

**Address by Professor Matt Jensen**

[www.africa-unite.org](http://www.africa-unite.org)

## **Bob Marley - His Music; Music Is More Than Music!**

[Manley thought that]...the ideals that come from socialism would serve the people better, you know the average people on the street. But I was told by a Professor at the University of the West Indies, when I was in Kingston, about a month ago, he said you know Manley came back to office (in about 87) and when he came back he came back on a more sort of conservative platform and one of the first things he said was the market has won and my heart just, I have to sink to the floor when I hear that. So anyway I also think of that band Third World, singing 'Human Market Place'. So they say that slavery was abolished about a century and half ago but in this new system that I see and feel that is taking over, I feel like in one sense it is a strong as ever only now it seems that everybody is trying to sell everybody. You know, people trying to sell the guy standing next to you, the person standing next to you, your own mother. It is like there is this dragon that is like coming around and eating itself. I know they are sort of devastating images that I am bringing forth but again I think you need to know your enemy. A lot of great lyrics can come out of this kind of stuff that is for sure. So speaking of lyrics, some Bob Marley lyrics that are very appropriate to this is his tune 'Slave Driver'

'every time you hear the crack of the whip my blood in me runs cold, I remember the slave ship how they brutalized our very souls, today they say that we are free only to be chained in poverty, good God I think it's illiteracy it's only machine that makes money'.

Again that is five or six lines, he just sums it up so much what I was just talking about. You have got references to the slave trade, you have references to illiteracy certain types of illiteracy and to me it's quite a reference to the money making system it's all what's out there. It is only machine that make money we don't want to worry about that. Sometimes when I am writing lyrics and coming up with new music myself, you know I say this to my students a lot in my class I say you know if you are going to go out and create new music and it's in the reggae genre and you know about Bob Marley and you are trying to get to the truth of things the way Bob Marley did, it's very daunting because Marley almost said it all. Sometimes when I am writing some of my music and coming to them Marley's stuff comes into head and I change them up a little bit to maybe fit a current situation. I have had this idea of having some singers on a new CD I might be working on to instead of singing 'today they say that we are free only to be chained in poverty' to say that 'today they say that we are free only to be chained in prosperity'. So what I am kind of saying about this is I am not sure if it's the right thing to do to produce all the time especially when we are producing so much and it's not getting distributed properly which seems to be the problem.

And this leads directly into environmental degradation. I serve on a panel at Berklee where we talk and do a lot of research about the environment, which I think the degradation of the environment is an incredibly pressing problem that is out there. I think there was a cover story in the New York Times where they were talking about the polar ice caps melting and some big corporations were jumping up and down saying great we have another trade route [for the shipping of oil], that is a Babylon mentality for sure. If the polar ice caps melt this country would probably be under water.

**Address by Professor Matt Jensen**

[www.africa-unite.org](http://www.africa-unite.org)

So anyway a few of the things in my thinking about what Babylon really is, the things I just mentioned were real world things about maybe what we call the capitalist system. But of course what we talked about earlier [is that] it is a mentality. The Babylon system is a psychological, spiritual and ideological state that really results/resides in a deadly mix of fear and lack of awareness. And this is where we need to get in and help again harking back to the educational scene. All of you youngsters here we want to get in touch with them early. A couple other things about the Babylon system, I think about ways in which the system is maintained. There is the colonialist mentality of divide and rule. Then there is the old fashion use of force, those with the biggest guns have all the control and right now I am thoroughly disgusted with that mentality in my country [the U.S.A]. My vision is for music to be the force, the big gun is music. Again a perspective from my country about how the Babylon perspective is maintained, this may be a little bit different down here in this country and many "third world" countries in that you might have more time. In my country everybody is so busy, running from one job to the next trying to produce, make more money. There is so little time for you to sit back and meditate and pray and talk with your fellow man and fellow woman. And again since we are talking about this whole problem being idealistic, it starts in the mind. If you don't have time to think or talk or meditate, how are you going to change things? In my country you have people who have families, two children, two cars they have all these things that the world seems to want but they have no peace. They are running from one thing to another to another, it's a big thing where parents do not see their children because they are both working full time jobs they send their children to daycare centers and there is not a human connection going on there so much. So these are the downfalls of the "first world" and what I am calling the Babylon system. Really in my view the capitalist system does not recognize you as an individual person, it recognizes you as a unit of capital, how does that feel? You are a dollar bill that is all the system sees you as.

Now Brother Bob Marley knew about this on the deepest level and sang about it constantly and incessantly. This is why I am completely addicted to his music. He says something deeply in my soul. A few lyrics here that I am going to read about from Bob that underlie this point from 'Zimbabwe'

'to divide and rule could only tear us apart, in every man chest there beats a heart, soon we will find out who is the real revolutionaries and I don't want my people to be tricked by mercenaries'

and again from 'So much Trouble in the World',

'you see men sailing on their ego trips, blast off on their space ships, million miles from reality, no care for you no care for me',

summed up quite succinctly. When we had the press conference yesterday my coming down here is a great learning experience which I always seek to kind of understand first before I try to put out my feelings about things and I have been listening to everybody and seeing what has been going on on the streets. And one of the things that was brought up in the press conference yesterday, was that a problem here in Africa is that many Africans are still looking to the West (America, Europe) for aid, for organizational help even for food and shelter and what David Hind brought up as he put it '*it seems like every other shovel full you have got gold*

**Address by Professor Matt Jensen**

[www.africa-unite.org](http://www.africa-unite.org)

*in it'*, you have natural resources that can bring you, pay for the organizational help that you need, pay for the food and shelter that you need, but there is still this tremendous poverty. What is going wrong here? Talking historically, when you know your history you know your identity as the lyric goes in 'Rat Race'.

Way back at the end of the Second World War you had our President Harry Truman made a big warning talking about beware of the rise of the military industrial complex. This is military – guns, the industry owned by the few people at the top and then this coming together to form this colossus of power that is concentrated in the hands of a few people. This seems to be going wild and rampant in the world right now but way back at the end of World War II there were very amazingly high statesmen who knew about this and warned about it. I find that to be simultaneously refreshing that that was around for a while but also very disturbing because it gives you a comparison as to where things were.

Back in Boston on the National Public Radio, there was an interview with these guys who were very high in the business world who went to the Harvard University's business school and they talked very much about when they were in school the mentality was so we're entering the business school we want to go to business but what is most important still is to make sure that humanity is higher than profit making. And I dread to think that this is not the case anymore. Another interview on the same station was the guy from Hershey's chocolate around World War II was a very international corporate leader and he was very concerned in his corporation to watch out that people on the top that they did not get paid too much. Again we are talking about the distribution of wealth. Some lyrics from Bob that illustrate that are 'Ambush in the Night',

'see them fighting for power but they know not the hour, so they are bribing with their guns spare parts and money the military industrial complex, trying to belittle our integrity, they say that what we know is just what they teach us though political strategy they keep us hungry, when you going to get some food your brother got to be your enemy'. Again so succinctly put by Bob Marley.

In my performance studies class at Berklee College of Music, I audition 15 students every semester and they come as musicians. It is a band we have three horn players, four singers, two keyboard, two guitar, two hand percussionists and bass and drums. And it is a blast to have these great musicians show up and we spend the whole semester every week playing Marley's music. But not only do we do that, but I said we cannot just play the music we have to learn about Bob Marley's life so I lecture for an hour take them through Marley's life talk about politics, socialism, capitalism all these different ideologies to get to know the music better. And every semester I always ask my students, so are you glad that you had these lectures and you have learned about Bob Marley's life you learned about music as social protest, you learned about politics you related it to your life, you related it to what's going on. And they always are like wow this is an invaluable part of the class to raise your awareness of what is happening. So with that in mind I want to take a look at Bob's tune 'Dem Belly Full' from 'Natty Dread' – so far I have talked about Babylon being this system that is terrible – Now I want to talk about what is great about the

**Address by Professor Matt Jenson**

[www.africa-unite.org](http://www.africa-unite.org)

alternatives that I think we are all seeking here. It is very difficult to just choose one song because Marley's music, so many of his tunes just completely captivate this but from Dem Belly Full

'dem belly full but we hungry, a hungry mob is an angry mob, de rain it fall but the dirt too tough a pot a cook but the food nu nuff, we are gonna dance to Jah music dance, we are gonna dance to Jah music dance, forget your troubles and dance, forget your sorrow and dance, forget your sickness and dance, forget your weakness and dance, the cost of living get so high, rich and poor they start to cry, now the weak must get strong they say oh what a tribulation, dem belly full but we hungry, a hungry mob is an angry mob, a rain a fall but the dirt too tough, a pot a cook but the food nu nuff, we are gonna chuck to Jah music, we are gonna chuck to Jah music'.

So in thinking about this tune, Bob Marley's music and lyrics have so many interpretations of course 'them belly full but we hungry' what do you think of well this is talking about poverty stricken people who can't eat and the rich people who have a lot of money and food in their stomachs. But Bob says this about it, he says 'you belly is full but we hungry for the love of our brethren', food might be in your belly but there is more to living than just filling it; where is the love of your brother. So when I heard that, the hat came off even further. We are talking about love of our brother man and sister woman next to each other, which I of course did not think right off the bat. Another thing about this lyric, is he is talking about dancing to Jah Music and over and over again, forget your sorrows your sickness your weakness and dance. This is Bob's response to the Babylon system. Seems kind of ridiculous, how are you going to fight down Babylon by dancing? How is it that going to fight down Babylon? Thinking about this and talking to people about this really I think Bob saw this not even as a vehicle of resistance but an actual act, dancing is an act. I take a step back and I look at it, where the cultures, most of the music that I really love out there is the music that comes from the African diaspora, whether it is D'Angelo, whether it is hip hop stuff, I am very into Afro Cuban music, Kuti is one of my absolute favorites, James Brown, Parliament Funkadelic. What we are talking about is we are doing something that is not for the sake of making some money. A lot of these cultures, these 'third world' cultures that don't have money have each other have your creative minds have some time to think about it and do it. I play a lot of Afro cuban music. The people who come forth in this music grew up with a conga in their hands. when they would get together on Friday afternoons when their parents got back from work they would be out back with the barbeque going and the 'tel-lie-vision' did not come out, the congas and maracas and the claves and all the vocals came out. So the five year olds learned how to play music, it was part of their soul.

In the Babylon system you don't have time to sing. So when Bob sings about dancing it is really expressing yourself. Like carnival in the Caribbean, what a show of creativity. We human beings are creative, if our creativity is stifled then we are no where, you children here I hope you are getting studies in creativity. So really music and art to me is the key to all of this. I have these visions of the entire society being musical and artful first and profit making is second. We are talking about using your creativity and being free with it. To me the Babylon system as I described it earlier really cuts into that and makes it less free. We are looking for real freedom here,

**Address by Professor Matt Jensen**

[www.africa-unite.org](http://www.africa-unite.org)

true freedom through music and the great vibrations. I want to share with you that at the Kumasi concert three nights ago I was standing at the front and they had let the entire crowd in who was outside 15-20 thousand people. When the Marley Brothers came up on stage to perform their tune 'Africa Unite' and everybody was just jumping. This one guy grabs my hand and another guy grabs his hand, and there are three hands up in the air just jumping. And I know that I am a vast minority in the crowd in terms of race and it was such a heartfelt cross cultural experience and a tear came to my eye. This for me as a musician when I see that and feel that on stage that is why I want to be a musician. This is what we are looking for this if the feeling that we are trying to get across to people. This is what I am after this is what Bob Marley's music has done what his bloodlines did to us last night. It is just transcendental. Whether you are Rasta or not I think that the music, arts, creativity is what we have to hold onto and we got to find the support through our friends and family, our fellow musicians and artists, through symposiums like this through concerts that we hear to keep this vibration going amongst us and stay unified in it. Because sometimes when you get in that Babylon system vibe it wants to take you down so far and make you worry too much about what you are going to do next and how you are going to survive. We want to keep part if not all of our minds and hearts in that creative space and to bring that forward. I was saying that with a lot of Marley's music I will read to the lyrics and try to bring them forward to some interpretations that come from today. So these are the lyrics to 'Rat Race' with some of my little differences and additions

'Oh what a rat race, this is a rat race, oh what a capitalist race, it's such a rat race, some are lawful, some are bastards some are jackets, oh what a rat race, some a gogon, some a hooligan some a ginnigog in this ya rat race, when the cat's away the mice will play, political violence in Iraq city yeah, don't involve me in your say say say cause I don't work for no Enron USA, when you think its peace and safety a sudden destruction collective security for surety yeah, don't forget your history, know your destiny, in the abundance of water the fool is thirsty'.

Here are some verses that I wrote

'How long can our spirits maintain the shallowness and lack of meaning that the sale of everything forces upon us, how long can the earth maintain the lack of humility that our market driven minds have forced us to accept, you got the Coke race you got the Pepsi race you got the McDonalds race, it's just a rat race, mass media race, archbishop race, RealiTV race, it's just a rat race, you got the horse race, you got the dog race, you got the human race but this is a rat race, oh it's a disgrace to see the human race in a rat race'.

With that in mind I encourage you all as musicians. What great spiritual and artistic leaders really give to us is that they demand that we really get to know yourself better. So I leave you with this Bob says 'Say Something' in the song 'Could you be loved'. So Say Something!