

...Bob Marley as an African artist combined word music and movement. As African people we don't think of the poet separate from the musician, separate from the dancer. We see artistic production as multidimensional and this is one of the aspects of our shared culture that we can see defining us as African people wherever we find ourselves across the globe. Now one of the other issues Professor Martin brought out was the role of revolution in creating a Pan African consciousness. We know that even on the trek from the interior to the coast, African people rebelled against slavery. On the slave ship we rebelled, when we got to the plantation we rebelled at every stage. So that part of the Pan African consciousness is the sense of revolution; not allowing yourself to be turned into a commodity willingly, we resisted. Then another key element that Professor Martin brought out was the desire for the return to Africa as a powerful element in Pan Africanism. I am teaching a course at the University of the West Indies this semester called 'Reggae Poetry', and one of the songs I was lecturing on last week was Bob Andy's 'I've got to go back home'. And that going back home could be somebody from [the] country who went to town and discovered that town wasn't so hot after all and wanted to go back to country. But I saw that song as a kind of affirmation of the desire of Africans in the Diaspora to return [home]. When Bob Andy says 'if I have to walk, if I have to swim, I've got to go back home', and he talks about the 'sands of the other shore', so that when you listen to reggae music you can already hear in the music this desire for the return. And I think it is really important to focus on the lyrics because many times we dance to the music and we enjoy the power of the sound but we don't often times listen to the message in the music, so this is why I am teaching this course. So then the return to Africa, and then now having given us the solid foundation Professor Martin looked now at Marcus Garvey and Bob Marley and how they brought forward that Pan African vision. Garveyism, you know I am not going to go over any of that but just to show you that in Garvey's life work we see the embodiment of Pan Africanism. And in a later time Bob Marley carried forward that same vision as he says in 'Redemption Song', which we know he got the concept of 'emancipation from mental slavery' from Marcus Garvey, 'we forward in this generation triumphantly'.

In the feedback session after that powerful lecture, one of the issues that I thought was so important was recognizing our brothers and sisters from across the borders who have come in to share with us. So we had a brother and sister from Benin, who are originally from Guadeloupe, and their experience itself is one expression of this desire to return. They have returned and not only have they returned they are now investing their intellectual capital in building up a school. And I think what they said about the role of education and agriculture is something that we must value. Particularly the point the sister made about the kind of embarrassment that the children sometimes feel to come and say my Father is farmer. And she has to say no, the food production is the heart of it. Agriculture, the culture of the field is the basis for the culture of the mind. If you do not have good food in your body you cannot think, so we have to think about the role of the agricultural workers who produce the nourishment for us. And another important point that sister made was the importance of remembering history. Particularly Soweto, the 16th of June 1976.

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Now South Africa is a country in crisis, after ten eleven years of so called freedom, I am not so sure that things have changed as much as they ought to. And I gather that South Africa is not memorializing Soweto. Maybe this is part of the strategy of reconciliation, but reconciliation cannot mean forgetting. We cannot reconcile in a condition of amnesia. We have to reconcile while remembering the atrocities, because if we do not remember the atrocities they are going to happen again. So I think that was a very important point brought out by that sister. My little sistren, Ms. Donesha, a little firebrand. She gave us an upful celebration of our power to create unity. She said we cannot sit back and wait for somebody else to do it. One of the powerful points she made is that we have to start with ourselves. We can't expect anybody else to do for us. And she made the point that even a smile can make a big difference. Little actions can generate powerful consequences. I will come back to her a little bit later when we talk about the way forward.

Matt, well, you know you look at Matt and you say Matt is 'Babylon', but Matt is saying no, I am not 'Babylon'. Matt is saying that 'I' [he] represent one of the progressive forces that is trying to understand my position and the role that I can play in effecting radical social and political change. So I say big respects to Matt for the work that he is doing, the questions he raised "what is Babylon?" and he defines Babylon as that capitalist system, the exploitative system that says the most important thing is how much money I can ring out of any enterprise; you don't care about the people in the process the important thing is making money. And he made a very good point; money cannot buy peace, and capitalism turns human beings into consumers, commodities, tools of production, [and] tools of consumption. And I want to tie Matt's comments on that destructive process in with the testimony of our Australian brother who described himself before reggae as an empty shell. Maybe he was overstating the case, I am sure there was something in the shell that made it possible for him to reach out to reggae music. But for him reggae was more than just a commercial sound, reggae spoke to his soul. And I think this is why the capitalist system does, in a sense convert human beings into empty shells. And that is why I believe so many people in the so called developed world keep coming to the so called undeveloped world. Because they realize that in many ways we have kept alive a human spirit that they have lost with their material wealth. And I keep telling people hat I would rather live in Jamaica with my little pay than go to North America to get a big salary and to be constantly fighting racism, because that kind of constant fight has to destroy your spirit, and racism dehumanizes not just the victims but the perpetrators. Because as one of our novelists from Trinidad says in a powerful book called 'Salt', he says can you imagine how much work it must have been to be a plantation owner, to be an overseer, you have to be beating people all the time, it is hard work to be beating people into submission. And he is being satirical but he is really making the point that those systems of oppression also impact on the oppressor. So Matt then showed us the way in which Bob Marley's music for him has been an instrument of cross cultural communication, cross racial communication. It is able to reach out to people across some of the divisions that we consider to be natural and God given. And particularly Matt paid attention to the role of music teaching as a way of raising the consciousness of his students, because he

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wasn't just teaching them music. And an interesting question about the music came up in the discussion period – isn't this reggae music sort of very simple, monotonous, it's not really big music as such so you know, how are you going to be spending all this time on the music. And I thought Matt's answer was quite good, that some of the music that look so simple and so repetitive and monotonous are complicated by rhythmic structures that make them move away from the apparent simplicity of their surface meaning and so as a music teacher he both teaches music as well as the message in the music.

Well Professor Nketia as an elder is entitled to speak as long as he wants and entitled not just to chair but to do more than chairing. And Professor Nketia gave us a lovely mini lecture on some of the profound issues that I think we need to be raising in a symposium like this. Very profound question – what made Bob Marley such a global success? And what he said that I found so important was that Ghanaian musicians, Barbadian musicians, Guadeloupe musicians, Japanese...because all these peoples across the world have appropriated reggae, have taken it over as their own. What he is saying is, we mustn't just imitate Bob Marley, imitate the reggae musicians, do things the way they did. What we need to do is analyse the process; how were they able to make a major world success of this music that started in a little run down area of Jamaica that people would have dismissed as a ghetto – nuttin good can't come out of Trench Town. And what Professor Nketia was asking us to do is to really analyse what were these elements, not just copying. Because these days if you copy Bob Marley, you may not get any global success now, we've been there and done that. What do you have to contribute? And so what I think Professor Nketia was getting at was the need for us to understand the nature of the music industry now. Not to just copy, because although people say imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, flattery is not what you need to get you in the music business. It seems to me that one of the important elements in trying to answer the question that Professor Nketia raised, it seems to me that there was a political consciousness in the '70s in the world. It was a particular moment in world history, when liberation was a global concern. And reggae music fed into a global consciousness that we have to chant down Babylon. The 'flower power' people you know, white Americans and British and all kinds of white people saying the system is wrong. And they were able to now work with black people who were saying the system was wrong.

Now one of the things that people don't like to say, we've touched on it a little bit here, is that Kaya, the holy herb had a role to play in the spread of reggae. I went to a conference once in Ottawa and this fellow said to me imagine, you had a music, a global music and you had a system in which a drug had become sacrilised, had become the divine instrument through which you communicate with the spirit force. And we have to recognize that part of the appeal of Rastafari, was ganja. You know it gave ganja status. Now one of our musicians, Tony Rebel a DJ, has a very powerful line in one of his songs where he asks the Jamaica Tourist Board why are you using Bob Marley with a spliff to advertise Jamaica and if somebody on the street has a ganja spliff you going to arrest them. And they say look at the contradiction that Bob

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Marley as this global African is out there advertising Jamaica, associated with ganja but he is like a kind of designer dread almost, that Bob Marley can get away with doing something that people, ordinary people can't do. And one of the issues for me that that raises, is how is it that Bob Marley who in his time would have been dismissed as, the you know, the reprobate from Trench Town, over time has become seen as the epitome the classic exponent of reggae. And it has to do with the whole process of the way in which what seems radical in one period can then become ordinary, not quite as dangerous as it used to be, and the fancy word that they used is routinized, you know, it becomes everyday and ordinary. I am not saying that Bob Marley's message isn't relevant now because we see systems of oppression all over the world, but I am trying to get at the way in which at a particular period in time Marley's political consciousness catapulted him on the world stage, which it might not have done in a period of conservatism.

Another issue that we have to look at, and this is where we looking now at the relationship between capitalism and art. The role of Chris Blackwell was as a visionary producer, I would like to think of Blackwell as a capitalist with a conscience. Here is Blackwell with Jamaican roots, recognizing that reggae music was a powerful force. But he recognized as well that it had to be marketed in an efficient way. And if I understand my history of reggae properly, one of the things that Blackwell did was to move reggae from the single to the album. You didn't have albums before Marley and the Wailers. Packaging a single hit into a bigger product, an album a full scale, five six seven tunes on a side. So you know, Blackwell as a white Jamaican, had access to material resources and he was able to use his wealth to take Bob Marley and the Wailers to another level, that they might not have been able to do. It's interesting that Peter Tosh even for that wonderful concert, that peace concert where we have all of that tape of Bob Marley bringing Edward Seaga and Michael Manley together, Peter Tosh's politics was much more radical and Peter said he didn't want any foreign press taking pictures of him so of course we have no visual of Tosh speaking out at that concert. We have the lyrics, you know the words that he said, but maybe Tosh missed a moment to make the foreign press record him for posterity but you see Tosh was more hardline in a certain way than Bob Marley. And I think Bob was willing to allow himself to be used in the best sense of the word. He was able to recognize the potential from an alliance with Chris Blackwell, whom some people have wickedly called white sick, because of the sense of exploitation that they saw in this commercial relationship. Peter [Tosh], radical. Bunny Wailer, after a while Bunny said he was not going into any 'iron bird' [airplane], and you know, you cannot be selling a record internationally without going in 'iron bird'. So you know the Wailers kind of dropped out of the mix as well. So this question then of capitalism and the role of capitalism, and the role of Chris Blackwell's resources in making Bob Marley a global success relates to the question of the importance of local artists having the opportunity to get their work released which was raised in the discussion period. Because some of the artists are saying here that the producers are not taking them on, from you have a Rasta vibe, they don't want to have anything to do with you. And you think of 'The Harder they Come', those of you who have seen that movie you know the difficulty that the artist

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often has getting a producer to invest money in his or her talent. But I was very please to have a producer jump up almost immediately and say they can 'dis' the producers as much as they like but part of the problem is some of them don't have a product that you can really invest your money in. So as artists I think we need to be sure that we have invested in professionalism so that when we come to a producer, the producer can say yes this is a product that I can market. If Blackwell had not seen talent in Marley he would not have taken him up. So what we need to recognize then is the role of the producer and the artist is a joined responsibility and a joined commitment to quality that will result in the full accomplishment of the potential of the local music industry.

Now very quickly they the way forwards. These are some of the issues that I saw coming out of the day's session and it seems to me that the most important issue for us to deal with as we look at the way forward is the role of education. This kept coming up over and over again. And when I talk about education I am thinking of it as both formal and as Rastafari would say 'hartical'. What I am calling hartical people might call informal but I don't like the notion of informal because some of these supposedly informal ways of passing on knowledge are really quite formal, it's just that they don't take place in formal institutions like schools. So, when we look then at the role of education in the formal system, one of the things that I think we must recognize is that the school curriculum across the African world must be transformed. It must start from a Pan African perspective. And this means that children in Ghana must learn about slavery and children in the Caribbean must learn about slavery and we must have the same story. We cannot have one story in Ghana and another story in the Caribbean. In other words if we say the story of slavery is a disputed story – some people said they sell us, some people said they thief us, some people say we sell out, [and so on]. In other words, even if we are going to say that there are different versions of the story, children in Ghana and children in the Caribbean must know all the versions. There mustn't be an African history of slavery that radically challenges a Caribbean history of slavery, even if we have problems of saying who is to blame and who is responsible, let us openly address these issues of who is to blame, who is to be responsible because I believe that many of our traditional African chiefs were behaving then the way in which some of our politicians are behaving now, so it's not surprising. We know that our politicians sell us out all the time, so why would it be so hard to believe that some of the traditional chiefs may have sold us out. People in power are people in power and it is a question of how that power is used. We have a Jamaican proverb that says – when you go to Jackass yard you mustn't talk about long ears, that is the proverb we got in Jamaica it could apply anywhere, [for example] when you go to a Lion's domain don't talk about his tail or so. In other words, when you are a guest in somebody's company don't talk about their weaknesses. So what I am trying to get at is I believe that perhaps the school system here is not teaching African history, Pan African in a way that some of us in the Diaspora might want to see it done. But we also have the same problem in the Diaspora, because many Jamaican children don't know anything about Marcus Garvey either. And it seems to me that knowledge that is seen as dangerous knowledge sometimes gets repressed in the formal school system. So

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that is one issue so that the school curriculum across the African world must be transformed. This means the development of text books that give different stories. I was interested in Professor Martin's talk where he said that Africans got to America through the slave trade, but you know there is the whole other narrative that Africans came to the Americas before Columbus, that Africans came as explorers. Now it's not just a question of the development of textbooks, and Professor Martin's 'Majority Press' has been publishing books on Garvey that have become major textbooks in Universities across the world. I believe that this development of textbooks is very important and at the same time we have to focus on the distribution of existing materials. We have to develop the craft of musicianship through discipline, I want to big up Berklee University through Matt's initiative for setting up this opportunity for musicians from here to get an opportunity to experience another musical tradition, another way of learning music. The other issue is back to Donesha and the way she accepted the challenge of the role of the Rita Marley foundation, the Bob Marley foundation in creating workshop opportunities for people's musical abilities to be developed.

[Carolyn Cooper, speaking about Brother Mortimer Planner]
[Let me tell you a story]...they said that his heart stopped beating. So I said no hope of any recovery and they said no they have him on the ventilator but even if he comes back he is going to be brain dead. So you know we start to think where we going to have the funeral, tell them we can't have it too quickly because people from all over the world will have to come and so on. About six 'o' clock they call me back to say Brother Mortimer Planner's heart started to beat again and he was breathing. So the thing about it is when I went to see him two days later you would never believe that this is the man who should have been brain dead. So I say Brother Mortimer Planner you see they say 'if life was a thing that money could buy, the rich would live and the poor would die', well I say you just prove it. Because if you were not a Rastafari elder they would have sent you down to the morgue when your heart stopped. But because you are such an important man in the works, them just keep him on the ventilator and his heart just decide say mi nuh ready fi go yet, you know, and he has been going since then. When I went to see him, Brother Mortimer Planner was holding court in the hospital, chatting, not one inch of his brain gone anywhere. The story tells you about the nature of medicine and the way in which the medical industry discriminates between the rich and the poor, the important and the unimportant and it makes you realize that in Jamaica, at least, Rastafari have power to such a degree that somebody like Mortimer Planner is recognized as an elder and every penny that can be spent to keep Brother Mortimer Planner alive is being spent. The University has invested in him, he has been appointed a Senior Fellow, accommodation and housing are provided. So Rastafari trod to a certain level now where a Rasta in the university hospital is not going to be immediately pronounced dead.

I think we need to recognize that to some degree Mortimer had a major role to play in shaping some of Bob Marley's lyrics and so. He was a very powerful force in Marley's development. Then, when we talk about the hartical education, we have to

look at the role of the mass media as a form of education, radio, television. And I was very pleased with the speaker who suggested from the floor that translation of lyrics is a very important strategy because sometimes people do not understand the words that they hear. It is one thing with English and the various African languages but it also applies across the globe. I went to give a lecture in Frankfurt and it was interesting when people told me that when they first heard Bob Marley's 'No Woman no Cry' they thought it meant if you don't have a woman you won't cry; they did not understand that 'No Woman no Cry' was a song of consolation. It is important that even though Bob says that everybody has to listen to the music and get his own inspiration, sometimes it matters what the words say. And translation now becomes a very important form of popular education because Bob Marley's message can be made accessible to global audiences in a language that makes them fully understand the message.

One of the issues raised was reggae as a political message, why is it that Bob Marley receive so much persecution in his time, the ambush in the night. Donesha made the point that the politicians themselves recognized the power of the musicians to unite the people. The music is a force to unite people that has revolutionary potential. And this is why I think that Bob Marley has been turned into 'One Love' because 'One Love' is much easier to deal with than 'Chanting Down Babylon'. But one of the things I think we need to leave this symposium with as we try to add value to the music product is not just the concert but is the intellectual reflection. It is to remember that Bob Marley was a visionary who wanted equal rights and justice and sometimes in order to love people you have to beat them and get them back on the path of righteousness. Thanks for sharing in this occasion and I hope that as we go forward from here we can carry the message of Bob Marley and his work.