live in uptown Kingston) (Ras Brenton, 1998).

Many of the Rastafari who have gained a degree of monetary success live in middle-class areas such as the Red Hills or Beverly Hills sections of Kingston, which are not easily accessible to poor Rastafarians. These better-off Rastafarians may occasionally visit the ghettos and haunts of ordinary Rastafari, but outside of this and episodic attendance at ceremonies or interacting with small networks of Rastafari, they remain out of touch with the common Rastafari. The monied Rastafari can afford new automobiles, modern homes, technological gadgets, and international travel, but are criticized by their poor comrades because they do not share their success. This contradicts fundamental tenets of the ideology of the first and second generation Rastafari: sharing, reciprocity, egalitarianism, and selflessness.

In the past, material wealth was not an issue for reaching Africa. In fact, some people would sell all they had to leave to Africa (see Chapter 5). Beginning in the sixties, the pragmatic Rastafari, learning from the missions sent to Africa and through reasoning, agreed that they should take something to Africa, if only a skill or talent that can be applied there. Now it seems some who acquire material possessions in Babylon are reluctant to return. One elder says that "If man have big house, big car, payment, and all them things, him is not going to want to leave them for Africa" (Ras Brenton, 1998). These changes are an issue for group survival because it threatens the investment, sacrifice, renunciation, mortification, and communion necessary to maintain the group.

Still, Rastafari like Ras Brenton see material development and spiritual develop moving hand-in-hand, and that too much of one or the other is not good.

[Rastafari] Must have to develop materially and spiritually. And if a man is not spiritually mature as they say, he would not be materially mature either. It is that stage we have reached. So we have to think spiritually, materially and naturally to be practical about that which we seek....because Rasta says he is king and he wants to be like the king's [Selassie, I] son to have everything that the king would have. But that is when we go a yard [Africa]. When we have our land we are not going to have everything abroad [that so many are seeking], but some man a fight to get everything

abroad before he goes home because he says he does not want to go home poor. But I can remember that we did not come here rich neither. So if we go home poor it is not anything, because we came from where the wealth is. They brought us [to Jamaica] poor. They took all that we had when they were bringing us. So we came here with nothing, and we going home back with something. So whatever we can go with we will go with it, but some of us should start to go from now (Ras Brenton, 1998).

So one of the problems the Rastafari of the future must address is creating a balance between material and spiritual concerns.

Competing Interests in Mobile, Pluralistic, Capitalist Societies. That there are these new competing interests—mobility and material concerns in a deprived class-based society—bring a new dynamic to the movement. Third and fourth generation Rastafarians are more likely to try and keep their feet in two worlds, Babylon and Rastafari, to lose commitment to the identity and faith, or to not understand the norms and practices developed by the elders. Still, the same forces that threaten to weaken the movement have strengthened it by spreading the ideology and information about it across the globe.

Sometimes the conflicts raised by competing interests lead to abandoning some of the most fundamental tenets of the Rastafari doctrine such as trimming off one's locks. Even poor Rastafari face this conflict. Ras Brenton describes how one Rastafarian he knew "trim off him dread locks through him a struggle and him trim off through him want go back in a the goings as what him would a say, him see himself upon him [own] flag" (1998). The man was faced with continuing to struggle or trimming his locks in order to become inconspicuous among non-Rastafarians. Some jobs are completely off limits to male Rastafarians because of their locks and beards, and the perception that ganja smoking makes both men and women untrustworthy is not an uncommon notion among those unfamiliar with the Rastafari. But trimming one's locks to "partake of Babylon's fruit" is an unacceptable option for many Rastafari, so they work, gladly, outside of "Babylon's system." This strengthens their view of themselves as free. But as the pace of technological change quickens and basic human and civil rights are implemented and enforced against discrimination, more Rastafarians will find themselves working within Babylon. What mechanisms will they use to build and maintain commitment to their identity and group? Will this be the challenge that weakens the group? These challenges are only beginning to unfold.

Another set of challenges that will continue to draw out the issue of competing interests and allegiances is the increase in the number of college-educated Rastafari. Will they be able to balance their personal commitment to the identity and ideology along with the prerequisites vital to group survival: investment, sacrifice, commitment, and mortification? For them, renunciation may or may not become an impractical affair. The Rastafari have a reputation, deserved or not, for being critical of technology to the point of refusing to use it, although not all have this view. The pragmatic Rastafari see technology as a useful tool when used in the service of group goals and human well-being. Technology is a problem for them to the extent that it is used to control, oppress, spy, and destroy.

Some are coming to terms with what the challenges of an increasingly mobile, competitive society mean for the Rastafari. Ras Brenton:

We are in the technological age, and Rastas will have to deal with technology because some of them are in it right now. Like Rudy would tell me that up in New York, most of the Rasta youth going to college now, and they are going to come out to be technologists. So we have to appreciate that, we have to respect that. We love that. To see Rasta coming from Back-o-Wall, for instance, where he had to eat and drink out a burn pan, yes, and burn rubber tyres and wear rubber tyre shoes. Now he is wearing everything. He is wearing Clarks [a sporty British shoe]. He is wearing anything that he wants to wear, and you cannot fight against that because it is the age that we are living in. Okay. So we have to respect everything progressive, going forward. We cannot fight it down because it is that we actually fight for. Rastas were suffering when we get the vibes to be like Rastas, and Jah say we must go this way to find it a little easier and a little better. Little by little, it will be because we want to go to Africa, but the time has not really come yet. We have to wait on His Majesty's time, and some say that we have to make it our own time now. His Majesty sets the pace, but we must carry it through. If we do not carry it through, we are keeping back ourselves (1998).

Recognizing some of the challenges and changes facing the movement, Ras Brenton sees most of them in a positive light. He notes that in his time "we did not have so much news media contact[s], but things have changed so much so that we have more of these contacts now...." (1998). The media, as noted, has dramatically spread and made easily accessible information about the movement, but it brings new contradictions. For instance, one can "experiment" with Rastafari without needing to meet an authentic Rastafarian. Ras Brenton recognizes another change and challenge in that "There are more Rasta youth coming into the Movement now. Some of them are ignorant of the facts....[Yet] we respect that [they keeping the movement alive], and we have more conscious sistren [women]

coming up in the movement, and more conscious brethren too. They help to make things easier for us" (1998). Brother Woks also sees the changes as positive, especially the spread and growth of the movement. He says they are "Good signs because His [Selassie, I] voice shall be heard throughout all generations and His dominion is stretched from shore to shore, and simply because of that it will have to spread because righteousness will have to cover the earth as how water covers the sea. No corner of the earth shall escape his voice" (Brother Woks, 1998). Brother Woks believes that Rastafarians need to work on developing their economic base so that they can create opportunities for themselves:

If Rasta was economically viable and become strong from a longer time, set up an economic base, we could employ these people. We would have them working with us. Instead of the society having them, it would be we who have them, but simply because of this tug-o-war thing, every man is looking through different eyes and all these kind of things (1998).

Pragmatic Rastafari like Ras Brenton and Brother Woks see good and bad in change, and try to focus on the positive tendencies. The spiritualist-oriented Rastafari tend to see change as threatening, and to avoid it through criticism or withdrawal.

SUMMARY

Although not stated as such by the convert, identity conversion is a solution to the questions, tensions, and concerns of the convert-in-process. They are focused on seeking information related to the new identity and group. Immersion means that the convert-in-process puts forth the effort to learn what she or he can about the new group. In the case of the Rastafari, study of print media, especially the Bible and African and Black history, takes precedence, along with learning from thoroughly acculturated members. Gradual participation in activities associated with the new group referent begins, but the person still maintains marginality at meetings and gatherings as he or she has much to learn about the new ideology, norms, and practices. During this phase, the person may be aggressive and defensive in asserting the new identity, most likely blustering to hide his/her lack of in-depth knowledge about the new reference group.

As people move toward Emersion, they coming to grips with their identity transformation and new group referent, and may feel born anew. Yet, there are many tensions that continue to haunt the new convert. A primary one is the requirement, in many

cases, of withdrawing from ties to the old self that challenge the new identification; these are the demons of the old identity.⁵ Family and friends are likely to question the convert's decisions and might estrange themselves from the new convert. This could possibly cause pain for the convert-in-process, but it also spurs motivations to continue on the new identity path. The elder Rastafari were challenged by the wider public, as demonstrated earlier, and this too is a source of ongoing tension for the converts. To continue on their identity path they must have conviction, which often resides in the knowledge that they are a chosen and special people.

Over time, the person internalizes the new identity; it is thoroughly integrated into the full identity complex. As the "new" Rastafarian learns more, he or she comes to see the world in a new way, typically feeling morally superior to those who are not a part of the movement, especially Christians, the *petit bourgeoisie*, and enforcers of the law. The boundary between IE and Internalization is a heuristic one. Stage four marks the processes by which the person has become comfortable with the new identity and attendant networks and commitments. Because the person is now comfortable in his/her new outlook and identity, it does not mean that identity-related tensions will no longer arise. Challenges to the identity will periodically arise over the life course.

Finally, we can talk about ongoing commitment and attachment to the new group and identity. While commitment mechanisms vary depending on personal characteristics, social milieu, time period, and group needs, at minimum the person must maintain interaction with the group associated with the new identity. Participation in ritualistic activities is one of the stronger commitment-binding mechanisms. Also, the person must feel that he or she benefits from being a part of the larger group. Competing interests in high-tech, mobile societies create new challenges to group and identity commitment, but such challenges can be met through adaptive mechanisms that might even use the tools that represent a challenge to maintaining community. The Internet, for instance, has been hailed as a threat to community because it fosters isolation. However, it can be a venue of communication and dissemination of information as some Rastafari are learning. While this may be of little use to the elder Rastafari, it may provide a means for maintaining community for later generations.

Stage five is the point at which the person's total identity complex is not only re-

integrated, but the self and group are now thought of in relation to forces greater than the self and the group. The person gives him or herself over to abstract principles: righteousness, justice, tradition, humanity, and a sense of history and mystery (Kanter, 1972: 113-123). Where religion is involved, appeal to supernatural forces is used to explain and rationalize personal decisions and inexplicable occurrences. A new identity equilibrium has been reached, and only life turning points and another Encounter can shake up what is now a new paradigm.

ENDNOTES

1. The author and publication information are unknown.
2. Rastafarians use 'man' instead of 'men,' even if it occurs within a word. The plural of 'Man' is 'Man and Man.' 'Man' is seen as positive, while 'men' is thought of in negative terms. Sometimes it is associated with homosexuality. For example, when Rastafarians want to insult or criticize Michael Manley and the PNP they will say 'Michael 'Menley,' emasculating him. Rastafarians do not use men in reference to themselves.
3. I must note that this is a very unpopular opinion among the Nyabinghis and to publicly claim this is almost sure to create a stir.
4. For instance, Tommy Cowans, a radio personality, and Judy Mowatt, one of the I-Threes of Bob Marley and the Wailers, who were known as Rastafarians, created a stir when they announced they had converted to Christianity (get newspaper cites). The local papers crowed that they were a declaration of the superiority of Christianity and the inauthenticity of Rastafari as a religion. Debates of the issue by Rastafarians had an entirely different cast. Most saw a positive element in the public challenge of their faith. One elder summed up their general opinion when he said: "The wolves have exposed themselves." This was a recognition of the mass popularity the cultural and ideological elements of the movement had acquired in the face of the rejection of two core organizing elements of the faith and identity: Belief in a Black God and redeemer and Ethiopianism. Thus the inauthentic Rastafarian is one whose primary allegiances are cultural and musical and not religious and racial. The renouncing of Rastafari by such people indicates to the authentic Rastafarians that their ranks are slowly being reduced to the faithful (although popularity of wearing locks continues to grow).
5. I thank William Cross for helping me better understand this aspect of Nigrescence.

CHAPTER 8

RESULTS, DISCUSSION, AND CONCLUSION: THEORY, IDENTITY, NIGRESCENCE, CONVERSION, AND RASTAFARI

Unlike all orders of religion, the culture of Rastafari was not handed down from father to son as the people of Christendom. We who have perused the volumes of history knew that in this 20th Century a king would arise out of Jesse's root, who should be a God (Almighty) for this people and a *liberator to all the oppressed of the Earth*. We the Rastafarians who are the true prophets of this age, the reincarnated Moseses, Joshuas, Isaiahs, Jeremiahs, who are the battle-axes and weapons of war (a Jihad, or Holy War); *we are those who are destined to free not only the scattered Ethiopians (Black men) but all people, animals, herbs and all life forms*" (Rastafarian leader Sam Brown, "Treatise on the Rastafarian Movement," 1966; emphasis added).¹

A driving force that precedes people coming into the Rastafarian faith and movement is an engagement with big and existential questions about life, morality, and the oppression that Black people face. This is couched in language about truth, Blackness, justice, righteousness, and redemption. This pursuit of self-affirmation and community is typically preceded by an Encounter. That is, something happens to capsize a person's current understanding of the world, pushing them to find a satisfying Black-oriented world view and identity. In Jamaica, the Encounter can take the form of dreams, visions, insights, and real-world experiences. For first and second generation Rastafarians, socialization into the movement typically begins by seeking information about the group and hanging on the fringe of street meetings and ceremonies to watch and learn. However, some individuals are inherently intellectual and curious, and their observations and analyses lead them to contemplate difficult questions about society. Rastafari has been appealing to some of those Black Jamaicans with a curious disposition and a religious orientation.

Because Rastafarians as a group are less than 75 years old and constitute a small percentage of the Jamaican population, few people are raised in the faith from childhood, although the number appears to be increasing. Becoming a Rastafarian is characteristically a conversion process. However, it is not *only* religious conversion, it is also a racial one, a transition from low to high salience on Blackness. This process, even with its religious

dimensions, is satisfactorily explained by the revised model of Nigrescence (Cross, Jr., 1995), as it details the route through which a person comes to manifest a strong Black orientation. Nigrescence models show what is involved in the move from racial indifference (or self-hate) to racial recognition, self-love, and cultural self-affirmation. The life histories I collected validate the model, although there are some points of contention raised by the data, two main ones being a middle class bias and the issue of historicity: What are the class-based factors in “becoming Black?” Can we really know whether Nigrescence works the same in the distant past as the present?

Nonetheless, because religiosity is a all-important aspect of Rastafarian identity, I added components from religious conversion theories to the revised Nigrescence model. Many of the religious conversion models draw attention directly to subjective and objective factors outside of mis-education. Important are motivational and commitment issues. Why do some people internalize the Encounter and others do not? What supports a person maintaining the new identity and what blunts it?

As emphasized, a person’s identity is resistant to change and there are mechanisms that erect defenses against what are perceived as intrusions into a person’s belief and identity repertoire. Growing into a new self implies that there are prior motivations or catalytic experiences that lead to identity conversion. Marcus Garvey was not born a Black nationalist; he initially favored Booker T. Washington’s assimilationism. But then he began to notice the plight of Black people everywhere; he became discontented. Injustice pushed him toward Nigrescence. His outlook and mission changed as a result of his Encounter, which he experienced through his travels:

I started to take an interest in the politics of my country, and then I saw the injustice done to my race because it was black, and I became dissatisfied on that account. I went traveling to South and Central America and parts of the West Indies to find out if it was so elsewhere, and I found the same situation. I set sail to Europe to find out if it was different there, and again I found the same stumbling block—“You are black.” I read “Up From Slavery,” by Booker T. Washington, and then my doom— if I may so call it—of being a race leader dawned upon me in London after I had traveled through almost half of Europe. I asked, “Where is the black man’s government? Where is his King and his kingdom?” I could not find them, and then I declared, “I will help to make them.”²

Change does not occur in a vacuum. Something that is not a result of the natural development of the life course has to happen to cause identity change. There must be

precipitating factors that “shatter the relevance of the person’s current identity and worldview and, at the same time, provide some hint of the path the person must follow in order to be resocialized and transformed” (Cross, Jr., 1995:105). There is a need for at least the hint of an alternative identity path, otherwise the person might manifest psychological problems. A person must have symbols, concepts, and practices from which to draw in the construction of the new identity. The concepts, symbols, and practices have their own history, developed in particular environments. Through a social and life history approach, I have identified some of the ways in which core elements of Blackness (symbols, concepts, and practices) congealed in Jamaica, providing a wellspring from which people can draw. The Rastafari have generously drawn from these elements. By showing the lineages of Rastafarian identity and ideology, the view of them as deviants and cultists is replaced by one that locates them in the mainstream of Black Jamaican experience.

Use of terms such as “shatter” to describe identity conversion elicits notions of dramatic and sudden change. However, the Nigrescence model and most conversion theories suggest gradual change, which is consonant with the life history narratives I collected. A person’s dissatisfaction with his/her current identity or society is addressed by exploring locally understood sources and meanings of truth, justice, freedom, and righteousness, which are cognitively, culturally, and morally (often religiously) defined through Jamaican understandings of Blackness.

Most religious conversion accounts locate identity transformation in some kind of tension or turning point; in the case of Nigrescence it is deracination and mis-education, which becomes a form of tension once the person realizes he or she is mis-educated. If we combine Blackness, tension, and mis-education with a religious problem-solving perspective, we have identified individuals ripe to convert to Rastafari if they come into contact with the culture and ideology. Deracination appears less important as an influencing variable in identity conversion, likely because of the ideas and values associated with the Black moral economy. The Encounter is a transformative experience or series of experiences. In the Jamaican context, these include dreams, insights, reading and studying, and concrete experiences such as witnessing a jarring occurrence, meeting a “special” (often charismatic) person, or having a naturally curious disposition that leads one to wonder why things are the way they are. The curious person is continually seeking to learn more, open to new ways of

thinking, but engaged within the parameters of local cultural symbols and concepts, such as Black redemption and Ethiopianism. Cross, Jr., emphasizes how “in many instances, it is not a single event that constitutes a person’s encounter, but a series of smaller, eye-opening episodes, each of which chips away at the person’s ongoing worldview. These small encounters have a cumulative effect: At a certain point, something happens to ‘break the camel’s back’...and the person feels pushed toward nigrescence” (1995:105).

Another factor influencing identity transformation can be sweeping social changes that affect the perceptions of large numbers of people. Migrations, wars, economic and political crises, and technological change can so shake up some people’s sense of self and understanding of the world that a new identity configuration and world view is sought. Sometimes identity conversion under these circumstances is religiously-oriented or inspired. In any event, the identity and world view transformation provide a more satisfying model and explanation of the world, and serve to return the person to a new dynamic equilibrium.

Just as there are mechanisms that protect a person’s core identity elements from change, so too with the identity of authentic Rastafarians: divinization of the self and group are protective mechanisms. “Divinizing the self is also a way of protecting one’s personal identity and that of the group or race to which one belongs from social, cultural, political and other forces that are seen as threatening, even destructive....” Rastafarians “restore their true identity by a process of deconversion [from religions like Christianity] and reconstruction [a Black religious identity]” (Clarke, 1986:12).

Blackness is a combination of social and cultural characteristics that originated under slavery and were perpetuated by the descendants of stolen Africans. It takes distinctive form in musical and artistic expression, religion, language, food preference, and world view (not necessarily cosmology or cosmogony, since these are sometimes shared with non-Blacks). The identity and ideology of the earliest Rastafarians grew out of a long-established moral economy in which Blackness, in its cultural, group recognition, and religious expression, was an important part of individual and group identification.

The first and second generation Rastafarians became who they were for moral, religious, and cultural reasons, and racially framed these in terms of Blackness. Concern with truth, justice, righteousness, belief in a Black Messiah, and a critique of White conceptions of God and the Scriptures are defining features of their identity. Their identity shift typically

grows out of a preoccupation with existential questions: “Why are Black people oppressed and burdened with legacies such as slavery?” “How ought Black people interpret righteousness, justice, and freedom?” “What is my purpose on Earth as a Black person?” “Has the Messiah actually returned as a Black King?” “Is the Christian God presented by the status quo relevant to Black people’s experiences and understandings?” These are some concerns of the potential religious and Nigrescent convert—pursuit and attainment of truth and community.

Becoming a Rastafarian is not a rigid process ruled by an inalterable blueprint. The factors that attracted and defined the early Rastafarians in Jamaica are different from those affecting later generations (e.g. 3rd and 4th) and those outside of Jamaica. In England, for example, race raises issues differently than in Jamaica, as there is no indigenous tradition of a Black moral economy or Ethiopianism. In England, Miles argues that being a Rastafarian places one in a “minority elite” because of the positive value attached to being Black in a world dominated by whites (Miles, 1978:22). Cashmore points generally to the differences in the Rastafari identity conversion process in England:

...entry into the Rastafarian reality came through four phases: initial apprehension of disadvantage on what were considered racial grounds; the accompanying loss of affiliation to the parental culture of the first generation of blacks and the concomitant weakening of the “plausibility structure” of parents’ beliefs, the drift into the movement; and the acceptance of Haile Sessie as God and Redeemer (1979:311).

Reference Group Orientation

Delineating the Reference Group Orientation (RGO) is central to analyzing the social and material aspects of personal and group identity and Nigrescence. In the case of first generation Rastafarians, taking on a new identity meant affiliating with a marginalized in-group whose attributes were appraised as positive. Adherents identified with the growing group in the absence of material rewards. The greater society and specific groups became an important out-group reference points for their identity formation, especially by the time of the 1938 Labor Rebellion. Major players in the formation of the oppositional RGO elements of Rastafarian identity were colonial administrators, the police, Whites, their Black allies, and the association of all these with oppression (slavery, colonialism, brutality, backwardness).

These out-groups became negative referents and sources of the formation of counter-norms.

Pre-Encounter and Pre-Conversion

The experience of the elder Rastafari suggests a new convert likely had a prior religious understanding, even if it was vague and superficial. This is consistent with much of the literature on religious conversion (all of a person's old religious notions do not have to be discarded though). Where race is an identity-organizing element, as for the Rastafarians, the pre-Encounter Black must be able to draw upon an already extant model of Blackness. In Jamaica, a Black moral economy, Ethiopianism, religion, and other traditions and events furnished elements of Blackness from which to draw, provided the person has knowledge of this information. A common pre-Encounter Black archetype in Jamaica is the Black who took/takes the colonial-White-Brown policies toward Blacks as his or her own. These people are thought of as being inimical to the positive and autonomous development of the capabilities of Black people. To become Black and a Rastafarian is to move away from the mentality, practices, and policies of pre-Encounter Blacks. Once Nigrescence is underway, such Blacks may be thought of as ignorant, "blind" to the truth, enemies of liberation, freedom, and righteousness. Thus, it is not only Whites and Browns who furnish elements for counter-identification; so too do some Blacks.

Although it becomes clear after the move toward Nigrescence, the convert-to-be has a low stake in their current identity. The reasons, I suggest, are already extant dissatisfactions deep within the person. The dissatisfaction should not be assumed to only be an internal psychological problem. Its roots are as likely to be external and material: dissatisfaction with work, status quo religions, violence, moving to a new locale, and so on. The life history offers an avenue to better understanding the person before, during, and after Nigrescence and religious conversion, and hence, to grasping why a person changes his/her identity.

The Encounter and Seekership

Becoming Black does not happen all at once as some claim can be the case with religious conversion, where a person is a sinner in the morning and saved that night. Even in such a dramatic religious case, the groundwork has been long laid.

Cross, Jr., identifies deracination and mis-education about the Black experience as

major factors that define the state of racial identity of the pre-Encounter Black, *and* are what make Nigrescence possible. The Rastafarians have long argued this position. Formal education under the Western model does little to teach Blacks about their cultural lineages and heritage, relationship to Africa, nor about the darker aspects of White colonization such as slavery, apprenticeship, and reactionary vigilante retribution in the aftermath of Black protest and insurrection. Even finding out about Jim Crow and apartheid can open the eyes of a Black Jamaican (or Brown or otherwise). Brother Yendis went to America in the early 1960s on an H-2 Farmworker visa, and never forgot the apartheid-like conditions he saw in Florida: “[When] I went to the United States, I was a Rasta within the eyes but never carry no covenant...The heart was there...[I] spend some time and see the condition of Black people. [It is] One thing I have fresh in my mind” [he remembers it as if he had just experienced it] (1998). Such experiences can be eye-opening.³ An absence of knowledge and awareness of Black history and experience foils the development of Black consciousness and solidarity grounded in shared ancestry, experience, and history, which are the bedrock of racial and ethnic solidarity. As such it is the fuel for the Negro-to-Black-conversion.

The Encounter is the experience that causes a person to reconsider his or her identity. It must be so shocking that a person is unable to ignore it, taking the experience to heart. Yet, the Encounter must resonate with existing elements of a person’s experience, even if the connections are unclear. Encounters for the older Rastafari take the form of dreams, visions, insights, and real-world experiences. The person must make sense of the Encounter and the experience will be given some kind of framework. The elder Rastafarians used both race and religion to frame their Encounter experience and identity conversion. As shown in chapter 7, and as some of the religious conversion analyses show (e.g. Horton & Peel, 1976), “new” elements are integrated amongst the older ones as the person learns more about the new identity and faith. Complete abandonment of earlier religious notions is not necessary.

The Encounter and seekership stage emphasize how the person begins to seek out information in a very deliberate fashion in order to make an identity decision, and my findings confirm this. A gradual process of self-reflection, soul-searching, learning, and socialization is underway; the person is in a state of seekership. Some people may experience tension prior to an Encounter. Life turning points are often a source of tension and can have

the same effect as an Encounter.

Quite a few Rastafarians told of being attracted to street meetings and lectures by some of the early evangelists, and/or they attended Nyabinghi ceremonies. At this stage, they hung on the fringe as observers of Rastafari ceremonies and meetings, watching, listening, and learning, as the revised Nigrescence model suggests. An unexpected finding was how coming into contact with a “special person” served as an Encounter for some elders, as does having what I call a curious disposition. Something about a person, his or her deportment—especially regality, pride, or grace in the face of adversity—led several elders to find out more about the striking person’s group. Then there are those whose inquisitiveness leads them to wonder about the world they live in. Questions about oppression, poverty, and the racial identity of God were the kinds of concerns that made them seekers.

Conversion: Immersion & Emersion

Once a person moves toward Nigrescence, he or she has to learn new group norms, practices, knowledge, and referents. The early Rastafari did this through listening to and observing thoroughly acculturated and socialized Rastafari, and by studying and reasoning together. Participant observation made this point obviously clear. The “newest” Rastas show their desire to learn more and to have the elders teach them the “istry” (history), to acquire pamphlets, literature, etc. What helps them toward the end of this stage is their own identity theory, inborn conception, which says “you were already a Rastafari, but had not yet given birth to it. Now you have discovered your ‘true self’ and your links to the ancient past.”

The emotional aspects of the Encounter are heightened during the Immersion phase of stage three (Conversion: Immersion-Emersion). Historically, the newest converts are the most militant, vocal, and confrontational, as the origins of the Dreadlocks illustrate (some of the elders maintain the vocality, but are less confrontational in the absence of a perceived challenge). The confrontational stance may be a reflection of the person’s superficial grasp of group norms and behavior. A person may be defensive about not fully understanding the new group and identity and may use aggression to conceal this, and he-she may hold highly romanticized notions about the group— ideas which have yet to be confirmed through interaction with the group. These two positions are not mutually exclusive. What is happening during the Immersion phase is the person is exploring a new group referent.

The third and fourth generation Rastafarian conversions are not equivalent to those of the first and second generation, whose identity shift meant great risk and peril—to literally risk forsaking the world around them for the new beliefs and identity. First and second generation Rastafari directed their criticisms at the White crown government, its administrators and beneficiaries, the small and large capitalist, and the Christians. They also directed their anger toward the Blacks and Browns who aided and abetted the Whites in their workings, just like the Bogleites. Accordingly, the definition of Nyabinghi became death to Black *and* White oppressors, drawing upon sentiments and rhetoric established during the Morant Bay Rebellion. Such rhetoric tells us much about their racial and class politics. The confrontation aspect emanating from the early Rastafari was reinforced by the police and public persecution of them, doubly reinforcing their identity. As Cross, Jr., argues, when “the person, regardless of class background, feels angry at those who are perceived as having ‘caused’ his or her predicament— white people and all the white world....Inner directed guilt, rage at white people, and the anxiety about becoming the right kind of Black person combine to form a psychic fuel or energy that powers the person into a frantic, determined, obsessive, extremely motivated search for Black identity. The pre-Encounter or ‘negro’ is dying...and the ‘Black American’ or ‘Afrocentric’ person is beginning to emerge” (1995:106). The fiery rhetoric of the Rastafari soothed and stoked the new convert’s rage and anxieties associated with the new identity.

In the Nigrescence model, anger at White people and their legacy is acute during the Immersion phase of stage three. For the new converts, “confrontation, bluntness, directness, and an either/or mentality may be the primary mode of communication with other people, black or white. This communication style is associated with the much discussed ‘blacker than thou’ syndrome...Labeling and passing judgment on others helps the person clarify his or her own identity....” (Cross, Jr., 1995:108). Additionally, “there also develops a need to confront the ‘man’ as a means of dramatizing, concretizing, or proving one’s blackness. The confrontation...is a manhood (or womanhood) ritual—a baptismal or purification rite. Carried to the extreme, the impulse is to confront White people in authority, frequently the police, on a life or death basis” (p.109). This zeal is partly a person’s effort to show her or his “command” of the new beliefs; it may also be a defensive mechanism that serves to erect barriers that keep other people from questioning their understanding of what they claim they

believe.

In their efforts to develop the new identity, people latch onto the most obvious and visible symbols that imply allegiance to the new identity. Apparel, colors, insignia, emblems, and language associated with the new identity are readily consumed and displayed, even though the significance of the emblems may be poorly understood. This bold display of what appears as familiarity is likely disguising the person's uncertainty and lack of understanding. Cross, Jr., explains this behavior by saying that converts need "clear-cut markers that he or she is progressing in the right direction" (Cross, Jr., 1995:106).

As a part of moving out of the Immersion phase (Cross, Jr., notes that a person can stagnate and not move beyond the "evil whitey" phase, but this was not the case for any of the interviewees), the Nigrescent individual pays attention to leading Black figures they identify with. They pay attention to how these folks publicly behave in order to integrate these behaviors into their new identity repertoire. For first and second generation Rastafarians, Haile Selassie, I, is the primary role model: his majestic attire, intellect, noble and humble demeanor, speeches, and even gestures, serve as cues for them. Marcus Garvey is another revered figure and symbol. His racial rhetoric, emphasis on self-reliance, and Black redemption, his ceremonial military attire, and more provide images that individuals can imitate. However, it takes time and socialization to learn these things.

A tantalizing sidebar to the Immersion-Emersion phase is the development of a "surge in altruism" in the new convert where "selflessness, dedication, and commitment to the (Black) group is evident; the person feels an overwhelming love and attachment to all that is Black" (Cross, Jr., 1995:110). Egalitarianism, communalism, and reciprocity were defining features of relations between the early Rastafarians. While the new converts came into this in a way compatible with stage three of the revised Nigrescence model, it has remained a part of their identity and ideology. This can be partially explained by the environment provided by the Black moral economy and a literal reading of the commandments of the Scriptures to do justice. Also, by the late 1950s, socialist and communist ideas had wider impact as these were embraced by at least one of the first Rastafarian leaders, and as radical political change became more common among Third World nations like Cuba. Leonard Howell corresponded with the Trinidadian communist George Padmore, and even talked of communal living (Hill, 1983), and as I showed, the

followers of Claudius and Ronald Henry were serious about implementing either socialism or communism in Jamaica. Others, like Brother Yendis, who became known as a communist (rightfully or wrongfully) because of his organizing work, and visits to formerly socialist nations Russia and Cuba, supported their version of socialism, “social living.” Another factor supporting egalitarianism and communalism resulted from the need to be close-knit and supportive because of repression and ostracization from the public and police, plus the fact that they were extremely poor.

Finally, during Immersion-Emersion the Rastafari convert-in-process begins to reject the society and move closer toward the group through renunciation and mortification. This is important to group identity and ongoing group attachment because it lessens competing alliances. As the person moves toward Internalization and Commitment, they are likely to disparage their old identity, if they do not completely disavow it. This is important to solidifying the new identity by erecting new boundaries that exclude the old self and some of its relationships and behaviors. Family and friends may reject or ridicule the convert during this phase, but this is not always the case. Not all relationships and behaviors are easily or necessarily abandoned, and these can be called the “demons of the old identity,” which may haunt the convert-in-process for some time to come. These are sources of tension, anxiety, and discomfort because they make the convert-in-process re-evaluate their identity choice.

Commitment and Internalization

During this phase of identity transformation, the person achieves a new identity equilibrium. The new identity is now a part of one’s “normal” self. This is facilitated by in-group or even family and peers who acknowledge the person’s identity conversion in a non-threatening way. Even a threatening reaction from intimates may strengthen the person’s resolve in the new identity. Nonetheless, anxieties lessen because the sources of tension have diminished. However, the new Rastafari or Black convert may not be out of the woods as new challenges to the identity and its attendant beliefs may occur. In order to maintain the new identity and group affiliation, the person must begin to invest in and make personal sacrifices for the group. The Rastafari have no rules on contributing to the group. There is no required tithing, wills, donation of property or time. But contribution is essential; it comes through non-conventional forms.

Commitment and Ongoing Group Attachment

Investment and sacrifice for the new Rastafari came with the travails associated with their marginalized identity: persecution, ridicule, brutality. They endured these because they knew themselves to be on the correct path: “No cross, no crown.”

What kept them on their identity path are the rewards associated with it and the group. Satisfaction with the new self is insufficient to maintain commitment. Communion, community, and the sense of being a special and chosen people furnish forms of reward. Communion and community-building and maintaining mechanisms are most forcibly revealed through ceremonies and formal and informal rituals.

For the first two generations of Rastafarians, the process of commitment and mortification was clear. Sacrifice meant commitment because of the things one gave up to profess the divinity of Haile Selassie or to grow a heavy beard, and later, dreadlocks. Mortification was straight forward because the non-Rastafarian world was Babylon, making the us-them distinction clear. Their aim was to leave Babylon and not participate in its lifestyle and trappings. The central Rastafarian ritual, the Nyabinghi, provides community and solidifies group and individual identity and faith. At the Nyabinghi, group boundaries are reinforced as the wickedness of the Babylonians is exposed through ritual, song, and dance. The sharing of food and herbs, especially the chalice pipe, make the sense of community pervasive and all-embracing. Outside of ritual, sharing work and activities such as clearing land, building a “taatto” (a rag-tag house), or searching out the ingredients for a meal, provided means through which the faith, identity, ideology, and culture of the early Rastafari were perpetuated.

While dissenting and deviant groups may require sacrifices of time, money, and material goods, first and second generation Rastafarians do not formally demand these sacrifices. Rather, they *expect* it as volunteerism; it is an informal mechanism of social control. And these are strong moral expectations steeped in Black identity. A person is *expected* to attend Nyabinghi ceremonies; it is *expected* that Rastafarians share with others; it is *expected* that they do not become obsessed with accumulating material possessions. Those who fail to consistently express commitment may be chastised by those familiar with that person’s behavior. Their sacrifices may seem inconsequential, but are sacrifices nonetheless. The early Rastafarians often gave up pursuit of material goods, lived simply, avoided flashy dressing,

practiced celibacy, and in many instances, and gave up worldly indulgences.

Challenges and Threats to Ongoing Commitment to the Identity and Group

There are threats to ongoing commitment to the group and the identity. Social change brings to the fore unforeseen challenges that tug at the loyalties of members. The climate that nourished the development and maintenance of a Black anti-systemic identity has changed. Rastafarian culture and ideology have been popularized, and ironically, it is in the land of their origin that they still find their greatest obstacles.

The commitment and mortification challenges facing Jamaican Rastafarians between 1931 and the pre-Black Power era are very different from those between the Black Power era and the present. Jamaica today is a much more mobile, pluralistic,⁴ and capitalistic society than 35 years ago. Moreover, the contemporary ubiquity of print, audio, and visual media make information about religious ideas and practices more available to more people, allowing them to explore a religion without interacting with the adherents of that faith (Kilbourne & Richardson, 1988:4). A significant, but statistically unknown, number of third and, especially, fourth generation Rastafarians are as likely to have come into contact with Rastafari through reggae music, videos, movies, and scholarly and popular texts, as through a “classic” Encounter, or attending rituals and intensive interaction with adherents.

Internally, the group now has a fragmented class dynamic in that some adherents, nominal or not, have access to, and consume, some of the trappings of Babylon that their elders rejected: homes in middle- and upper middle-class areas, flashy jewelry, sporty cars, jet-setting, living a night-club lifestyle associated with reggae music, and so on. These better-off Rastafari are seen as stingy and stand-offish, failing to share their goods with the struggling Rastafari, especially the elders, a growing number of whom have failing health and need support. How this conflict will play out remains to be seen.

Not not all modern trappings are rejected by all Rastafari (they have quite divergent views on how to deal with social change). For instance, when I asked an elder how should Rastafarians deal with modern contrivances like cellular telephones, he replied, “A fire that. [Does] It no[t] work like fire? [Does] It no[t] carry spark like electric[ity]? We fe control fire. Anything with fire Rastafari control dat” (Brother Bags). So, some have found ways in which to integrate change into their existing mazeway. How this will be generalized to the group is

an open question.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study has aimed to shed light on social historical factors and personal experiences that help explain why and how people become Rastafarians. The topic has broad importance because it speaks to movement genealogy and participation, especially radical movements. A stigmatized group for around 40 years, one has to wonder what drew people into the movement. Why and what did people invest in the movement? What rewards could participation offer? Understanding this in its fullest sense required finding the Rastafari's links to past movements, events, and ideas. Hence, I have argued that the Rastafarians are a continuity with preceding movements, although they are distinctive in their own right.

In designing this project, it became clear that anthropological studies of identity rarely spoke to the identity-related concepts and theories of social psychology and sociology, and rely upon questionnaires and experiments for their understanding. I aimed to integrate the psychological and sociological approaches to the study of identity with those of anthropology. I did this by applying the anthropological approaches of participant-observation, the life (and social) history, and ethnography, to sociological and social-psychological conceptions of personal and group identity.

This study has hopefully provided evidence that Nigrescence patterns hold outside of the United States, and in a society that is predominantly Black, as opposed to one where Blacks form a historically oppressed minority (America). Miseducation and deracination are powerful contributors to the possibility of Nigrescence, even where there are longstanding Black traditions and structures such as a Black moral economy. Temporally, this work has made a contribution by identifying and detailing Nigrescence long before the Black Power movement in America. The implication is that this supports Cross, Jr.'s, assertion that the model applies to Blacks past and present.

The revised Nigrescence model was applied to the problem of explaining why and how people become Rastafarians. The model could adequately have explained the question in terms of Cross, Jr.'s, latest formulation of it. Because the group being approached used religion and race as core identity-organizing elements, I added components of religious conversion theories, seeking to draw attention to their religiosity and to issues of motivations

to convert (outside of the Encounter) and to what maintains commitment and what thwarts it.

What is more, accounts of Black consciousness and experience and movement participation, would greatly benefit from an understanding of the Nigrescence process, especially the Encounter. This would lead analysts to elaborate on the factors that contribute to Black identification, and where appropriate, Black radicalness. For instance, Gilroy's *Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993), James's *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth Century America*. (1998), Bush's *We Are Not What We Seem: Black Nationalism and Class Struggle in the American Century* (1999), and Hanchard's *Orpheus and Power: The Movimento Negro of Rio De Janeiro and Sao Paulo, Brazil, 1945-1988*, all address Black consciousness and identifications, but rarely get at how people reach that point. In reading these works it is easy to see how certain experiences transformed the characters the authors write about, but apparently they are unaware of NT or how it might be useful in their work. Nigrescence theory, I suggest, would add an enriching dimension to such accounts.

Those who seek to further test or apply the revised Nigrescence model should consider three suggestions. First, what can be done to get at the essence of the Encounter, the factors that lead one person to personalize it and another to ignore it? Cross, Jr., has already identified this concern by noting that "one must make the distinction between being in the path or being the object of an encounter event or activity and actually personalizing it or being 'turned around by it'" (1995:105). But pinpointing these differences remains open. Second, the revised model's fourth and fifth stages would become more comprehensive by requiring that commitment mechanisms and things that prevent ongoing group attachment be identified in a given case. And third, greater sensitivity to relationships between social class and identity would be useful. We know a lot about the identity development of Whites and middle-class groups, but much less about poor and marginalized groups. While the route to Blackness (or Whiteness or Asianness) may be the same, to use a metaphor, the scenery is most likely different. If these elements are adopted, I believe the model will then be able to fully engage issues of movement participation and identity formation.

My recommendation for addressing the preceding suggestions are the implementation of research designs and methodologies that place the research questions or

hypotheses within the context of a person's biography. The life history is but one way to approach this.

On a general level, this study has sought to show how becoming and being Rastafari is a humanistic and ethical transformation that has to be approached from their perspective, and in terms of watersheds in their development and in the development of the movements and ideas that preceded them. The typical Rastafarian has looked at the world and seen and experienced things that he or she felt were not right, not just, not oriented toward truth and liberation. So strongly did he/she feel about this that he/she changed. While the critics may cry "but they did not change their world," they have overlooked the fact that the Rastafari did and many of them were active in it. The society that once loathed the aesthetics, culture, and history of Africans and their descendants found Black pride and ingrained it in the national consciousness. Even the banality of dance hall music and culture and its time period of political conservatism, neoliberalism, and capitalist triumphalism did not undo the changes associated with the Rastafari, although for a while it seemed so. And the society that once forced the Rastafari to hide in alleys, ghettos, and gullies, that threatened to liquidate them, that institutionalized its leaders and called their followers dirty, now exhorts the richness of their culture as a means of drawing in tourists seeking the exotic (and ganja). The Rastafari's own project of identity-building tells us much about the land and society that gave them birth.

I close with a chant sung at Nyabingi ceremonies. It encapsulates the elder Rastafari's sensitivity, criticism, and sense of power, and the racial and class dynamics of society in which they developed and maintained their identity:

Wonder why the White man them no go wey (away)
 for we want go home a yard (Africa)
 for we want go home a yard
 Rastafari a go burn them out, burn them out,
 Burn them out Ithiopia land (Africa-Ethiopia)
 Hot fire burn them out, burn them out
 Burn them out Ithiopia land
 I say go [a]way Babylonian,
 I say go [a]way Babylonian,
 Babylonian you must get a great shook of lightening,
 Babylonian you must get a great shook of thunder,
 Babylonian you must get a great shook of thunder,
 On a this fine day

ENDNOTES

1. Caribbean Studies 6(1):39-40, p.39.
2. Originally in "The Negro's Greatest Enemy," *Current History*, September 1923; cited in James 1998:71.
3. Brother Yendis had previously experienced his initial Encounter. But his experience in America points to Cross Jr's recognition that a person can experience more than one Encounter and that they can recycle through stages of Nigrescence.
4. The pluralism is more a result of tourism than a reflection of the accuracy of the national motto *Out of Many One People*.

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