

Rasta Teacher:
Leadership, Pedagogy and the New Faculty of Interpretation

A Thesis
Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirement for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Cultural Studies

of
The University of the West Indies

by
Jalani Adwin Niaah
2005

Institute of Caribbean Studies
Faculty of Humanities & Education
Mona Campus

ABSTRACT

Rasta Teacher: Leadership, Pedagogy and the New Faculty of Interpretation

This study is about the leadership provided by Rastafari. This leadership is explored through a focus on Rastafari Elder Mortimo Planno, a man who describes himself as a rebel or a social outcast in relation to the wider society, indeed the *Earth Most Strangest Man*, who exercises leadership over some of the most marginalised members of Jamaican society. In a direct refutation of the assertion of a monolithic Western white supremacist consciousness, Ethiopianism is argued to be the philosophical location of this leadership, and the emergent worldview of the Rastafari designated a *modern Ethiopianist* praxis, particularly evident through its 'articulate' cultural action(s). The outcome of this practice is a new generation of teachers.

Through an examination of contemporary testimonies, literary, historical and biblical texts, as well as ethnographic research including extensive engagement with Mortimo Planno and the archives he has amassed over fifty years, this thesis presents the Rastafari Movement as a key contributor to new African leadership pedagogy and thus the creator of an indigenous knowledge system of higher learning. This cultural studies reading thus challenges those who reject the Movement's approach and purpose. It provides a more sober assessment of the numerous contributions brought to African Diasporans over the last eight decades by the Movement's universal conscientisation, which has been conducted primarily through philosophical engagement. As such, Trench Town is presented as a virtual city university, its Rastafari inhabitants, such as Mortimo Planno, its key faculty and social theorists. I argue that this understanding is what Planno calls for as a "New Faculty of Interpretation." My thesis asserts that this "New Faculty of Interpretation" has been the

primary contribution of the Rastafari movement of Kingston, to Jamaican culture and African Diasporan consciousness.

Key words: Rastafari; Ethiopianism; Mortimo Planno; Earth Most Strangest Man; Folk Philosophy; Trench Town, Cultural Studies; Jalani Niaah