

Brief History of the Rastafari Movement in Barbados

The interest and focus on values and events of African origin became more prevalent as Caribbean people revealed their latent African perspectives during the era of the Black Power Movement in the 1960's.

Maritime travel from Jamaica in the north to Trinidad in the south as well as the rise of Jamaican music increased our knowledge and appreciation of Jamaican culture especially as it related to reggae and Rastafari.

In April 1975, following an invitation from Elombe Mottley of the Yoruba House, then located in Fontabelle, St Michael, a small group of Rastafari brethren, Ras Boanerges and the Sons of Thunder, visited Barbados to educate and enlighten our communities about the Nyahbinghi Order and Rastafari in general.

The late Ras Ikael Tafari, who was at the time, a sociology student at the Mona Campus of the University of the West Indies, accompanied and facilitated the delegation, which also included Ras Profman and Youtman (Nedley Seymour), during their stay on the island.

Ras Ikael subsequently returned to Barbados around 1981 and was instrumental in the establishment of the first Nyahbinghi tabernacle at College Land, St. John to the eastern border of Codrington College.

The obvious respect for nature and the rural environment resulted in many Rastafari in Barbados from the early 1970's re-discovering and inhabiting areas in close proximity to springs, as previous indigenous inhabitants on the island had done. Foster's Funland, a remote recreational spot on the northern coast, eventually became a small commune for nature-seeking Rases throughout the 1980's.

Meanwhile, in the capital city of Bridgetown, the urban Rases developed their entrepreneurial skills in leather-craft as well as in the creation of necklaces and bracelets made from indigenous materials such as black and brown coral. Rocker's Alley, a pedestrian's thoroughfare to the east of Cave Shepherd & Co. Ltd on Broad Street, became a hub of commercial activity for these aspiring businessmen and women. This location was eventually deemed unsuitable for such activity and an alternative site was identified at Temple Yard near to the Cheapside Public Market. Apart from the arts and craft items on

sale at Temple Yard, the introduction of shops offering vegetarian meals as well as others that displayed local wood carving and wire craft created by the now deceased caretaker of the Yard, Bongo Spade, expanded the cultural expression shown by the Rastafari community in Barbados.

The shop operated by Ras Siphon and Sister Nzinga in Temple Yard should also be mentioned here as one in which a wide collection of creative items and African clothing was offered for sale to the public thus presenting a positive and novel approach to entrepreneurship among small-business persons.

Temple Yard was eventually re-located to an area opposite the General Post Office where it is still in existence as a Rastafari oasis in the city environs.

The Twelve Tribes of Israel, a mansion formed in Jamaica from the 1960's also proceeded to open a branch of their organization at Mason Hall Street in the City. Their regular and successful efforts at fund-raising afforded some of their members to travel annually to Ethiopia and visit the mecca for Rastafari at Shashamane in Shoa Province. In 1987, the year of the commemoration of the centenary of Marcus Garvey's birth, August 17th 1887, four brethren of the local Rastafari community, Ras I-Ter (Peter Gay)-now deceased, Bongo Lights, Adonijah and Ras I-Ral initiated a walk for Africa on May 25th- African Liberation Day. The route, which began at Temple Yard, followed an easterly direction through the central parish of St. George, to King George Vth Memorial Park in St. Philip and embraced the symbolic gesture of journeying eastward to Africa. It was at this same time that the Rastafari Theocratic Council was formed out of a need for Rastafari to have an organization that could facilitate Rastafari from various mansions.

1992 heralded the centenary of the birth of His Imperial Majesty, Emperor Haile Selassie 1st, July 23rd 1892, and in collaboration with our Rastafari brethren and sisters in St. Lucia and St. Vincent as well as those of us at the Nyahbinghi tabernacle at Mt. Carmel, College Land in St. John, an educational and spiritually enlightening tour of about ten islands in the Eastern Caribbean, from Trinidad in the south to St. Kitts in the north, was carried out in association with Nyahbinghi Elder and Patriarch Ras Boanerges (Bongo Watto). From this exposure to prophecy and biblical interpretation from the Elder, great insight on the philosophy/tenets of Rastafari was gained by all and sundry as our journey spanned from December 1992 until July 1993.

In 1994 at the United Nations conference for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) at the Sherbourne Conference Center (governmental) and Barbados Community College (NGO), the Rastafari community was represented by a sizeable delegation of mainly Nyahbinghi brethren who participated in a number of workshops. These included subjects such as Sustainable Culture and Sustainable Agriculture and resulted in a financial grant being awarded to the Cornerstone Project for Organic Farming at Mt. Carmel, College Land, St. John, through the auspices of the Global Environmental Facility of the United Nations Development Programme.

Africa Hall, a community-based organization with Ras Bongo Spear at the helm, and which was accredited to this SIDS conference, was later awarded consultative status within ECOSOC at the United Nations.

The need to organize and centralize was becoming more necessary within the Rastafari community and following a Rastafari gathering in St. Croix, USVI, in August 1997, the Barbados Rastafari Working Committee (BRWC) was established in December of that year. Elders Sam Brown and Mama Farika of Jamaica added their support and blessings as a whole new energy of working together towards repatriation with reparations evolved amongst Rastafari primarily in the Eastern Caribbean.

The hosting of an International Rastafari Conference in Barbados in August 1998 by the BRWC, now renamed the Ichirouganaim Council for the Advancement of Rastafari (ICAR), with the assistance of the Barbados Government, allowed for our regional and international counterparts, along with the local community, the opportunity to discuss pressing issues and concerns. There was also a very successful arts and craft expo at Queen's Park during two days of this event.

It should be explained that the renaming of the organization to include the pre-colonial name of the island – Ichirouganaim- was to identify with the indigenous nature and category of Rastafari within the ethno-cultural context. As a result, other neighboring islands followed suit e.g. Iyanola (St. Lucia) and Youlou (St. Vincent).

Since that landmark event of 1998 in the annals of Rastafari on this island, the Rastafari community, through its locally registered organisation, ICAR, in conjunction with its regional counterpart, the Caribbean Rastafari Organisation, (CRO), have been accredited to and represented at major conferences such as the United Nations World Conference Against Racism (UN-WCAR), in Durban, South Africa -2001; the South Africa – Africa Union - Caricom Consultation in Jamaica,

2005, and the Africa Union- Caricom Global Dialogue in Bridgetown, Barbados, 2007, which was integral in the commemoration of the bi-centennial year of the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

As the world plummets into this 21st century with its grave challenges, environmentally and otherwise, the Rastafari Movement remains committed in our stance against religious intolerance and the abuse of the rights of marginalized indigenous people and people of African descent.

We shall continue to support any progressive programmes and activities undertaken by our wider pan-African family as we endeavor to educate and elucidate our communities about the greatness of our African ancestors and civilization.

Jah Blessings to all

Ras Iral Jabari

July 4, 2010