

Oppression and Resistance in Jamaican Reggae and Afro-Brazilian Music A Comparative Study of Race in Music and Culture

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Oppression and Resistance in Jamaican Reggae and Afro-Brazilian Music A Comparative Study of Race in Music and Culture

Cultural expression frequently serves as a lens to the conditions, historical and contemporary, of a society. Film, music, and literature often serve as an extension of oral traditions and can provide us not only with a glimpse into history but can also share with us the cultural impact of the past and give us a greater understanding of the present. In the countries of Brazil and Jamaica with similar [histories of oppression](#), from [slavery](#), to genocide, to crushing poverty and systemic racism, it is not surprising to see a similarity in the heightened consciousness in their music. Through analysis of the histories of Brazil and Jamaica, from slavery to the institutionalized systems of oppression, one can understand how such seemingly different musical traditions frequently share a common theme, resistance.

"...a good part of the attraction of reggae music to its metropolitan audience is the anger

and protest of the lyrics. We obviously face a contradiction between the message of urban poverty and protest which reggae conveys and that of pleasure and relaxation inherent in our holiday product.

In short, when we promote reggae music we are promoting an aspect of Jamaican culture which is bound to draw attention to some of the harsher circumstances of our lives."

-- Jamaica Tourist Board Memorandum, October 10, 1975 (Davis and Simon, 1977, p. 1)

Jamaican reggae is music of protest that carries an angry message of poverty. Listeners worldwide often simply enjoy the swaying upbeat and melodies of reggae while giving little thought to the importance of the lyrics or the 'harsh circumstances' that have given birth to the music. Similarly, the music of Brazil has been neglected. Musical prejudices commonly lead to the association of subtle rhythms and light, casual melodies with bland music and not profound expression (Byrne, 1989, p. 2-3). However, the music of both cultures carries with them strong traditions of resistance. They both pay homage to their leaders and mythic figures and work to carry on in their tradition of resistance.

The Maroon States

In contrast to the thirteen colonies which were to become the United States of America, which were colonized by settlers seeking a new life in the West, the majority of the new world colonies were established to be financial ventures based on the exploitation and exportation of natural resources and the running of massive plantations.

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