

**Rastafari and Judaism:
Philosophy, Politics, Theology
Phil 3210.01 / Rel 3000.01 / JS 3000.001
Professor Lewis Gordon
Time: Mondays, 3:00 PM–5:40 PM
Fall 2009
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Office hours: Mondays: 10:00 AM–11:30 AM**

This course explores the philosophy, history, politics, and theology of Rastafari, one of the Caribbean's most influential and often misunderstood liberation movements. The influence of Judaism, Jewish philosophy, and Jewish politics on Rastafari is often overlooked, even in the face of Rastafari Zionism, which looked to Africa in general and Ethiopia in particular, and in terms of the birth of the movement on an island where Jews live in ways that transcend some of the racial and ethnic categories of North America and Europe. There is also the influence of Rastafari in contemporary Israeli culture, especially and perhaps ironically between Ethiopian and some Orthodox Jews. There are, as well, the relationship of *kashrut* to *ital*, ancient purification herbs to the Rasta holy herb of ganja, the use of music in liturgy and the popularization of liberation reggae, the ritualized response to the destruction of the Second Temple of Jerusalem and the Rasta conception of embodied purification, and the philosophical and theological tenet, which could be read as a philosophy of liberation, of responsibility for the improvement of the world. We will also examine how this simultaneously African-centered and Hebrew-avowed movement was possible for Rastafari, this creative restructuring of symbolic life on a small island in the Caribbean, to have the global cultural impact it has enjoyed from the last quarter of the twentieth century. These questions and themes will be discussed in this course through an examination of scholarly writings, films, and music. This course presumes no prior knowledge of the subject, and it thus has no prior requirements.

Required texts:

An Introduction to Africana Philosophy, by Lewis Gordon. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP. ISBN-10: 0521675464

Caliban's Reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy, by Paget Henry. New York: Routledge. ISBN-10: 0415926467

Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader, edited by Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, William David Spencer, and Adrian Anthony McFarlane. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998. ISBN 1-56639-584-4.

Finding Each Other in Judaism: Meditations on the Rites of Passage from Birth to Immortality, by Harold Schulweis. New York: UAHC Press. ISBN 0-8074-0764-X

Judaism by Michael A. Fishbande. San Francisco: HarperSanfrancisco. ISBN-10: 0060626550

The Myth and Reality of Judaism: 82 Misconceptions Set Straight, by Simon Glustrom. West Orange, NJ: Behrman House Publishers. ISBN 0-87441-479-2

The Rastafarians, by Leonard E. Barrett, Sr. Boston: Beacon Books. ISBN: 978-0-8070-1039-6

Rastafari: Subordination in the Midst of Liberation Theology, by Obiagele Lake. Carolina Academic Press. ISBN-10: 0890898367

Rastafari: A Way of Life, by Tracy Nichols. Chicago: Frontline Books. ISBN-10: 0948390166.

Recommended, if you can get a hold of it:

Diane Tobin, Gary Tobin, and Scott Rubin, *In Every Tongue: The Racial and Ethnic Diversity of the Jewish People*. San Francisco: Institute for Jewish Research & Community.

Joseph Owens, *Dread: The Rastafarians of Jamaica*. Kingston, Sangster

Lewis R. Gordon, *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Additional scholarly articles and visual materials will be posted on blackboard.

Films

The Harder They Come
Rockers

Music

Each meeting has a musical leitmotif. You are encouraged to listen to relevant “classic” examples of Jamaican and African Diasporic music, especially those with themes of protest and liberation. Due to copyright laws, you will have to solicit the music yourself, but a list of the albums on which these songs appear will be available.

Requirements:

A midterm take-home examination, a final take-home examination, attendance at the race and Judaism symposium, and attendance and participation in the class lectures.

Dates Reading assignments and topics

(Because of Labor Day and Yom Kippur, there are two sessions in which 2 weeks of readings are assigned.)

- 8/31 **Hand out syllabus and discuss structure of course.** Introduction: Studying Jews, Studying Afro-Jews, Studying Rastafari in the context of Africana philosophy. Importance of not erasing the specificity of each. Critical philosophical, ethnophilosophical, and political-theological challenges. *Recommended:* On blackboard, “Locating Afro-American Judaism: A Critique of White Normativity”
Leitmotifs: Marley, “Natural Mystic”; Maurice Gordon, “Natural Mystic”; The Idan Raichel Project, “Come with Me / Bo’I”
- 9/14 **Judeans, Jews, Jewishness, and Afro-Jews.** *Readings:* Michael Fishbane, *Judaism*, chapters 1 and 2; and on blackboard, excerpts from Shaye Cohen’s *The Beginning of Jewishness*, prologue, chapter 1, and chapter 4, and chapter 9; Charles Finch, “The Nile Valley Sources of the Old Testament,” from *Echoes of the Old Darkland*; and read also from *The Jewish Sourcebook*: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/jewish/jews-romanlaw.html> and Isaac, “Locating Afro-American Judaism” (both on blackboard).
Leitmotifs: Matisyahu, “Jerusalem”; Steel Pulse, “Not the King James Version”; Matisyahu, “What I’m Fighting For”
- 9/21 **Judaism, a short introduction.** *Readings:* Fishbane, *Judaism*, chapter 3; Glustrom, *The Myth and Reality of Judaism* (pp. 1–66) and Schulweis, *Finding Each Other in Judaism* (pp. 1–30).
Leitmotifs: Matisyahu, “Fire of Heaven/Alter of Earth”; The Melodians, “Rivers of Babylon”; The Idan Raichel Project, “How Beautiful You are” and “Blessings for the New Year”
- 9/28 **Yom Kippur**—no class. *Recommended* viewing on your own: *Rockers*.

- 10/5 **Slavery, Jamaican history, and African roots.** *Readings:* (2 weeks of readings because of next meeting after Yom Kippur) Barrett, *The Rastafarians*, chapters 1 and 2; Nicholas, *Rastafari*, chapters 1 and 2 (these are very short chapters); and in *The Rastafari Reader*, “Introduction” and Part II: Neil Savishinsky, “African Dimensions of the Jamaican Rastafarian Movement” (pp. 125-144); Rupert Lewis, “Marcus Garvey and the Early Rastafarians” (pp. 145-148).
Leitmotifs: Burning Spear, “The Invasion”; Bob Marley and the Wailers, “Slave Driver” and “War”; Burning Spear, “Marcus Garvey”; Peter Tosh, “400 Years”; Max Roach, “Garvey’s Ghost”
- 10/12 **Neocolonial realities:** viewing of *The Harder They Come*. *Reading:* Nicholas, *Rastafari*, chapter 3. **Mid-term examination assigned and due on October 20, 2009, at 3:00 PM by email attachment or in-text to lewgord@gmail.com.** Although the film offers much music, *leitmotif:* Muta Baruka, “Columbus Ghost”
- 10/19 **Resistance and Liberation Struggle.** *Readings:* Barrett, *The Rastafarians*, chapter 2; Nicholas, *Rastafari*, chapter 4; and *The Rastafari Reader*, Part I: Clinton Hutton and Nathaniel Murrell, “Rastas’ Psychology of Blackness, Resistance, and Somebodiness” (pp. 36-54); Barry Chevannes’s “Rastafari and the Exorcism of the Ideology of Racism and Classism.” Re-read Glumstrom and Shulweis on election and slavery. *Recommended:* Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto* and Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, chapter 1: “On Violence.”
Leitmotifs: Desmond Decker, “007 (Shanty Town)”; The Slickers, “Johnny Too Bad”; Bob Marley and the Wailers, “Crazy Baldhead”; Steele Pulse, “Uncle George”
- 10/26 **Dread, Jah, and racialized divinity.** *Readings:* Barrett, *The Rastafarians*, chapter 4; Nicholas, *Rastafari*, chapter 5; and recommended, from *The Rastafari Reader*, Eleanor Wint et al, “Who Is Haile Selassie?” (pp. 159-165); Clinton Chisholm, “The Rasta-Selassie-Ethiopian Connections” (pp. 166-177); Rex Nettleford, “Discourse on Rastafarian Reality” (pp. 311-325); Nathaniel Murrell and Lewin Williams, “The Black Biblical Hermeneutics of Rastafari” (pp. 326-348); Nathaniel Murrell and Buchell Taylor, “Rastafari’s Messianic Ideology and Caribbean Theology of Liberation” (pp. 390-414).
Leitmotifs: Burning Spear, “Door Peep”; Peter Tosh, “Jah Guide”; Buju Banton, “Our Father in Zion” and “Hills and Valleys”; Muta Baruka, “Lamentation”
- 11/2 **Afro-Caribbean Philosophy.** *Reading:* Paget Henry’s *Caliban’s Reason* (entirety).
Recommended: Gordon, *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy*, chapters 1, 2, 3, and 5.
Leitmotifs: Steel Pulse, “Babylon Makes the Rules”; Bob Marley, “Babylon System”; Peter Tosh, “Get Up, Stand Up”
- 11/9 **The semiotics of Rastafari—the language and music.** *Readings:* Barrett, *The Rastafarians*, chapter 6; Nicholas, *Rastafari*, chapter 6; and from *The Rastafari Reader*: Ennis Edmonds, “Dread ‘I’ In-a-Babylon” (pp. 3-35); Adrian McFarlane, “The Epistemological Significance of ‘I-an-I’ as a Response to Quashie and Anancyism in Jamaican Culture” (pp. 107-124). From *Rastafari and Other African-American Caribbean Worldviews*: John Homiak “Dub History: Soundings on Rastafari Livity and language” (pp. 127-181); “From Burru Drums to Reggae Riddims: The Evolution of Rasta Music” (pp. 231-252); Roger Steffens, “Bob Marley: Rata Warrior” (pp. 253-265); William Spencer, “Chanting Change around the World through Rasta Riddim and Art” (pp. 266-283). Katie Roof, “Orthodox Jewish Reggae: A Cultural Phenomenon,” <http://communication.ucsd.edu/kleske/thescoop/r4.html>. On blackboard: Paget Henry, “Rastafarianism and Dread.” *Leitmotif:* Peter Tosh, “Downpressor Man” and “I Am That I Am”; Bob Marley, “Survival” (Chuck D version)
- 11/16 **The semiotics of Rastafari—ganja; dreadlocks; clothing; food.** *Readings:* Nicholas, *Rastafari*, chapters 8, 9, and 10, and from *The Rastafari Reader*: Kevin Ayulmer, “Towering Babble and Glimpses of Zion” (pp. 284-310); and re-read Fishbane, *Judaism*, chapter 2 and Schulweis, *Finding Each Other in Judaism*, chapter 1.
Leitmotifs: Marley & the Wailers, “Natty Dread”; Michelle Ndge O’cello, “Dreadlocks”; Peter Tosh, “Legalize It”
- 11/19 **Race and Judaism Symposium** (sessions will be from 10:30 AM till 5:30 PM—attend as many as you can)
- 11/23 **Women / “sistren” in Rastafari and in Judaism.** *Readings:* Lake, *RastafarI: Subordination in the Midst of Liberation Theology* (entirety). Nicholas, *Rastafari*, chapter 11; from *The Rastafari Reader*, Maureen Rowe, “Gender and Family Relations in RastafarI” (pp. 72-88), Imani M.

Tafari-Ama, "Rastawoman as Rebel: Case Studies in Jamaica" (pp. 89-106); Glustrom, *The Myth and Reality of Judaism* (pp. 78-94); and *recommended*: Miriam Peskowitz and Laura Levitt, *Judaism since Gender*

Leitmotifs: Idan Raichel Project, "If You Go / *Im Telech*"; Bob Marley, "No Woman, Don't Cry"; Burning Spear, "Mother"; Annette Briswett, "Na Na Na"

11/30 **Death and Dying (or lack thereof) in Judaism and Rastafari.** *Readings*: Schulweis, *Finding Each Other in Judaism*, chapter 6; Gustrom, *The Myth and Reality of Judaism* (pp. 169–192); Nicholas, *Rastafari*, chapter 12; on blackboard, excerpt from Joseph Owens's, *Dread*.
Leitmotifs: Burning Spear, "Jah No Dead"; Matisyahu, "Indestructible"; Bob Marley, "Jah Live"

12/7 **Rastafari and Judaism Today: concluding discussion.** *Readings*: Barrett, *The Rastafarians*, chapters 7, 8, and afterword. *Recommended*: Diane Tobin, Gary Tobin, and Scott Rubin, *In Every Tongue: The Racial and Ethnic Diversity of the Jewish People*
Leitmotifs: The Idan Raichel Project, "Ayal - Ayale"; Maurice Gordon, "One Blood"; and variety of performances of "One Love," including Bob Marley and the Wailers, "All in One"

Final paper due on December 10, 2009, at 3:00 PM by email attachment, RTF or in the text of the email to: lewgord@gmail.com.

Any student who has a need for special accommodations due to disabilities should speak with me as soon as possible to discuss the specific situation and contact Disability Resources and Services, located in Ritter Annex, at 215.204.1280.