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The World's War as Seen in Jamaica: Racial Oppression Reflected in Reggae

Bob Marley is undeniably one of the most influential and highly acclaimed musicians of all time. Very few people can hear that name without picturing long dreadlocks, a raspy voice, and a kind, life-loving smile. His songs' soothing beat and messages of peace, happiness, and equality were and still are appreciated by people from all over the world. Marley was an outstanding influence not only in the music world, but also in his country, Jamaica. He was much more than a famous musician, serving as a major figure in the Jamaican religious and social movement, Rastafarianism, which took a stance against colonialism and the oppression of African people. His songs offered commentary on the economic and racial inequalities many of his Jamaican listeners were experiencing at the time. His song, "War," accentuates this perfectly. Bob Marley and the Wailers released the song on their eighth album, *Rastaman Vibration*, on April 30, 1976 in the midst of political upheaval and social change in postcolonial Jamaica. The song itself is an excerpt from Emperor Haile Selassie I's speech given to the United Nations. There is a tremendous significance in using this particular speech besides paying respect to the Rastafarian messiah that reflects the period in Jamaican history in which it was released. What makes this song especially intriguing are all the different elements that comprise it. It is an

incredibly complex song that touches upon multiple themes of Rastafarianism, the nation's history of colonialism, the political condition and restoration of African identity in the 1970s. The musical components, genre, and lyrics further emphasize the message that Bob Marley was trying to convey in the song. The "war" that he describes throughout the song refers to the conflict and violence that occurs from the racial oppression of people that is experienced all over the world. In his song, "War," Marley shares Selassie's larger humanitarian message with the world while also relating it to the African diaspora's experience of this "war" in Jamaica to empower social change within his country.

Rastafarianism

"War's" message for the racial and social equality of African-Jamaicans finds its roots in the Jamaican religion turned social movement, Rastafarianism. In fact, it is almost impossible to discuss any form of reggae without also mentioning this influential movement. In many ways, Rastafarianism is a stance against colonialism and an embrace of the African-Jamaican struggle and identity. Rastafarianism emerged in Jamaica in 1935 during the latter years of colonialism. After the island's independence from Britain in 1962, however, the movement would see much more influence. During the process of decolonization, Jamaicans were quick to discard any tools of colonialism. The King James' Version Bible was one of the first books introduced to the slaves on the island and was often the only book they owned. Jamaicans recognized how the Bible was used as a means to perpetuate slavery and were ready to discard the book altogether. However, it was so embedded within Jamaican culture from years of exposure and indoctrination that others decided to turn its influence into good. Laurence Breiner's journal article, "The English Bible in Jamaican Rastafarianism," explains how the Bible that had once oppressed

African-Jamaicans was reworked into Jamaican post-colonial culture as a way to liberate themselves from their current condition. Rastafarians have a unique interpretation of the Bible, the most notable being the way in which the story of the Jews was made to parallel the African experience of colonialism. Rastas believe that the Bible was written by and for Ethiopians, and that this group is God's true chosen people. African slavery and diaspora are seen as a punishment by God and a purposeful separation from their homeland, however this is only a temporary displacement. Another term Rastas have for Jamaica is "Babylon," the city where the Jews were exiled in the Old Testament. They believe that they are in a state of exile, and they are meant to return to Ethiopia, to which they refer to as "Zion." Zion in the Bible is a hill in Jerusalem where King David built his kingdom. It also serves as a symbol of home and heaven. Rastafarians take these terms quite literally, believing that Jamaica truly is Babylon and Ethiopia is their "promise land." The reason why the Bible tells a different story is because as part of their punishment, God allowed the Bible to be possessed by people who used it for evil such as slave owners. That is why, in Rastafarianism, verses such as "servants be subject to your masters" are rejected as European lies and deception. Some Rastafarians view the current printed Bible as corrupted and instead rely only on oral worship and spreading of ideas. This reinterpretation of the Bible can be viewed initially as a way for impoverished African-Jamaicans to cope with the racial and economic struggles they were experiencing. However, as the religion gained more and more followers, it soon became a means of recalling black identity and equality. During the 1970s, the black nationalist movement in Jamaica had already been gaining steam. Many working-class black Jamaicans, as well as politicians, saw the value in Rastafarianism as a means to elevate the island's African heritage and identity. "The broad appeal of Rastafarianism in

Jamaica and beyond radiates from this stance of self-possession and assured identity” (Briener 35).

“War” would not hold nearly as much significance to African-Jamaicans if it was not for Bob Marley’s role in the popularization of Rastafarianism. Marley had lived his teen years in the poor community of Trench Town in West Kingston where he had encountered some Rastafarian people and ideals. However, it was not until Haile Selassie’s visit to Jamaica in 1966 that he made his conversion. His wife, Rita, had been in the vast crowd of Rastafarians and African-Jamaicans during Selassie’s arrival at the airport, where she believed to have seen the holy stigmata, Christ’s wounds from being nailed to the cross, on Selassie’s hands. She told Marley what she had witnessed, and he embraced the religion shortly after. He adopted the Rasta customs, growing his hair out in dreads (Rastafarians adhere to Leviticus 19:27-28, “Ye shall not round the corners of your heads... you shall not make any cuttings in your flesh.”) and made a practice of smoking ganja (which was considered a sacramental tradition in Rastafarianism). He became a symbol and leading figure in Rastafarianism and acted as a chief messenger of its teachings through reggae. When considering Rastafari’s oral tradition of spreading information, Rastafarianism and music go hand in hand. Reggae as a popular musical genre served as a means for Rastafarianism to spread throughout the island, and with the help of Marley, throughout the world. Reggae in particular was also known for being the music of the people and a voice for the marginalized and suffering. It was the perfect vessel for the Rastafarian message.

“War” offers a message of both hope and motivation for the African diaspora’s victory in the “war” in Jamaica through its Rastafarian undertones. This ambition for African-Jamaicans to gain social equality is derived primarily from the song’s references to the Rastafarian eschatology. Rastafarianism differs greatly from other African and neo-African traditions in

terms of their attitudes towards the Middle Passage. In the Atlantic slave trade, the Middle Passage is the period of transportation of millions of Africans to the West Indies to be sold into slavery. This forceful departure from their homeland caused great trauma and anxiety amongst Africans due to their worries about not being able to return to Africa and be with their people again and whether or not their souls would be reunited with their ancestors after death. Many Africans took their own lives on the slave ships, believing that their souls would return to Africa. In contrast, the Middle Passage is viewed by Rastafarians as a purposeful event in their story of exile and perseverance. Unlike other African traditions, spirits of dead or ancestors do not play a role in Rastafarian tradition. Despite Jamaican slaves being brought up in the Christian faith by their slave masters, the Rastafarian religion does not believe in an afterlife or heaven.

Rastafarians reject the idea of death altogether, believing they will return to Africa during their lifetimes, and people die as a result of their own soul's turmoil and sin. Rastafarians are confident that as long as they do not give in to the ways of Babylon, they will not see death and will be able to return to their homeland and find peace again after centuries of suffering.

Throughout the song, lines from Selassie's speech can be interpreted, and probably were by many Rastas, as the confirmation of this Rastafarian belief. Lines in the speech acknowledge the oppression that Africans must face until the fateful day of their return comes. This oppression is referred to in the verse: "Until the ignoble and unhappy regimes that hold our brothers in Angola, South Africa, subhuman bondage, have been toppled, utterly destroyed." However, Bob Marley's overall declaration of social equality for Africans diverges from the Rastafarian belief that no further action is required of Rastafarians other than staying faithful to the religion and not becoming a part of Babylon. Marley invites African-Jamaicans to actively defend their rights and seek changes within their current condition. The lines: "That until that day the dream of lasting

peace, world citizenship, rule of international morality will remain but a fleeting illusion to be pursued, but never attained” can be interpreted as meaning peace and homecoming for Africans cannot be achieved unless they themselves are willing to take action. Marley, himself, uses his platform and the influence of his music in order to inspire social change in Jamaica. Rastafarians must do their part in the war of racial oppression and fight for their own equality. This is further expressed in the verse: “And until that day, the African continent will not know peace. We Africans will fight. We find it necessary.” However, Marley remains faithful to his Rastafarian beliefs and exerts a confidence in the prophecy that the African diaspora will return to Ethiopia and God’s people will triumph over those who have oppressed them for so long: “And we know we shall win as we are confident in the victory of good over evil.” Rastafarians believe that the only higher source of authority than the Bible is Haile Selassie. By using the words of Selassie as opposed to a Bible verse (as many other reggae songs do), there is a greater strength behind Marley’s conviction. By preserving Selassie’s call for worldwide participation in the pursuit of human equality, Marley communicates to his own country and fellow Rastafarians that social change needs to occur in order for African-Jamaicans to find peace.

Ethiopia and Haile Selassie

It was his strong faith in Haile Selassie that inspired Marley to incorporate the words of the Ethiopian emperor into his music, and this inclusion served as an affirmation in the significance of the message provided by Selassie in his speech. The late emperor was a major influence amongst Rastafarians in Jamaica. The religion’s name “Rastafari” is derived from Selassie’s given name Ras (the Ethiopian title for prince or chief) Tafari Makonnen. Selassie’s role as the face of Rastafarianism is often attributed to a “prophecy” given by Jamaican political

activist, Marcus Garvey, who often preached to the slums of Jamaica. He is claimed to have said the famous words: "Look to Africa when a black king shall be crowned, for the day of deliverance is near." Selassie's coronation in 1930 was seen by Garvey's followers as a fulfillment of the prophecy. Thus, the Emperor would become the involuntary head of Rastafarianism. Haile Selassie takes on a much greater role in the religion than a spiritual leader, being considered the second incarnation of Jesus Christ and the Messiah of Rastafarianism. The Ethiopian Emperor never denied or confirmed his supposed status as a deity upon visiting Jamaica, and even himself claimed to be a descendant of King Solomon. The mass respect he gained from the African diaspora in Jamaica came not only from his holy reputation, but also the fact that he was the leader of the independent African country, Ethiopia. According to Donald N. Levine's journal article, "Ethiopia, Japan, and Jamaica: A Century of Globally Linked Modernizations," this recognition of Ethiopia as a strong, independent African nation began in 1896, when Emperor Menelik II swiftly ended the invasion of Italian forces in the Battle of Adwa in the first Italo-Ethiopian war. At the time, Ethiopia was the only non-white country that successfully resisted a European colonial power. Menelik II also wished to modernize Ethiopia, implementing railway and postal services and a modern education system. This strive for a modern Ethiopia continued under his son, Selassie, who introduced a democratic system of government, primary and secondary schooling, built more roads and encouraged other public projects, and outlawed slavery. Selassie also helped Ethiopia garner further esteem and prominence in the eyes of the world by obtaining a position for the country in the League of Nations, then the United Nations, and helped establish the Organization of African Unity. His prophesized coming to power and what he managed to accomplish with that power further cemented his faithful following. His image as a potent black leader reinforced the newfound

pride in African identity established in Rastafarianism. The Rastafarians in Jamaica held an immense admiration for the emperor, including Bob Marley. The emperor was regarded so highly as an incarnation of God, that his death in 1975 came as a shock to Rastafarians.

Believing that as God, it was impossible for Selassie to die, his followers were disconcerted, and many began to lose their faith in Rastafarianism or outright denied Selassie was dead. Marley, however, never lost his faith in Selassie, and still found reason to honor the Rastafarian figure in his music. This is specified in an interview conducted with the musician in 1976. When asked if he shared the Rastafarian belief that Selassie would return, Marley replied:

“Well, Haile Selassie is here because dig this now: The man who invent capitalism where is he? (Interviewer: You tell me.) I don’t know. Neither the man who invent the next thing or the next thing or the next thing... So the teaching of his majesty is a truth to us mankind... This is a teaching. Someone who set the example one must follow and one must live. And his majesty is the only one and the perfect one who do it. So [it isn’t the same as settling], looking for a man and to praise a man as God but is he teaching and who say the right things? ‘Until the color of a man’s skin is of no more significance than the color of his eyes’ you know- that mean, I mean, who ever say that? I mean, this man *right*. So, no offense, it is God who say these things in truth. And it’s just truth.” (Bob Marley 1976 Reggae Music, Bible, God Rastafari and Haile Selassie)

From his words, it is apparent that Marley’s respect for Selassie came not only from his godly reputation in Rastafarianism and influence as an African emperor, but also the wisdom he had to offer. The use of Selassie’s speech in a song released a year after his death was a way for Marley to communicate that despite Selassie’s passing, his insight still has a place in the defending of African diaspora rights in Jamaica and the rest of the world. Marley wished to spread this crucial message of equality using his own influence through his music. Marley was

not a political man, and never claimed to be apart of any ideology other than Rastafari. Despite their claims, political systems such as capitalism or socialism could not help African people in the way they needed. The messages of Selassie and Rastafarianism spoke to him in the same ways it spoke to many other African-Jamaicans. They held a strong faith in the fact that they would soon return to their homeland and finally see justice for all the suffering faced by their people. They would be victorious in the “war” of racial oppression.

Selassie’s call for a worldwide effort for peace and equality inspired Marley to refer to this endeavor in his song as a “war.” In 1963, Emperor Haile Selassie I gave his famous address to the United Nations shortly after the formation of the OAU. During this time, multiple different countries were still grappling with the civil rights of its citizens. One of the mentioned suffering countries in the speech was South Africa, which sustained apartheid until 1994. The Civil Rights Movement in America was also on the fight for rights for African Americans. All around the world, justice and equality were being denied to African people. Colonialism was not over; it had taken new form in the social and legal systems established by those in power. The last address Selassie gave to an organization of nations was in 1936, when he asked for assistance from the League of Nations to defend his country from Mussolini’s invading forces during the Second Italo-Ethiopian War. In this address, he recounted the terrible conditions of the war and the devastation and death inflicted on Ethiopia by the Italian’s use of chemical weapons, tear gas and mustard gas. He also had admonished the League for not upholding its own values and allowing the clear aggressor to continue its advances simply to maintain good relations. Selassie had witnessed the atrocities of war, and now in 1963, had a message, or rather a warning, to offer the world. In this speech, he calls for the disarmament of nuclear weapons, as these tools of war will be the downfall of mankind. He also draws attention to the current issue of establishing “true

equality among men.” Selassie is inclusive in his strive for peace, as he conveys that all the countries must be dedicated in fulfilling this goal or else it will never become a reality, and future generations will continue to suffer from their negligence. He claimed that at the conference that conceived the OAU, the African leaders in the organization were willing to do their part in achieving this global peace, and now it is up to the rest of the world to join in this objective. This particular part of the speech is what inspired Bob Marley and the Wailer’s “War.” Drawing from the speech’s over all anti-war message, Marley equates this fight for civil rights for all people to a war in of itself. Despite there not being a formal declaration, this social issue that plagues the world resembles a war. A consequence of war is violence and the subjugation of people. Societies impose an informal war on its citizens through policy, corrupt systems, and conflict and violence amongst its citizens. Like Selassie, Marley recognizes that it will take much effort to put an end to this injustice, but it is a “war” worth fighting. By the time the song was released, Jamaica had seen its fair share of this war. As an admirer of Selassie and his teaching and also being an internationally acclaimed reggae star, Marley wanted to preserve the worldwide audience while also giving his own message to his home country, Jamaica.

The Manifestation of War in 1970s Jamaica

The war faced by African-Jamaicans following independence first emerged through the country’s pursuit of a national identity that ultimately neglected their rights and history of suffering under colonialism. Despite having gained independence from Britain in 1962, the country would still suffer from a social class system that resembled the days of Jamaican colonialism. White European-Jamaicans were at the top of the social ladder, mixed race people or “near-white” or “brown” elites came next, and black Jamaicans made up the lower working

class and impoverished. As Monique Bedasse describes in her book, Jah Kingdom: Rastafarians, Tanzania, and Pan-Africanism in the Age of Decolonization, the brown elites dominated the political and social scene in the early decades of postcolonial Jamaica. In the 1960s, the elites decided the new identity of the nation would be “Creole,” and celebrated the racial mixing prevalent in the Caribbean. This only further perpetuated the social hierarchy that existed due to colonialism. However, the black nationalist movement also played a part in fashioning Jamaica’s identity by advocating for the rights of its black citizens. They openly discussed and engaged with Jamaica’s history of slavery in order to form a new identity of racial equality. The elites saw this as a threat to their own attempts to move forward and away from their colonial past, altogether ignoring the problems faced by black Jamaicans as a result of the country’s history. The Jamaican Labor Party (JLP), one of the two main political parties in the nation, particularly took offense to this rise in black nationalism and during its leadership, tried everything its power to extinguish the movement. “The government became known for its pointed attempts to undermine student movements, its harassment of progressive individuals, its banning of black power literature, and its brutality toward Rastafarians” (Bedasse 81). However, with the rise of Rastafarianism that resonated with the poor black population, these efforts would prove to be futile.

In the 1970s, Rastafarianism and reggae music found a place in Jamaica’s fight for social equality. The pro-African movement and sentiment saw influence in politics through the People’s National Party (PNP) under the leadership of Michael Manley. Manley fit the description of the usual Jamaican prime minister at the time: a near-white or brown member of the upper class. However, he differed from his predecessors in his rhetoric for black Jamaican rights and embrace of African identity. Social equality for black Jamaicans and the urban poor

had always been a vision for the PNP. However, his father, Norman Manley, who founded the party in 1938, was an educated man and lawyer and was seen more for his higher social standing and elite status. He had a harder time relating to those he was trying to represent compared to his political rival, Alexander Bustamante of the JLP, and this costed him the election after Jamaican independence. Michael would assume leadership of the PNP after his father's death in 1969, and he had big plans for social and political change in Jamaica. His 1972 campaign's success is heavily attributed to his use of Rastafarian ideals and culture. He adopted aspects of Rastafarian language and phrases into his own speech such as "I and I," a replacement for "you and I," which represents the Rastafarian ideal of loving each other as we do ourselves. Manley carried a walking stick known as "the Rod of Correction" he got from a trip to Africa. Though it was never proven, the stick was believed by many Rastafarians to be gifted to him by Haile Selassie. Above all, Manley acknowledged the black nationalists' assertion that in order to make progress in Jamaica's development as an independent nation, the social and political condition due to its history of slavery and colonialism had to be addressed. Manley recognized the great following Rastafarianism and reggae had sustained because of this concept. Thus, another significant advancement in his campaign was his friendship with adored Rasta reggae singer, Bob Marley. It is said that the two became quite close, and Marley even joined of a group of reggae artists that traveled across the island alongside the PNP during the 1972 elections (Bedasse 85). Manley's embrace of Rastafarianism and reggae gave the genre a new political significance. Marley was already a reggae icon in Jamaica and had always represented the voice of the poor urban class Rastafarians and black Jamaicans. However, his music now saw a much larger role in the political scene in Jamaica, and though he was not a political man, he took advantage of this to spread the Rastafari message. "War" is one of many of Marley's songs that call for revolution,

social change, and equality that was released during the 1970s. Marley continued to use his platform to promote Rastafarian ideals and equal rights for African-Jamaicans, and in turn, Manley was able to successfully win the election and communicate to the people that he was going to bring about the long-awaited change in Jamaica.

“War” was released during the rise of political violence following Manley’s re-election in 1976, serving as an attestation of the war Marley witnessed in his own country. Michael Manley wanted to see Jamaica take on more democratic socialist form of government, believing that this system would best quell the rising unemployment and poverty rates in the country. He called for some redistribution of the wealth and communicated a desire to make allies with Cuba, much to the displeasure of Jamaica’s previous capitalist allies, the U.S., Canada, and Great Britain.

Jamaica’s upper and middle classes, the more conservative JLP, and foreign countries did not take kindly to Manley’s socialist concepts and changes. In his article, “The 1976 Parliamentary Election in Jamaica,” Carl Stone explains the growing political strife between the PNP and JLP and the political upheaval that would follow. The 1976 election saw a much different reaction from the last, and the PNP’s victory was not as celebrated as in the 1972 election. The JLP took every opportunity to highlight the PNP’s unsuccessful programs and socialist agenda. “On socio-economic conditions it attacked the governing PNP for failing to reduce unemployment and it suggested that the PNP’s socialist and anti-capitalist ideology was increasing unemployment by frightening away foreign capital and freezing local capitalist investment” (Stone 251).

Opposition between the two parties and its members soon grew into aggression. The 1976 election saw an upsurge in gang violence through the use of guns. Fatal shootouts between rival political members resulted in the injury and death of over a hundred citizens (Stone 254). The violence that Jamaica experienced is an unfortunate result of the war of racial oppression

Marley's song describes. Both of the parties' founders had started their political movements with the intention of helping poor black Jamaicans achieve social equality. However, their differences in political strategy and competition for political power resulted in Jamaica's own people turning against each other.

Analysis of the Music and Lyrics

The fact that the speech is sung in the reggae genre connects it to Jamaica's history of colonialism, as well as African-Jamaican resistance to colonialist ideals that continued after independence. Reggae finds its origins through the overcoming of British colonialism. In Gordon's dissertation, *Presenting Jamaican Folk Songs on the Art Music Stage: Social History and Artistic Decisions*, he describes how Jamaican folk music and culture were suppressed under European rule, but were eventually rediscovered and embraced by African-Jamaicans as an art form and a crucial part of their identity after independence. For centuries, Africans were disconnected from their traditions due to the mixing of tribes on plantations and the European-dominated society repressing any emergence of African culture. One of the only times African folk music was permitted by slave masters was during work in the fields, as slave owners felt it would make the working day go by faster and thus help the slaves work more efficiently. Folk songs were also used for worship, entertainment, and as a way for slaves to communicate with one another since talking during labor was prohibited. It was not until after Jamaica's independence that a new artistic interest was found in folk music. Mento music in particular received much attention from Jamaican musicians. In his dissertation, "*Mento, Jamaica's Original Music*": *Development, Tourism and the Nationalist Frame*, Neely states that the origins of mento are obscured, with some musicians simply claiming it to be from Africa and others not being able to give any answer and just remember growing up with the music. He states that

mento's mysterious background "perhaps suggests that the word itself was not an African linguistic retention, but a product of the new-world African experience in Jamaica" (Neely 52). What further advances this claim is that mento music is often described as having an African rhythm and a European melody. It is a "creolized" musical genre. However, as Neely suggests, this adoption of European elements to the music that African-Jamaicans played might not have been entirely out of admiration. The practice of African-Jamaicans playing European tunes dates back to the 18th century when slaves played European music for their masters. This attempt to please the upper European class continued after emancipation as Jamaican musicians incorporated familiar European melodies into their music. This idea of a creolized musical genre played right into the country's initial strive for a creole identity during postcolonial Jamaica, and mento music was encouraged amongst musicians as a way of actively creating Jamaica's culture. However, with the rise of reggae in the 1970s, this European influence shifted to a more American one, particularly African American. Reggae was considered a modernized version of mento, however, it did away with European melodies and replaced them with American soul and rhythm and blues. Reggae was doing away with not only the musical elements but overall influence of Europe in African culture. The new genre reflected the pro-black era of the 1970s with the introduction of African American-originated musical genres. "With these developments, a pan African aesthetic developed around reggae music that valued Africaness but marginalized local creolized genres considered artifacts of colonialism" (Neely 314).

Bob Marley asserts the African-Jamaican experience of war through the song's musical genre and structure. "War" follows closely to the usual reggae style and elements. A defining feature of reggae music is the unique arrangement of instruments and genres and the way in which they operate with one another. For the most part, and in the case of "War," reggae

maintains the 4/4 tempo from mento. The bass will at times function as the beat, allowing the drums to have more freedom and play different rhythms. This is seen in “War,” as the low strumming of the bass sustains the time while different drumming rhythms can be heard throughout the song. Another cherished component of reggae music is the horn sections. This is one of the most significant and enjoyable elements of “War,” as the song precedes with a strong horn arrangement which follows after every couple of verses and is played simultaneously with other verses. An aspect of “War” that is popular in reggae music is call and response, a musical element adopted from R&B. Throughout the song, subtle female voices can be heard shouting the word “war” in the background as Marley recites lines from Selassie’s speech. The guitar elements in reggae are influenced by blues as well and are usually played in a staccato. The single, constant, and distinctive guitar strum is a notable characteristic of “War.” Another aspect of reggae that draws from mento folk music is that the tunes created should inspire dancing within its listeners. However, this is not necessarily found in “War.” The song is quite slow and melodic, as if it is telling its listeners to sit down and contemplate its message. This alteration in the musical style emphasizes the seriousness of the message Marley is trying to communicate. “War” is only one of many of Marley’s protest songs calling for the reclaiming of human rights and an end to racism. A choice comparison to “War” is his song, “Get up Stand Up.” The message behind this song bears similarity to “War,” with an overall and generalized message of civil rights with Rastafarian undertones. However, “War” seems to communicate a more serious tone. He uses the words of Selassie whom he adamantly respects as a teacher and religious figure in order to convey this important message, and it gives the song a sort of urgency and gravity that is felt more so than in the more upbeat and positive “Get Up Stand Up.” In “War,” the defending of people’s rights and fight for equality is not all “rising up and banding together.”

The reality of this battle is brutal and at times daunting and seemingly hopeless. However, his emphasis on the line “we have confidence in the victory of good over evil” communicates that though the task is formidable, we must persist to eradicate this social ill that has corrupted the world.

The lyrics in “War” are not purely from Selassie’s speech, as Marley made alterations to the lyrics that integrate his Jamaican message and others that acknowledge the rest of the world. The most notable changes are the additions after each verse: “Me say war” or “Dis a war.” The language used in these lines are Patois, an English-based creole dialect spoken by the African diaspora in Jamaica, most notably Bob Marley. His incorporation of the Jamaican dialect is a way to communicate the “war” happening in Jamaica. Patois originally was used as way for slaves and slave owners to communicate and became a common dialect amongst African-Jamaicans after slavery. However, the dialect was looked down upon by the upper classes in social situations and was attributed to the poor and uneducated after Jamaican independence. Thus, this unapologetic use of the dialect shows Marley’s pride and embrace of his African-Jamaican identity, as was shared by other African-Jamaicans in the 1970s. It also preserved the perspective of reggae as music for the common man. The personal pronoun in “Me say war” provides a more individualistic perspective to the speech by declaring what Marley has observed in his life is this “war.” Though Marley does create a version of the speech that is characteristically Jamaican, he still acknowledges the fact that different groups of people from all over the world are suffering racial injustices. He communicates this with the lyrical alterations and additions he makes in the second half of the song. The lines after the fourth and fifth verses are, “everywhere is war.” This transition from a personal perspective to a more inclusive one is how Marley maintains Selassie’s original worldwide audience. Marley also adds his own lines in

the sixth verse: “War in the east. War in the west. War up north. War down south.” This acknowledges how people are suffering from this “war” all over the globe. The seventh verse, however, ties the song’s message back to the Jamaican experience. Though Selassie was speaking to all the countries in the United Nations, like Marley, he still included his own continent’s and people’s experiences of racial oppression. The original line from the speech reads: “And until that day, the African continent will not know peace. We Africans will fight if necessary, and we know we shall win as we are confident in the victory of good over evil.” Marley makes a change to this line so slight, it is easy to miss, yet the meaning behind it is significant. He changes the line, “We Africans will fight if necessary” to “We Africans will fight. We find it necessary.” As Selassie had already fought a war with the Italian army, he was communicating that though he is a peaceful man, he will not stand by as his people’s lives and rights are threatened and will defend them again if necessary. In a sense, Marley is saying the same thing. However, he makes a point that the time to defend African equality is now and not in some unforeseeable future. The line before this one is the addition “Rumors of a war.” This can be read as a reference to the political and gang violence in Jamaica that was prevalent during the 1976 election. Marley is stating that the violence that comes with racial oppression is already underway in Jamaica. The people in Jamaica are quite literally fighting a war amongst themselves for the sake of achieving what they believe will bring about social equality. These aforementioned changes are a Jamaican twist to the speech that offer a powerful message for developing Jamaica about the injustice and violence the nation faced at this time.

Conclusion

As mentioned before, “War” is a multifaceted song with multiple layers and symbolisms to be uncovered. In order to fully appreciate the song’s meaning, it is crucial to understand Jamaica’s history, social issues, and the significance of Rastafarianism and the reggae genre. The complexity of the song parallels the complexity of the issue of worldwide racial oppression. Marley perfectly captures this ongoing fight for equality by equating it to a war. The song’s expression of the African-Jamaican struggle for equal rights reflects how the war of racial oppression occurs. A people are colonized, subjugated, and exploited for the colonizer’s benefit, and even after colonization, the hierarchy of race still manages to suppress the colonized group and prevents them from gaining any higher social standing or power. However, African-Jamaicans engage with their past of slavery and colonization in order to liberate themselves from it and advocate for social change within their country. During the time of “War’s” release, the African diaspora of independent Jamaica actively and openly celebrated their African identity and defended their rights. They had a prime minister who wanted to bring about social change through Jamaican politics and artists such as Bob Marley who advocated for their equality through Jamaica’s culture. Marley was more than a popular reggae musician. He served as a symbol of hope and revolution for Rastafarians and Jamaicans. Though Marley does inspire aspiration within his people, he still acknowledges the inevitable challenges that will be faced in this fight for equality. He was aware of the violence and destruction that occurred as a result of the “war” in Jamaica, as the country witnessed many lives lost due to the attempt for social change. This change cannot come about in a short period of time and without difficulty. However, as Marley and Selassie convey, human equality is a goal that cannot be abandoned. What is admirable about Rastafarianism is that they found meaning within their struggle and

developed a perseverance and confidence in the eventual attainment of peace and justice. Marley takes this belief further by encouraging Jamaicans to call for change within their country. Just like Selassie, he had a specific message to share with his people, but also a more general one to the rest of the world. The war of racial oppression effects every corner of the world. As Selassie expressed, it is everyone's responsibility to put an end to racial oppression and discrimination. This goal cannot be achieved unless everyone is committed. Though the song was written and released during a particular time period and holds a significant meaning to the country it was released in, every other nation around the world shares a similar experience. The fact that "War" is so personalized actually makes it all the more powerful in its message. It communicates that Jamaica has also experienced "war," but lives every day to fight against it. It inspires other nations to join them in the quest for equality for their own people. Bob Marley is such an inspiration not only to black Jamaicans, Rastafarians, politicians, and other citizens of the island, but to anyone who hears his music. Marley effectively used his platform and influence in order to preach peace, love, and equality to all people, and he will always be remembered for his contribution to his country and the world.

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