Does Rastafari bring freedom to its followers? – Knowledge Organiser

Keywords used in this unit

Haile Selassie – Emperor of Ethiopia
Ethiopia – country in Africa
Freedom – having the ability to act or change without constraint.
Jamaica - island country situated in the Caribbean Sea
Emancipation – To be freed
Jah – the name Rastafari use most often for God.
Holy Piby – the holy book according to Rastafari
Dreadlocks –Hair style adopted by Rasta's
Ital – Rasta rules concerning behaviour and food
Redemption - the action of saving or being saved from evil OR regaining possession of something

Why is freedom important to Rastafari?

History

- The history of Rastafari begins with the colonisation of Africa by Europeans. The European powers took many Africans as slaves and sent them as captives throughout the world.
- The Rastafari movement began in Jamaica during the 1930s following a prophecy made by Marcus Garvey a black political leader. Garvey preached "Look to Africa where a black king shall be crowned, he shall be your Redeemer."
- The prophecy was rapidly followed by the crowning of Emperor Haile Selassie in Ethiopia. Rastafarians see this as the fulfilment of Garvey's prophecy. The religion takes its name from Haile Selassie's original name, Ras Tafari.

Present day

- Black people still suffer from stereotyping and injustice today. Rastafari believe this injustice puts a physical and mental strain on black people.
- Many Rastafari fight back against oppressive forces in society. Some decide to move to Ethiopia which believe is like going home to the promised land/Zion.

Do Rastafari beliefs allow for mental freedom?

There is no formal Rastafari set of beliefs but there are some common ones:

- God (Jah) help us on the path of righteousness. Jah is everything which is good in the world.
- Everything which is evil is called Babylon. Babylon might be a racist person or a racist government.
- Most Rastafarians believe Jesus is the Son of God, that he is God incarnate - God physically on earth. They also believe Jesus was black.
- Many believe Haile Selassie was a great ruler and he was the king predicted in the Bible. Some believe he was Jesus/God back on earth again.
- Most Rastafari believe they are the 'lost tribe of Israel' mentioned in the Bible. They are lost - far from home - because their ancestors were taken by force from their home in Africa.
- Many try and return to Africa, the 'promised land' known as Zion.

Does Rastafari music support freedom?

- Bob Marley helped spread awareness of the religion among outsiders through his appearances and his lyrics. Many people believe that Bob Marley was the main factor in the spread of Rastafari across the world.
- His songs talk about the history of the slave trade and freedom e.g. in Redemption son: *Old pirates, yes, they rob I; Sold I to the merchant ships… We forward in this generation; Triumphantly…. Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery; None but ourselves can free our minds.*

Do Rastafari practices encourage freedom?

- Most Rasta's believe all people are equal and should help each other. Violence is not allowed.
- Most Rasta's follow strict food rules. All food must be pure or 'ital.' This means no alcohol, no dairy products, no tobacco, no meat, no salt and no sugar.
- Running through Ital food is the Rastafarian concept of livity - Jah exists within all living things
- Many Rasta's don't cut their hair and as it grows, they shape it into dreadlocks. Professor Horace Campbell says "Rastafarians living in a colonial context [in Jamaica] wanted to represent themselves as different from Europeans. So they took on a physical form which represented their identity with Africa."
- Rastafari has rules that apply only to women, these are not always followed today. Women cannot be leaders, cannot wear makeup, dress in promiscuous clothing, or use chemicals in their hair
- Some Rastafari believe smoking herb (marijuana) helps them to think better and unite with other Rastafari as brothers and sisters.