

PREFACE

This book explores Japanese engagement with Jamaican popular culture. I begin this exploration with “The Politics of Presence: Performing Blackness in Japan.” In that chapter, I locate Jamaica and Japan on the map of a global imagination of blackness, an imagination which I argue turns significantly on racial demography and political history. The four following chapters root this broad theoretical discussion in ethnography, exploring the lives and performances of the practitioners of Japan’s Jamaican subcultures. Although I discuss performance in each subculture in general terms, I also focus on particular modes of performance. I have done so not because I feel each performance mode is exclusive to a given subculture, but simply because I believe that it offers particularly interesting insights into the life of this subculture. Chapter 2, “Music and Orality: Authenticity in Japanese Sound System Culture,” explores the creative use of Jamaican music and spoken language by Japanese sound systems members as well as DJs, tracing the transnational routes these performers take to accumulate this musical and verbal symbolic capital. In the chapter, I explore how, once back in Japan, they draw upon these resources in the process of creating an “au-

thentic” Japanese dancehall culture, both for their Japanese audiences and more subtly for each other.

“Fashion and Dance: Performing Gender in Japan’s Reggae Dance Scene” is the third chapter. It addresses the cross-cultural issues of gender and sexuality, morality, and class invoked by the dress and dance of Japan’s reggae dancers. Disturbing the moral conventions of Christian, middle-class, British-identified Jamaican womanhood (Cooper 1997, 2004), the dance scene is the primary space for female participation in Jamaican dancehall culture, one otherwise dominated by male declarations of lyrical agility, sexual bravado, and willingness to use violence. I use fashion and dance to explore the extent to which the gendered body politics evidenced in the Jamaican case also appear in Japan.

The next two chapters shift from dancehall to Rastafari. The fourth chapter, “Body and Spirit: Rastafarian Consciousness in Rural Japan,” picks up on the previous chapter’s concern with embodiment but focuses on its relation to Rastafarian notions of spirituality. The chapter explores how Japanese express their identification with the movement in bodily terms, including the wearing of dreadlocks, diet, and medicinal practice. I will consider how one group’s participation at an annual festival in several of the the members’ hometown becomes a vehicle through which they bridge the gap between their selves as dreads and as residents of their rural community, and between their global experiences and those of a mythologized local.

The fifth chapter is “Text and Image: Bad Jamaicans, Tough Japanese, and the Third World ‘Search for Self.’” The first part of this chapter explores the interest of some Japanese dreads in a body of popular writings in which Japanese are imagined to be the true ancient Israelites. Jamaican Rastafarians make the same claim for themselves; the independent existence of this literature appears to these Japanese dreads to help legitimize their own claim to Rastafari. In the second part of the chapter, I examine nonfictional and fictional writings on Japanese travel to Jamaica. I link these works to the recent discourse of *jibun sagashi* (search for self)—a popular term in Japanese public discourse since the 1990s—particularly as this search has centered on narratives of Japanese travel overseas. I focus on a novel by Jah Hirō (1991), about a Japanese man who travels to Jamaica to discover himself through contact with the third world. I explore the author’s textual “performance” of the protagonist’s search for a stronger, ideologically actualized self, in part through an analysis of the novel’s imaging of Jamaicans.

I use the sixth and final chapter, “Jamaican Perspectives on Jamaican

Culture in Japan,” to resolve my discussion of how Jamaican subcultures afford insight into the performance of social identity in Japan. I begin to consolidate my discussion of race in a global context by exploring Jamaican perspectives on the popularity of Jamaican culture in Japan. I leave this discussion to the end of the book, at some risk of appearing to marginalize this perspective. But it is precisely because of the importance of a focused discussion of this Jamaican point of view that I have left it for the end. This discussion leads into what I consider the bigger picture of this research: what is in the social scientific literature a still-underexplored concern with the global politics of race and ethnicity beyond the West and the African diaspora, including as evidenced in Afro-Asian contact. With this concern in mind, I identify three key discourses of global race evident in this research.