Entry on Reggae

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Currently, the movement includes three major groups, which are known as “houses” or “mansions”: the House of Nyabinghi; the Twelve Tribes of Israel; and the Bobo Ashanti. The House of Nyabinghi is an ascetic sect whose motto is “Death to black and white oppressors.” The Twelve Tribes of Israel, which took hold among middle-class Jamaicans in the 1970s, revere their late founder, Vernon Carrington, as a prophet. (He was known as Prophet Gad.) The group is the most doctrinaire of the three and places a strong emphasis on the Bible. It also has a stated policy of including all races. The fundamentalist Bobo (pronounced Bob-bo) Ashanti sect members wear turbans and robes, and live in a utopian community called Bobo Hill in Jamaica, where they raise money by selling handmade brooms. Charles Edwards, also known as Prince Edward Emmanuel Charles VII, founded the group in the 1950s and is seen as part of a Holy Trinity that includes Haile Selassie and Marcus Garvey.

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References

REGGAE
Reggae was born in Kingston, Jamaica, in the 1960s from the melding of musical genres such as jazz, blues, rocksteady, ska, calypso, and rapsodie. In 1968, Frederick “Toots” Herbert, of Toots and the Maytals, coined the term “reggae” in his first album entitled *Do the Reggay*. Yet the word reggae may have derived from either “rega,” the name of a Bantu-speaking people on Lake Tanganyika in former Zaire; from the Kingston slang term “streggae,” used to identify a sex worker; or from the term “rege,” which means “danse” in the Soninke language of West Africa.

The development of reggae was the masterpiece of three men: Robert (Bob) Nesta Marley, Bunny Livingston (later known as Bunny Wailer), and Peter Tosh. These three pioneers of reggae were the original members of the Wailers band, which crafted a new music that combined traditional rhythms stemming from mento, calypso, and ska with the new sound of American blues and jazz, and rocksteady. The synthesis of these musical genres was heavily influenced by the cultures that enslaved Africans brought to the Americas centuries ago.

Despite its multiple origins, reggae is primarily a music coming from the people. In a June 1976 interview, Bob Marley, the legendary singer who popularized reggae, said, “Reggae say[s] something. But it can only mean something if it mean[s] something to the people who make it and the people who listen.” Marley’s statement shows that reggae is the property of the masses, since its meaning is shaped by the people who hear it, feel it, and live it. In this sense, reggae is a universal music that has a message that reaches people from all over the globe. Yet, despite its universality, reggae is primarily a product of African-Jamaican identity, because it evolved from the local resistance of black Jamaicans against racial, economic, social, and cultural oppressions since slavery. This message of resistance against domination reaches out to black people from the Americas, Africa, and other parts of the world who continue to suffer from the legacy of slavery and colonialism.

Reggae teaches the message of liberation, resistance, respect, brotherly and
sisterly love, and hard work that black people have learned from centuries of hardships in "Babylon," a word that identifies the West and every other place where black people continue to suffer. Following on the footsteps of their pioneers, reggae artists from Jamaica and around the globe travel across the world on a regular basis, spreading the message and wisdom of Rastafarianism, which is a term that refers to the philosophical and religious teachings of Haile Selassie (of Ethiopia) and Marcus Garvey (of Jamaica).

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See also: Calypso; Garvey, Marcus; Jamaica; Jazz and the Blues; Marley, Robert Nesta; Popular Music, American Influences on African; Sélassie I, Haile

References

REGGAE, AFRICAN

Reggae music in Africa owes its birth and evolution to the African Diaspora, and to the influence of Jamaican reggae. Just as Africa impacted the music of the New World in the aftermath of the transatlantic slave trade, the Americas and Caribbean, particularly Jamaica, introduced reggae to Africa. Africans were receptive to this music style because they could easily relate to the historical experience of Jamaicans. The beats and rhythms of reggae music are an aesthetic link between Africa and Jamaica.

Reggae made its initial impact in Africa during the mid-1970s, and since that time it has served as a major force in urban pop music scenes of numerous African nations, especially Anglophone countries. The reasons for the popularity of reggae in Africa range from the structural and functional affinities that exist between indigenous African musical forms and reggae, the eclectic background and purpose of reggae, the potent appeal of the music's religiously inspired and sociopolitically charged lyrics, and the eagerness on the part of young people in Africa to identify with a black transnational pop music idiom. Some have argued that the popularity of reggae among West African youth developed out of their growing dissatisfaction with both the over-produced, high-tech Western disco/rap/funk pervasive in urban nightclubs and the perceived stuffiness and rigidity of traditional music in the 1970s.

Africans can easily relate to the socioeconomic and political conditions in the black Diaspora. African territories had to fight for freedom, and today the independent states are fighting against neocolonialism, oppression, exploitation, corruption, and material deprivation. The messages and philosophies of reggae music are a means of protest. As a result of the similarities between the historical and contemporary realities of Africa and Jamaica, the images and tribulations found in the lyrics of reggae make it very attractive to the African people. As with Jamaican reggae, African reggae became a medium for telling about the struggle of the oppressed peoples of Africa—their stories and their trials and tribulations. Soon the music began to blossom in most parts of Africa, including Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambie, Ghana, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, and South Africa.

Like everywhere across the globe, Bob Marley served as the foremost apostle of reggae on the African continent. African reggae musicians frequently cite Marley as