

# RASTAFARI 101

## ROOTS REALITY IN THE CLASSROOM

by Malika Madremana

A peace sign greets all who enter Room 1. Red, gold and green scarves hang from closet doors. Brotha Bob watches wisely over all. Palm trees and mountains outline edges of the windows. African statues, masks and beads display mystically on tables and bookshelves. Walls are adorned with pictures of Egypt, China, New York, India – you name it – it’s like a trip around the world in one glance. Roots and culture fill up the place. A typical ninth grade English class? Maybe not, but the livity and *itECTION* (protection) within this room make it a sanctuary at my school. It’s a place where the youth feel intelligent, proud, safe, warm and loved, surrounded by good spirit. Welcome to Rastafari 101.

Some call me Ms. M, some Maestra, others may know me as Malika “MothaSista” Madremana. While creating and singing Jah music is my utmost calling, on the day-to-day, the classroom is my stage. I’ve been teaching youth for more than half my life and I’m currently blessed to be surrounded by ninth and tenth graders. Trust that it’s hard to balance music with teaching full-time, so many sacrifices must be made, but Jah knows there’s a time and place for everything. His Imperial Majesty Emperor Haile Selassie would approve of teaching as a noble cause: I serve H.I.M.

**“We must speak out on major issues courageously, openly and honestly, and in blunt terms of right and wrong.” - H.I.M.**

When youth enter my class for the first time, most of them are surprised to be introduced to a culture and faith that they know very little, if anything, about. I get the stares, whispers, snickers (and not just from the students). Every year I prepare for the same questions. Are you from Africa? What is Rasta? Why do you wear that thing on your head? Do you ever take it off? Can you wash dreads? Can you take out dreads? Is it true that Bob Marley smoked 100 blunts a day? Do you let your kids smoke? All this interrogation along with countless pleas for I to admit I blaze. I hold it down. My students learn quickly that I am not here to play; my faithful mission is to serve the Most High by instilling youth with truth and rights, showering them with positivity and compassion, and motivating them to become successful individuals who are both conscious of and active in the freedom struggle. They know I’m a-bring it to them real, they know I will guide and nurture them, they know I love ‘em, and they know I’m Rasta tru and tru.

*Ites gold and green must fly* By Robert L. Woods





**Black school in Kentucky, 1916**

**“A strong nation and a free nation can only base itself upon education.” - H.I.M.**

Every once in awhile, someone asks me how I can work inna Babylon school system. In return I ask, “Who are the students in the Babylon school system?” The youth of the ghetto, of the under-class, the answer. My people – who have little choice or option except to be under-educated, under-prepared and under-informed. While I have absolute disgust towards the school system’s abuse and neglect of my people, turning away from the youth up in those schools is like abandoning my flock. Unfortunately, there is great lack of progressive or radical educators in my district. I make a bold cry for anyone reading this to consider the honest and noble occupation of teaching, the youth need *I and I* (I, me, we, you – the whole of us together)! As His Majesty stated, “The liberation of the earth relies on the wisdom and knowledge of the future generations.” The question is not *how* can I and I work inna Babylon school, but rather how can I and I *not* work in one? I and I have a young nation to save!

Is it possible to integrate the precepts of RasTafari within the Babylonian system? Clearly Selassie I conquers. In fact, the heights of Rastafari keep I level within it! When I check it, I know His Majesty would have ordained I to teach, and that I be clever and tactful in my movements as I push through. So maybe I can’t blaze fyah on issues as candidly as I do amongst I and I, however, not a day goes by that my students don’t hear truth and rights, Jah love and culture wisdom. Every time I witness a breakthrough and I hear my students engage in higher reasoning, I know RasTafari *lives*. Therefore, the integration of RasTafari principles and public schools is not only possible, it is happening.

Let’s face it, if I and I dwell in America, there are few options for alternative education, especially for the under-class. These are the youth who need the most guidance and knowledge to pull themselves out of the wicked

cycle of poverty. These are the youth who are in the most crucial need of information. I and I have to find a way to reach these critical youth from within – school is the main venue. True, Babylon will make I and I jump through hoops and obstacles just to get into the schools to teach. I and I must rise to the challenge. Make the youth see teachers who look like them, who share their experiences, who relate to their joy and pain. Make the education real. I teach my students that education is the fist that knocks out poverty – critical information for the young nation of freedom fighters. Selassie I uttered:

**“From truth alone is born liberty, and only an educated people can consider itself as really free and master of its fate.”**

**“It is the duty of teachers to direct the thought and outlook as well as mold the character of their students.” - H.I.M.**

Confront a youth in my class the wrong way at the wrong time and you may hear, “I ain’t gotta respect nobody that don’t respect me!” This is indeed the 2008 mindstate. Whatever happened to the unconditional respect that youth used to have for elders, I can’t really recall. I do know that as a result of their experiences within poverty and dysfunction, these youth are confused, traumatized, abandoned and angry. Most of them are completely unprepared to enter society in a dignified manner. I am constantly disturbed by the utter lack of self-control that



**9th grade classroom** By Malika Madremana

leads so many youth down the path of delinquency and jail. The youth are angry, ready to fight at the drop of a dime. I have stood in front of classes with so much tension I could cut it with a knife. So while a typical English class might focus on grammar, writing, reading, etc., my classes need much more.

# RASTAFARI 101

**“Education has value when it is established in individuals of good character with respect to God.” - H.I.M.**

What good is knowledge possessed by a person of empty or corrupted character? Imagine lessons constructed around exploring conscience, self-control, tolerance, kindness and respect. For many, it is the first time they are being informed about these virtues of moral intelligence. It might be the last time. I beg parents to ensure that their children are instilled with these values that are so necessary for healthy living. So I and I must explore personal strengths and weaknesses. The youth must learn how to harness their inner powers to reach a higher state, how to connect with the Most High and meditate, and how to conduct themselves in a manner in which they can find a place in society other than the couch, the welfare office or jail. Separation of faith and school? Could never be. Jah is everywhere at all times!



**JAH LIVES in the classroom** By Bob Mihalus

**“Outside the kingdom of the Lord, there is no nation which is greater than any other.” - H.I.M.**

Empires, continents, countries and nations of indigenous people have suffered and perished throughout the ages at the hands of devastating colonialist forces. One day my students will understand that the poverty and dysfunction they are living in is, in part, the terrible legacy of a colonialist-manifest history – that they weren't simply cursed with a bad life. They need to see the big picture. This bit of knowledge can ignite the flame that starts to burn inside, making them ever-sensitive and critical against the prevalence of racism and injustice. I teach the youth that

humankind's goal is evolution. This evolution at its heart, aims to restore humanity to a just world and the realization of the oneness of life. I and I are one.

**“We must become members of a new race, overcoming petty prejudice, owing our ultimate allegiance not to nations, but to our fellow men within the human community. Eradicate colonialism, racism and apartheid from the face of the earth.” - H.I.M.**

I refer my students back to days of slavery when it was deemed illegal activity for slaves to read. The slave master preferred his slaves to be illiterate and drunk in their free time – for in drunkenness it would be less likely that Africans would be plotting an uprising or revolt. An educated slave was a dangerous slave – a threat to the system. I draw reference to the situation today. Many are still victims of systemic slavery through the vices of ignorance, violence, drugs and alcohol. I urge my youth to see the connection. Dissemination of information into the hands of downtrodden people is critical for the realization of the scope of victimization: Knowledge is power! Selassie I spoke this truth: “A well-informed public opinion is essential to the growth of political and social awareness.”

The saying “If you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem” may sound cliché but His Majesty exclaimed this truth: “Throughout history it has been the inaction of those who could have acted, the indifference of those who should have known better, the silence of the voice of justice when it mattered most, which has made it possible for evil to triumph.”

I still have people ask me what they can do to help the state of emergency that exists in public schools. The answer is anything and everything! Any little or big thing you can do can help. Donate money, supplies, resources and time to schools in inner-city or low-income districts. Help counteract the wicked inequality that is pressing young lives down. If I and I are to end evil, we must act. We can't sit around and expect problems to solve themselves. Let the truth come to light. Whether you hear it from Malika Madremana on stage or in front of 2nd period class: Let all freedom fighters be active and progressive in the education of our youth. ☪

*Malika Madremana was born in New York City, raised in California and has spent a lifetime on stage. Malika officially began her baptism into reggae as a background singer and vocal arranger for a number of prominent and heartical artists. She has toured and performed abroad with legends such as Bushman, Yami Bolo, Wadi Gad, Ras Attitude, Batch, Apple Gabriel, the Mighty Diamonds, Mikey Dread and others. Check Malika's releases Healing and Elixir on Greensphere Records. Next release soon come! [www.myspace.com/malikamadremana](http://www.myspace.com/malikamadremana) or [madremana@gmail.com](mailto:madremana@gmail.com)*