

b/n Bob Marley
1983 - 1989

National Library of Jamaica



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On the first anniversary of
his exodus, Rising Sun
salutes the Hon. Robert
Nesta Marley, O.M.

OLD PIRATES YES THEY ROB I
SOLD I TO THE MERCHANT SHIPS
MINUTES AFTER THEY TOOK I FROM THE
BOTTOMLESS PIT
BUT MY HAND WAS MADE STRONG
BY THE HAND OF THE ALMIGHTY
WE FORWARD IN THIS GENERATION TRIUMPHANTLY
ALL I EVER HAD IS SONGS OF FREEDOM
WON'T YOU HELP TO SING THESE SONGS OF FREEDOM
CAUSE ALL I EVER HAD REDEMPTION SONGS, REDEMPTION SONGS
EMANCIPATE YOURSELVES FROM MENTAL SLAVERY
NONE BUT OURSELVES CAN FREE OUR MINDS
HAVE NO FEAR FOR ATOMIC ENERGY
CAUSE NONE A THEM CAN STOP THE TIME
HOW LONG SHALL THEY KILL OUR PROPHEYS
WHILE WE STAND ASIDE AND LOOK
SOME SAY IT'S JUST A PART OF IT
WE'VE GOT TO FULFILL THE BOOK
WON'T YOU HELP TO SING, THESE SONGS OF FREEDOM
CAUSE ALL I EVER HAD, REDEMPTION SONGS, REDEMPTION SONGS
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CAUSE ALL I EVER HAD, REDEMPTION SONGS
THESE SONGS OF FREEDOM, SONGS OF FREEDOM
CAUSE ALL I EVER HAD, REDEMPTIONS SONGS

BOB LOVES



REGGAE AND REVO

THE ROLE OF

ROOTS — 'UP ROOTED'

Within the Third World, there is a unique social phenomenon. It was created by one of the terrible diaspora of history. The slave trade, stretching in the main from the 17th to the 18th Centuries, uprooted millions of Black Africans depositing them throughout the Caribbean, the United States and the more northerly regions of Latin America. There our ancestors were subjected to the most systematic and sustained act of deculturation in modern history. Here was no oppression of a people on their native soil. The slave had no familiar ancestral earth into which to plant his feet and dig his toes while waiting for the tide of oppression to recede or the opportunity for rebellion to present itself. The slaves were uprooted, detribalised, de-named, de-humanised. The only thing the oppressor could not take away was their humanity.

Through it all, music was one of the means through which the slave held on to the past and endured the present. Any discussion of the BLUES, the CALYPSO, the REGGAE begins at this point. Like all folk music, it is all essentially commentary; but what is unique about this commentary is that it reflects in every thought, in every musical pulse, something to do with survival and accommodation. The children of the diaspora struggle for a place in society to this day. Worse, they struggle for their identities, misled as the slave ships made their way to the New World through the MIDDLE PASSAGE. Therefore, their commentaries must deal with these realities.

CALYPSO

THE CALYPSO, exclusively Trinidadian, is cynical, satirical, amoral and often savage. The Trinidadian masses survived at least until the 1960's by a collective disregard of both the laws and the values of the oppressor. The individual spirit endured its degradation and transcended its hopelessness by laughing at everything including itself. But this was not the laughter of gentle good nature, illuminating a comfortable companionship. This was laughter like a weapon, like a rapier or a razor honed in centuries of surviving.

BLUES

THE BLUES have some of this but are more reflective of the consciousness of oppression. Perhaps, the American black has always known his situation to be closer to the hopeless.

REVOLUTIONARY POSSIBILITY

Of them all, the REGGAE is the most explicitly revolutionary. It is commentary;

satirical at times; often cruel; but its troubadours are not afraid to speak of love, of loyalty, of hope, of ideals, of justice, of new things and new forms. It is this assertion of revolutionary possibility that sets reggae apart. It has evolved from the original folk form of the MENTO. From this there sprang SKA which began a sort of marriage between American Rhythm and Blues, Gospel and the indigenous mento form. The mento itself often was driven on the strong beat of the digging song which helped the workers to survive the monotony of long hours with the pick-axe. It was unlikely, therefore, that the beat of Jamaican music would be more than influenced by Rhythm and Blues and would certainly never entirely succumb to it. In due course, SKA yielded to ROCK STEADY, the entire period of transition providing its heroes like the late great trombonist DON DRUMMOND. But we were still in transition. Then it all came together with REGGAE.

When one listens to everything from mento to reggae, one sees in instant reflection the dilemma of identity. The strong African root is there, particularly in the rhythm and the use of drums. But so great was the act of cultural destruction that all of the infinite subtlety and sophistication which sets African drumming apart, is missing. I can remember the first time I heard an authentic African drummer, I was astonished and for a while had difficulty in understanding what was going on, so intricate were the variations, so complex the rhythmic embroidery around the central driving beat. In Jamaica, only the central beat has survived. EVEN THIS SURVIVAL IS A MIRACLE IN THE CIRCUMSTANCES.

The most fundamental question that arises about reggae is: how did it become so explicitly and positively political. The greatest of the calypsonians, the MIGHTY SPARROW has journeyed into political commentary; but even he, quintessentially a part of the Trinidadian environment, although born in Grenada, has stopped short of the assertion of rights, has not essayed a positively revolutionary call. BY CONTRAST, THE GREATER PART OF BOB MARLEY IS THE LANGUAGE OF REVOLUTION.

CLAIMING A FUTURE

Middle class intellectuals had claimed a future for the Caribbean. But this was not reflected in the spontaneous music of the ghetto.

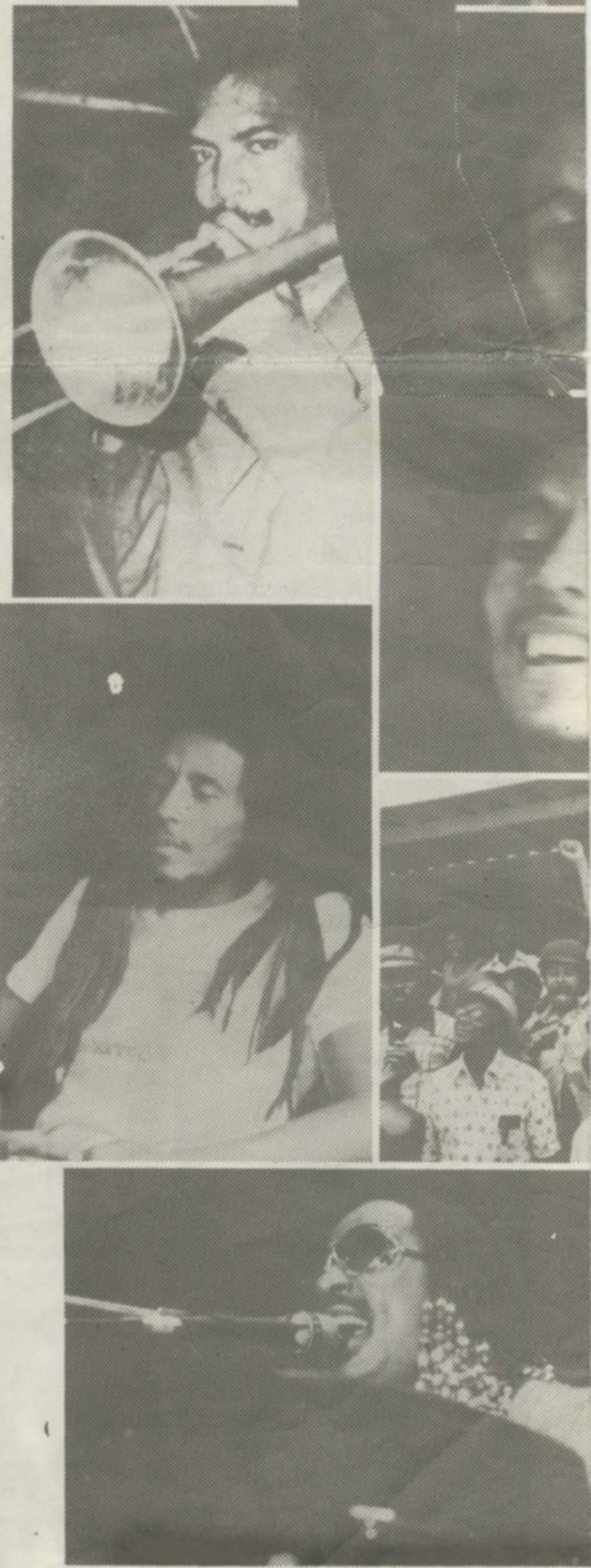
WHAT GAVE MARLEY THE COURAGE TO GO BEYOND MOCKERY TO HOPE:

TO TRANSCEND COMMENT AND ASSERT RIGHT? TO FIND THE ANSWER TO THIS YOU MUST ENQUIRE: DID BOB MARLEY REDEEM HIS IDENTITY BY RE-CROSSING THE MIDDLE PASSAGE AND RE-ENTERING THE KINGDOM OF HIS PAST? HE WHO KNOWS HIS PAST CAN BELIEVE THAT THE FUTURE IS THE TERRITORY OF HOPE. HE WHO KNOWS NOT HIS PAST FINDS THAT IN SPITE OF HIMSELF, HIS FUTURE IS, IN HIS MIND, A BURIAL GROUND. FAITH BEGINS WITH AN ACCEPTANCE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF CONTINUITY. IF YOU CANNOT SURVEY A CONTINUITY INTO YOUR OWN PAST, YOU CANNOT BELIEVE IN A CONTINUITY INTO YOUR OWN FUTURE. MARLEY HAD THAT FAITH

RASTA — THE FAITH

How did Bob Marley successfully undertake this journey into his past which released him to a belief in his people's future? The answer is: Rastafarianism. I enter into no controversy about people and their faith. To each his own. But it is inextricably a part of the psychodrama in which the black of the diaspora are enmeshed that their traditional, Christian faith is visualised in white terms. Inevitably and obviously, a religion that was spawned at the very centre of white civilisation expresses its faith through familiar symbols. If the servants and children of God are white, they will think of both God and Christ in terms of self-image. Therefore, the God that emerges will be imagined to be white. Every church has its sculpture and its painting expressed in white terms. So the children of the slaves begin with a visual contradiction. To compound the problem, the particular expression of Christianity was first the creature of the oppressor. Yet, the children of the slaves need faith and have faith. They are sure there is a God and they are sure that somewhere that God is their God rooted in the land of the past and visualised in terms of their self-image.

Rastafarianism is a true faith in the sense that its believers have taken that step beyond mere rationality into the acceptance of a view of the unknown, unknowable and unprovable which is faith. To them Haile Selassie is the symbol of God on earth and God himself is as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. The true Rastafarian, therefore, has traced his identity beyond mere history and geography to the ultimate source of all things, for the believer, the Creator himself. BUT HE HAS ARRIVED AT HIS CREATOR THROUGH THE IMAGES AND THE SOIL OF AFRICA. BY THAT ACT HE HAS RE-DISCOVERED THE SELF THAT WAS MISLAID IN THE MIDDLE PASSAGE



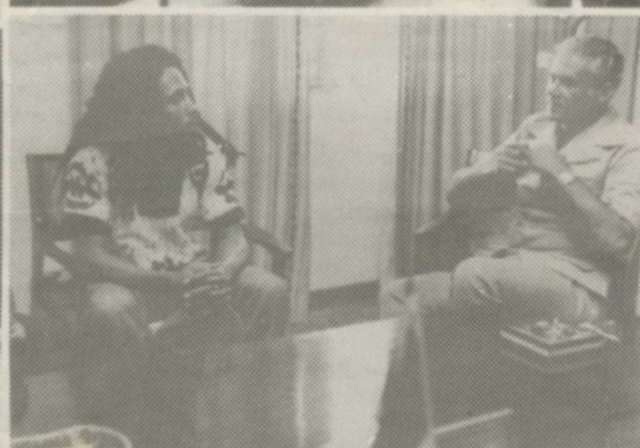
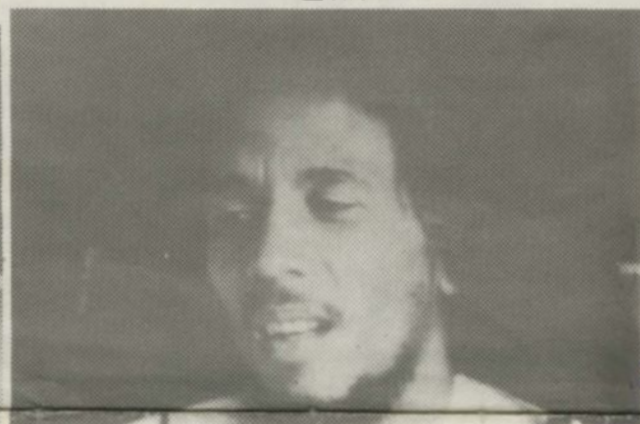
EVOLUTIONARY FAITH....

BOB MARLEY by Michael Manley

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF JAMAICA

ROBERT NESTA MARLEY O.M.

ROBERT NESTA MARLEY, Order of Merit (O.M.), super star, father and definitive exponent of reggae, was a Rastafarian. He had taken that journey. By that act he had solved his identity crisis. He had become a complete human being. In his completeness he could sing songs of compassion: "No Woman, Nuh Cry"; he could spit revolutionary defiance: "War"; he could embrace proletarian internationalism: "Zimbabwe".



AND HE COULD DO IT ALL WITH AN UNSELF-CONSCIOUS CONVICTION THAT MADE HIM A KIND OF SPONTANEOUS, UNCOMPROMISING REVOLUTIONARY, UNTOUCHED BY WEALTH, UNFAILINGLY GENEROUS, ETERNALLY UNSPOILT.

I AND I

I first knew Bob Marley in 1971, in the days of "Trench Town Rock". At this stage his music was still like visceral protest carried on the wings of a relatively uncomplicated, commentary on the ghetto. Throughout that year, he used to perform as part of a group of artistes who travelled all over Jamaica with me as the Party which I led prepared for the General Elections of 1972. Until that time my own political perceptions had reflected a mutually reinforcing marriage. On the one hand, there was the political theory which I had absorbed from my Father as a youth and had developed into explicit Socialist doctrine as a student in University. On the other hand, was some twenty years as an organiser and negotiator with the Jamaican Trade Union Movement. To this was now added a vital and new ingredient. I could never pretend that the lyrics of the protest music which were the driving motivation of reggae taught me things that I did not know. From an intellectual point of view, they were confirmatory of all that I believed as a Socialist, and have struggled against as a Trade Unionist. But I had not myself been born in the ghetto and was not personally a part of that experience. Reggae music influenced me profoundly by deepening the element of emotional comprehension.

STRUGGLE FOR CHANGE

I suppose a rough equivalent might be sought by a consideration of the influence of a writer like Dickens upon the sensibilities of English readers in the Nineteenth Century. In highly literate societies, the pen is a mighty instrument.

It cannot change the structure of classes, nor the relations between classes, because it cannot, of itself, change the nature and organisation of production. But it can pry loose from traditional class attitudes those extraordinary individuals who become a part of the process of political change in a society. Jamaica had produced a handful of great writers like GEORGE CAMPBELL, ROGER MAIS and VIC REID who had spoken to the issues of suffering and oppression. Their works helped create an awareness of the imperatives of change. But how many people read

them? Everybody listened to Marley and his school of reggae protestors. Certainly, I listened and was reinforced in the conviction that we had to STRUGGLE FOR CHANGE.

REGGAE GONE INTERNATIONAL

The invention of the gramophone, the radio and television have created a mass market for contemporary music. Where the symphony orchestra became the principal instrument for the dissemination of the great music of the classical European tradition, simpler forms of music would now have international currency. Technology brought into the market the broad masses of the people virtually everywhere on the globe. So there is no mystery about the means by which Bob Marley's music, and reggae along with it, have become familiar to the peoples of Europe, Africa and the Americas.

The real issue to be examined however, is why has reggae established an audience for itself among the myriad of competing musical forms which jostle for space in the communication apparatus? Pride of place is held by synthetic, escape music. With its bromides and anodynes it is there to pour balm on the souls that are either damaged by the failure to beat the economic system or bored because they have.

At the other end of the spectrum is the biting but parochial satire of the calypso which makes no impression on the international system whatsoever. Blues hold a significant place because sadness is a recognisable part of the human condition. In any case, America has produced most of the greatest technical virtuosos who have come out of the non-classical tradition. Clearly, reggae cannot, and is not going to compete with the escape music; but unlike the calypso, it has already carved a significant niche for itself. I can only hazard a guess that this owes much to two factors. Firstly, there is Marley himself: an authentic innovator, a genuine original in the sense that is true, say, of a STEVIE WONDER. Reggae has "gone international", therefore, partly on the back of Marley's gifts. But it must also be true that the protest of reggae, the positive assertion of moral categories goes beyond parochial boundaries. AMONG OTHER THINGS REGGAE IS THE SPONTANEOUS SOUND OF A LOCAL REVOLUTIONARY IMPULSE. BUT REVOLUTION ITSELF IS A UNIVERSAL CATEGORY. IT IS THIS, POSSIBLY, WHICH SETS IT APART EVEN TO THE INTERNATIONAL EAR.

BOB AND AFRICANISM

A SHORT INTERVIEW
WITH REX NETTLEFORD
BY RISING SUN

RS: Was the fact that Bob was a Rastaman a principal reason for his success?

Nettleford: I think this was most important — in fact, the appropriation by the Reggae complex of Rastafarianism gave to the whole Reggae music a total philosophy; the underpinning of a total world view, which took reggae out of the immediate concern of just giving pleasure to one of serious reflection on life and on the human condition.

I think that Bob Marley, intuitively, understood this and he would probably, in a funny kind of way, be remembered more for his lyrics than for his music. Because he took what were simple (in some instances we may say platitudes) and said them in a very special way which spoke to the yearning of a whole generation of Jamaicans and Caribbean people of African descent, who felt that for all the great leaps that we had made forward, in terms of Emancipation of slavery and self determination through political independence — that, in fact, the denigration of the African presence in the Caribbean and in the Western World had been a kind of commitment of Western civilization. And I think his onslaught against this massive force, which was against black people, gave him tremendous credibility and tremendous energy. I think that is part of the significance of Bob Marley.

RS: In a country like Jamaica where over 95% of our people are of African descent, would you say that Bob was able to make a contribution in the area of African culture bearing in mind that the African culture (in Jamaica) is still very much subordinate to the white European culture. Was Bob able, even for a while, to lift the African culture into the ascendancy?

Nettleford: Yes. If African means having Africa and the cultural heritage and patrimony of Africa at its centre — yes. Undoubtedly, Marley made a tremendous contribution here, because, I think, one of the fundamental problems of a society like this, is how do you give legitimacy to the products of the creative intellect and the creative imagination of the people of African ancestry in this part of the

world. Marley certainly did this because contrary to common belief, the form or the acquisition of formal symbols of authority, of participation in political and economic decision-making, blur the reality of the persistent denigration of things of African origin in the Western world.

Marley and all that gave him the source of energy, the Rastafarian Movement, questioned all the fundamental assumptions made by Western society about people of African descent. So, in this sense he certainly (through action), that is through the composition of music and the performance of what he created, he was able to show to the world the capabilities of the person of African descent to define himself, to create proper nouns for himself. This, of course, is a great achievement and in essence, a revolutionary act.

RS: Which of the lyrics mean the most to you?

Nettleford: "Emancipate yourself from mental slavery . . ." — that one line speaks a thousand things for us all. It goes to the roots of epistemology, the theory of knowledge; to anthology; the human condition. In that line we find a thousand and one meanings about the history and experience of people of African descent in the Western World.



The Hon. Robert Marley, O.M. being honoured in New York for his contribution to the Liberation Struggle in Africa.

THE MESSAGE OF BOB MARLEY

I am not one of those who claim to have recognised Bob Marley in the early days.

I vaguely remembered that he used to sing at Michael's meetings in 1972 and hearing that he had a tremendous gift of communication with a crowd even in the remote rural areas and then for some time I must have been thinking of other things until one day I saw a marvelous photo of him, and thought what a wonderful face — I now have many photos of him — there was something strangely spiritual about his face. As an artist, it appealed to me tremendously.

It was the face of a man with a deep and abiding faith — and then when I heard him sing "No woman, no cry", I knew here was something, here was someone, who carried a God-given message.

But there was another side to Bob Marley too, I think he was mischievous. He used to stay sometimes next door with a friend of mine and he had a little way of leaping over their joint fence and landing on my friend's porch! (He must have been practising his famous jump). Then he would sing or say a few words of a song and disappear over the fence again. My friend and his friends simply loved it and longed for him to stay with them, but no, he was gone.

Those days are a far cry from last week when someone speaking on JBC from the German Embassy said that Jamaica and Germany shared many things and not least he said is "Your Bob Marley. We love and admire him — especially the young people do".

Such is fame, such is success. The world knows Bob Marley.

But this never changed him. He still sang of the ghettos, and the sufferings and injustice of the poor. He never turned his back on his message of peace and love and the cry to help those who needed help most.

Great, Bob Marley, Great.

— Edna Manley

BOB MARLEY

Bob Marley was an outstanding Jamaican. Marley was an entertainer and a singer, a musician — but, there is much more to the man Marley.

In our process of decolonisation, many groups and individuals played significant roles. There were politicians and trade unionists who made the struggle at the political, economic and social levels; they were the scholars who raised the relevant ideas and clarified their implications. There was the masses who energised the struggle and ensured its ultimate success. Bob was a musician par excellence. He enervated the indigenous Jamaican musical form to full recognition locally and internationally. He produced a number of gold record albums — indeed, probably half a dozen or more. This in itself is a feat of outstanding merit. This is worth international acclaim!

Bob's message focussed primarily on the conditions and suffering of poor people all over the world and was an instrument, therefore, in broadening their consciousness. Equally, he addressed themes of social justice that challenged the conscience of the world community.

Marley single-handedly waged a struggle against oppressive institutions, not only against oppressive institutions but insensitive leadership and unequal relations. His message transcends all class, race and colour boundaries. He reflected much of the creative energies bottled up in the ghetto and he demonstrated a consistently high standard of excellence in his work. Above all, he called attention to the reality and the illusions of a divided society. He did that very eloquently.

So comprehensive has been his contribution to society that various interpretations have been given to his music and his songs. For some he is a revolutionary, for others his songs combine a timely call for principled action and just social organisations and for many others, his music represents a scholarly analysis of the general poverty of the human condition and how to make it better. As he said "cold ground was my bed last night". Let us reflect on that. In reality, Bob's music embodies all these concerns. What is more is that he represents a potential force for good.

— Tony Spaulding

PROPHET MARLEY

I have always regarded Bob Marley as an inspired revolutionary poet. His album "Uprising" which includes the words of Redemption Song, is not only reflecting material in terms of the prolific theology of the oppressed, but it enables to discern the times (political, cultural, historical, economic).



Bob Marley showed in his songs that there is only one history that is human history. This revolutionary prophet realized that the liberation of man in history is a concrete process, but this process is global and must happen where all oppressed peoples strive to regain dignity, personhood, manhood, through freedom and economic sovereignty.

— Rev. Ernle Gordon

MARLEY

Jamaica's cultural explosion as defined by the message and music of Bob Marley seems to have been temporarily stalled in its tracks with his passing. It awaits a new lyrical strength and sense of direction. Make no mistake, he was the master of reggae, sacrificing his life to transcend the music from its parochial confinement to today's international sound.

A day does not pass without my either humming or whistling one of his lyrics or summoning up the many memories I have of him. He was the heaviest spirit.

— Dermott Hussey