

**REVIEW****Movie Review: *Roots Daughters: The Women of Rastafari***

August 29, 2006  
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*Roots Daughters: The Women of Rastafari* documents a movement among Rastafarian women who are gaining a new understanding of history (or are perhaps re-writing it) to illustrate the matriarchal roots of the Rastafarian movement. And they're using those matriarchal roots as the basis for claiming power and equality in a religion/social movement that has largely marginalized them since its inception.

It's enlightening and interesting on so many levels, but if you aren't very familiar with Rastafarianism already, this documentary is going to be a little bit confusing. It does a great job of tracing the origin of the Rastafari movement as a movement of black slaves connecting back to Africa and drawing their strength from their rich cultural history. The film portrays Rastafarianism as a black social movement strongly rooted in Judaism and Christianity, complete with the "woman is evil because she ate the apple first" and "woman is inferior because she was made from man's rib" routine. Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie, the spiritual leader of Rastafari (although not himself a Rastafarian), is also viewed as embodying the second coming of Jesus.

The film contains interviews with several different women who are currently part of the movement regarding issues such as the reason for dreadlocks, the use of birth control among Rastafarians, and whether women are allowed to participate in the Rastafarian sacred drumming ceremonies. Just like a sampling from any other culture or religion, each of the women has her own interpretation of what is right and good and what is necessary to be Rastafari. Unfortunately, although the women interviewed were chosen based on differing geographic locations (from Canada to Jamaica) and differing social/political circumstances, there was no explanation of the economic and social differences in their realities or how those may have shaped their perceptions and opinions.

There is some compelling commentary and beautiful singing by Judy Mowatt, and some addictive chanting that is the origin of reggae. But the narrative is very fast, and if you rarely have the opportunity to listen to Jamaican accents, it's difficult to understand some of the women. At the end, I just wanted to know more. On one hand, a documentary that inspires you to learn more about a subject is good, but I was also disappointed. It was too short and ended while I still had a lot of questions. I do highly recommend watching it, but for the novice, a primer would certainly be helpful.

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In addition to pontificating in relative obscurity, Staci enjoys a good book, a cold beer and hanging out with her family. Perhaps, but not necessarily, in that order.

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