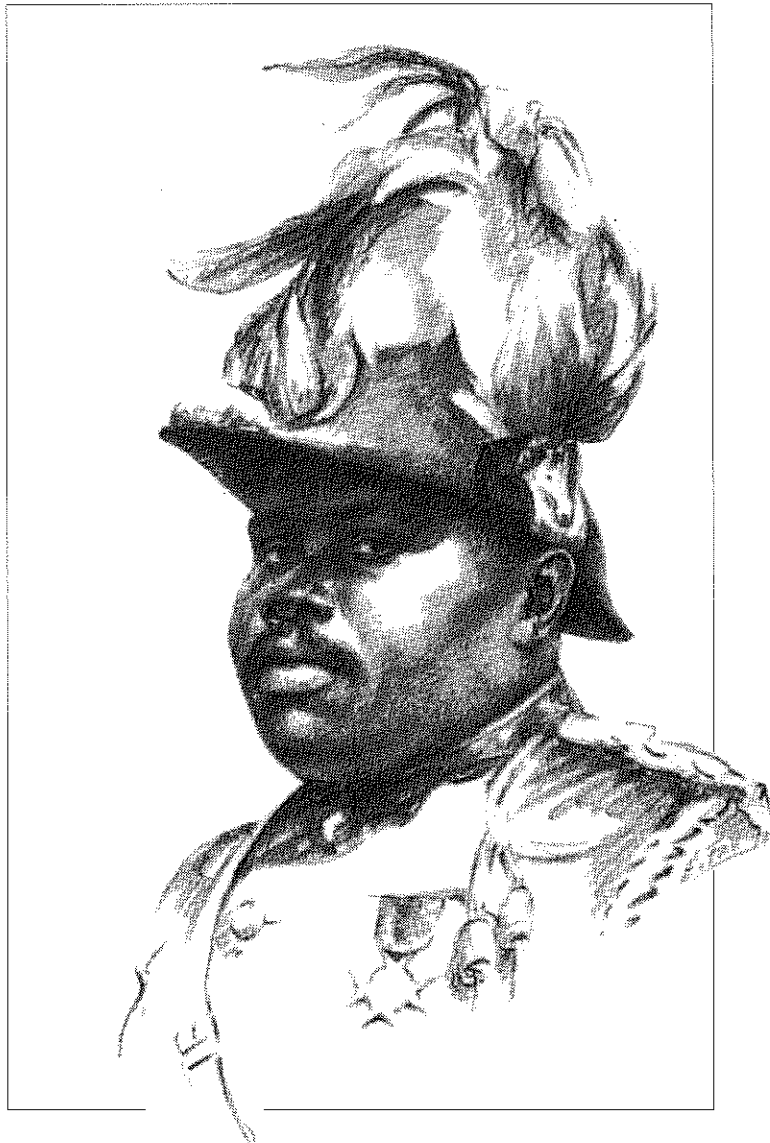


tel, Michael Taussig, Irene Silverblatt and others have shown how symbolic systems developed in opposition to colonial and neo-colonial exploitation and the Christianity which accompanied it. To some extent, Campbell's analysis of Rastafari as resistance goes further than such theorists because it places the struggle against racial oppression at the forefront of this resistance. This brings his work closer to that of Caribbean historians such as Edward Brathwaite and Monica Schuler who have begun to show how slaves and their descendants resisted slavery by recreating a sense of themselves as different from and in opposition to their white masters.

In the Caribbean escaped slaves defied the plantation system to build African-based Maroon communities in the mountains; other slaves risked their lives in the many revolts which culminated in the Haitian Revolution; post-emancipation uprisings continued the fight for social equality or basic political rights. As Campbell indicates, slaves and their descendants resisted, and they encoded their resistance in cultural forms: in their adherence to African traditions, in the cunning associated with Anancy the trickster hero, and in religious expressions which called for a new social order.

Campbell examines in some detail 20th century resistance and its link to Rastafari: the racial self-consciousness reawakened by Garveyism, the labour movement of the late 1930s which would culminate in independence in the 1960s, the new struggle against neo-colonial entities to which Walter Rodney sacrificed his life, the climax of these struggles in the Grenada Revolution. Throughout, he shows that Rastafari is not a marginal "cult" divorced from the reality of life in the Caribbean, but is instead a cultural formation dynamically connected to the struggle against colonialism and neo-colonialism. This dynamism carried Rastafari beyond Jamaica throughout the Caribbean, and beyond the Caribbean itself to metropolitan centres such as London, New York and Toronto where black people continued to suffer the legacy of colonial racism.

Campbell has the sociologist's sense of variations within a movement and transformations in relation to external pressures. He shows how African-based culture in Jamaica reproduced and transformed itself, even incorporating non-African elements. Ganja was introduced to Jamaica by East Indian indentured workers, but it was incorporated to the Afro-centric symbolic structure created by Rastafari. Reggae is sometimes considered to be a sell-out of Rastafari or a popularization, something that is not true to the roots and drums of Rastafari's nyabinghi origins. But though reggae can be foreign to Rastafari, a form circumscribed by Western technology and marketing strategies, it could become a vehicle for Rastafarian consciousness and it helped spread Rastafari throughout the world. As Campbell points out, reggae artists identified with Africa, poignantly criticized capitalism, and movingly called for African redemption. The example of reggae is one indication that Rastafari is not an orthodoxy packaged by high priests or



Marcus Garvey - drawing by Elton C. Fax

by scholars in a university; it is a popular movement whose directions and variation will be determined by those involved in it at many different levels.

Campbell also shows how aspects of Rastafari could be and were manipulated by non-Rasta Jamaican or foreign interests. Jamaican politicians are astute at using popular religious symbolism. More detrimental to the spirit of Rastafari were the activities of the Ethiopian Zion Coptic Church. According to Campbell, the Coptic church was a white-controlled American corporation that claimed to be Rastafarian and to represent Rastafarian interests. While campaigning for the legalization of ganja, it bought up land and property, linked itself with elements of the police and the judiciary, and took control over a large part of the ganja trade. The Coptic newspaper was overtly anti-communist in orientation. Rastas and others were drawn into a capitalist enterprise promoting individual rewards and American consumer expectations quite out of keeping with the Jamaican socio-economic reality. Though the activities of the Coptics have been set back by a number of arrests, capitalist control over the ganja trade continues.

Campbell avoids the claim sometimes made that resistance to oppression is an innate force in history inherently oriented to the building of a free and just society and polity. Resistance has its limits. Following the analysis of culture provided by Amílcar Cabral, the father of Guinean in-



**Rasta and Resistance:  
From Marcus Garvey to Walter Rodney  
by Horace Campbell**

Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press Incorporated, 1987, 236 pp.  
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People of African descent throughout the Americas have struggled for centuries to preserve a sense of themselves as human beings. They share a long history of resistance with other colonized peoples such as native Canadians, a history which has implications for the experience of all non-white people who find themselves confronting a world which is still largely white-dominated. Discrimination on the basis of perceived or imagined racial difference means that specific groups of people are defined negatively as "non-white," and it is this racial dimension of oppression that distinguishes their struggle from that faced by other oppressed groups such as workers or women.

The fact of racial oppression is the centre of the Rastafarian analysis of the Western experience, and Rastafarian culture is based on a history of struggle to transform that experience. In *Rasta and Resistance: From Marcus Garvey to Walter Rodney* Horace Campbell explores the social and political dimensions of Rastafari. De-emphasizing the more mystical aspects of Rastafari and casting aside sociological and anthropological readings which fail to situate Rastafari within a history of struggle in the Caribbean, Campbell argues that the Rastafari movement "challenges not only the Caribbean but the entire Western World to come to terms with the history of slavery, the reality of white racism and the permanent thrust for dignity and self-respect by black people."

Analyzing the complex belief system of Andean men and women, Nathan Wach-

dependence, he argues that the challenge of Rastafari is to transform itself into a "universal culture" capable of playing its part on the stage of world history. Rodney worked with the Rastas in Jamaica, recognizing that they were "the leading force in the expression of black consciousness in the Caribbean." Yet their vision was clouded by the myths of Ethiopia, the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth, and His Imperial Majesty, Haile Selassie I, the Redeemer. Rodney and, following him, Campbell set themselves the task of demystifying Rastafari by carefully analyzing the soci-historical process in which it is located without losing the power and vigour of Rastafarian consciousness.

A comparison with another fairly recent book on Rastafari is revealing. In *Black Heat Man: A Journey into Rasta* (Chatto and Windus: London, 1986) Derek Bishton begins with the myth and reality of Ethiopia but like Campbell situates Rastafari in the history of oppression and cultural resistance in Jamaica. Bishton presents a less scientific, more experiential account of Rastafari and he does not emphasize the history of resistance to the same extent as Campbell. Bishton's photographs are alive; Rastas and ordinary Jamaicans talk in his interviews.

In his attempt to understand the deep roots of Rastafari, Bishton visited the Accompong Maroons in Jamaica, the living, visible reminder of the earliest attempts to flee slavery and rebuild Africa. Maroons who acquiesced and agreed to work for the British continued to live in Jamaica. But those who went beyond these limits found themselves transported first to Nova Scotia, then back to Africa. A "back to Africa consciousness" had some influence in Jamaica in the 19th and early 20th century, and a number of individuals actually made their way back. But it was not until 1914 when Garvey founded the United Negro Improvement Association and mobilized Jamaicans, black Americans, and others that the slogan "Africa for the Africans" began to take on new and renewed meaning. Whereas Campbell emphasizes the dynamic connection between Rastafari and the social structure, Bishton places more emphasis on its roots in Jamaican popular culture and the back-to-Africa theme. Campbell is intent both to recover the truth of Rastafari and to demystify it; Bishton is content to try to let Rastafari tell its own truth.

Campbell does not entirely succeed in his task and the reader is forced to confront the inadequacies of his conceptual approach and descriptive presentation. Campbell implies that the emphasis on Selassie and repatriation, far from being essential to Rastafari, were deviations imposed by external factors. Once the Jamaican state recognized that Rastafari was a force to be reckoned with, it promoted the deification of Haile Selassie through the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Similarly, he states that the idea of repatriation was largely a response to the displacement of the Jamaican rural population in the 1950s and the land grant made by Selassie to descendants of Africans in the West. No Rasta would tolerate Campbell's belittling

of these central tenets of Rastafarian knowledge. Rastas have affirmed the divinity of Selassie and the necessity of repatriation. But what outsiders often fail to realize is that the metaphorical richness of these two ideas overflows their literal (non-Rasta) interpretation.

Time and time again Campbell refers to Rastafari as a form of idealism; one which is "pregnant with criticism of the social order" but idealist nevertheless. He states that Rastas have not addressed their own bourgeois individualism; nor have they seriously dealt with the question of class relations. He is acutely aware that racial claims have been used to legitimate exploitative regimes in Haiti, Guyana and elsewhere. In the case of Ethiopia, Selassie fought against Italian fascism and claimed to represent the interest of black people throughout the world. But this cannot hide the fact that he was a feudal monarch in an exploitative social order. Rastas who settled in Shashamane in Ethiopia found themselves in competition with each other in a struggle for limited resources. After the emperor was overthrown in the Ethiopian Revolution, Shashamane Rastas had to face the wrath of Ethiopian peasants who regarded them as feudal retainers and expropriated their land and property. Campbell's task, following Rodney, is to bring materialism to Rastafari. Rastafarian thought, one begins to suspect, is what Marx called an "opiate" of the masses, a form of resistance, but one which rises and


declines in inverse proportion to efficacious social action.

Here lies the fundamental problem in Campbell's entire analysis. Though he is critical of any form of materialism that fails to leave room for the specificity of racial oppression and racial consciousness, Campbell ultimately opts for the presentation of external reality and external concepts of reality rather than for the lived and sustained meaning of Rastafarian cultural action. In Campbell's book the analysis of the structure and meaning of Rastafarian thought and practice is neglected in favour of looking at the relationship of the movement to external factors. Campbell repudiates a host of sociologists for calling Rastafari a racist oriented millenarian cult. He particularly blames the University of the West Indies "Report on the Rastafari Movement" for laying the basis for future distortions. But Campbell has added his own distortions. If he is to make his assertions convincing, he has to analyze the critical implications of Rastafarian thought in greater depth.

Compared to Campbell, Bishton's journalistic approach presents an opportunity for the alert observer to make more space for the expressiveness of the Rastas themselves. But Bishton's space is limited; his photographs present a history, but are incomplete; and his presentation of Rastafari covers too much territory too quickly. He overemphasizes the millenarian component in Rastafari. The voice of Rastafari

does not emerge in *Black Heat Man* to the extent that it could. The work poses a tragic enigma. At the end, with Shashamane's few huts and the few acres of land, the "revolutionary" government of a dead monarch's followers is the view beyond the police. Howell's commune after being destroyed by the police. In Jamaica the middle class and the middle class's Rastafarian performances; but it is also the poet Michael Smith's own country. And the struggle continues. Bishton chooses in Birmingham, choosing to strike back with solidarity with a South African for its freedom. Bishton has with the critical problem of the quest for Africa, but he has provided the tools which are thrust for emancipation.

There is within Rastafari itself a disjunction between or idealistic conception of critical or emancipatory Rastafarianism is sympathetic to the millenarian. Campbell's Rastafari from the millenarian sociologist, but then he would be more fair to experience if they recognize grounds for social and



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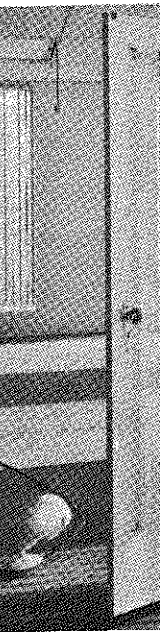
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does not emerge in *Black Heart Man* to the extent that it could. The structure of his work poses a tragic enigma: he begins with the end, with Shashamane reduced to the few huts and the few acres which the "revolutionary" government has left the dead monarch's followers. He ends with the view beyond the pinnacle, beyond Howell's commune after it has been destroyed by the police. It is a view of the Jamaican middle class enjoying Rex Nettleford's Rastafarian inspired dance performances; but it is also a view of Rastafarian poet Michael Smith stoned to death in his own country. And so the tragic struggle continues: Bishton closes with scenes in Birmingham, with black people choosing to strike back, and doing so in solidarity with a South Africa demanding its freedom. Bishton has left his readers with the critical problem of demystifying the quest for Africa, but he has not provided the tools which might further the thrust for emancipation.

There is within Rastafarian thought itself a disjunction between a millenarian or idealistic conception of reality and a critical or emancipatory conception. Bishton is sympathetic to Rastafari but calls it millenarian. Campbell attempts to rescue Rastafari from the millenarianism of the sociologists, but then he proceeds to reduce Rastafarian thought to idealism. Both would be more fair to the Rastafarian experience if they recognized that the grounds for social and political critique

can be found within Rastafari itself.

Campbell is correct in identifying resistance as one of the most important aspects of Rastafari's relationship with the colonial and neo-colonial world. Rastafari has always resisted the status quo whether by overtly challenging it or by withdrawing from it. However, millenarianism is a recurring theme in Rastafari and is quite consistent with resistance. Howell's claim in 1933 that black people owed their allegiance to the new monarch of Ethiopia was indeed a political act challenging the authority of the colonial regime. But as Robert Hill has shown, Howell's act was also classically millenarian for he preached about a new and inverted social/racial order: Ras Tafari (Selassie) was "King of Kings and Lord of Lords" who had come "to break every chain" which had kept black people enslaved to whites. Campbell does not mention Prince Emmanuel Edwards, one of the longest surviving of the early Rastafarian patriarchs. Prince Emmanuel described himself in a Rastafarian paper in 1983 as "the Black Christ" who has come to redeem his people from colonialism; his followers (Bobo-Dread) acknowledge as much. But while most millenarian movements have been associated with violent outbursts and military campaigns by God's chosen armies, Howell, Prince Emmanuel, and indeed most Rastas are non-violent.

However, millenarianism is only one aspect of Rastafari. At the core of Rastafari

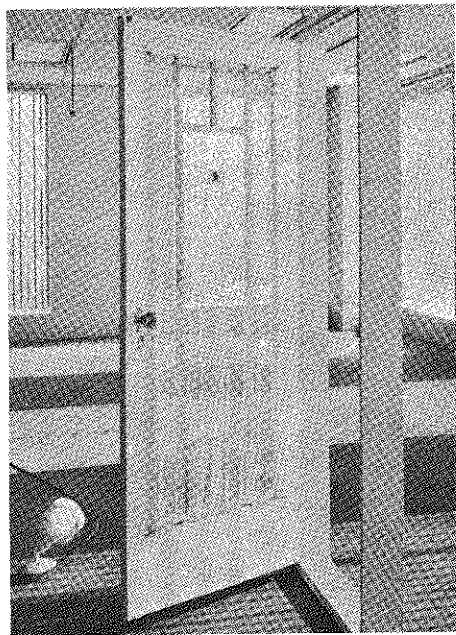
"reasoning" is the infinite interplay of partially constructed meanings which arrive at a temporary unity in the dialogical act. Rastafarian thought, even in its idealistic or millenarian guises, yields itself to alternate convergences of meaning. What does Prince Emmanuel really mean when he calls himself "the Black Christ?" At some level could he be saying that a group of people which has been humiliated for centuries can take possession of their own purity and godliness, their own freedom as human beings to mutually create a human world.

Students of Rastafari such as Rex Nettleford and Joseph Owens have argued in several works that the Rastafarian understanding of Selassie is a statement about the divinity in each man, and this gives to the black man a claim to humanity denied him by colonialism. Likewise Ethiopia exists on earth and the millenarian vision of the promised land can be translated into a call for the creation of a new and just state wherever the black person finds himself, even if that be in Jamaica, Babylon itself. Inherent in Rastafarian thought is its ability to establish its own interpretative self-critique.

Sam Brown, very much an "orthodox" Rasta, ran for political office in the early 1960s. The Rastafari Movement Association with which Sam Brown was later involved was oriented towards dealing with the concrete social issues in the Jamaica of the day. Campbell provides us with useful information when he discusses Rodney's influence on the Rastafarian Movement Association. However, Rastafari's self-critique came prior to Rodney, and Rodney's "materialism" was a tool which the Rastas could rework in their own terms without giving up their deepest beliefs. This tradition is carried on today by Rastas associated with the Rastafari International Theocracy Assembly and by Rasta social theorists in the universities. As elections in Jamaica approach, Rastas are beginning to make plans to have their voice heard.

Those Rastas committed to radical social and political change in Jamaica do not have to give up the claim of black divinity and the belief in the right to repatriation. What they have given up is the millenarianism that triumphed in other Rastafarian tendencies. There are two logics in Rastafari, the one millenarian and in that sense escapist, the other socially and politically oriented in an emancipatory quest. What disembodied social thought cannot provide is the group cohesion and commitment provided by a cultural matrix such as Rastafari. Campbell's work really demonstrates, therefore, that Rastafari is a powerful cultural phenomenon among people of African descent which carries within it a commitment to social and political change. And in a unity such as this, the Western imposed dualism of idealism and materialism falls away, revealed for what it is, an alien imposition.

*Patrick Taylor has recently published The Narrative of Liberation: Perspectives on Afro-Caribbean Literature, Popular Culture, and Politics (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988). He teaches at York University.*



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