

# Music as Social Reflection: A Sociology of Literature Study of Bob Marley's "One Love/People Get Ready"

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## ABSTRACT

This journal discusses Bob Marley's song "One Love/People Get Ready" as a work of musical literature that conveys messages of unity, peace, and human solidarity. This song serves not only as entertainment but also as a medium for social reflection that depicts a society marked by conflict, discrimination, and injustice. The objective of this study is to analyze the meaning of the song's lyrics and identify their relevance to social reality, particularly in efforts to foster harmony amidst diversity. Additionally, this study aims to examine how the moral messages in the song can contribute to the formation of collective social consciousness.

The method used in this study is a qualitative method with a literary sociology approach. Data were collected through literature review and textual analysis of song lyrics, then analyzed using descriptive-analytical techniques to uncover the symbolic meanings and social messages contained within them. This approach allows the researcher to understand the relationship between musical works and the social context underpinning them.

The results of the study indicate that this song contains a universal message about the importance of love, unity, and tolerance as solutions to various social problems. In conclusion, this song serves not only as a work of entertainment but also as an educational tool capable of fostering peace and social justice within the global community.

**Keywords:** Bob Marley, One Love, Sociology of Literature, Social Solidarity, Peace Education.

## INTRODUCTION

Literature plays a vital role in human life as a means of expressing ideas, feelings, and experiences. Through literature, people can understand various perspectives on life, whether stemming from different cultural, social, or historical contexts. This helps readers develop empathy, broaden their horizons, and enhance their critical thinking skills regarding the reality around them (Guamanga et al., 2025).

Furthermore, literary works also serve as both a medium of entertainment and education. Stories, poems, and plays not only provide enjoyment but also contain moral, ethical, and life values that can serve as guidelines (Suciati et al., 2023). Thus, literature plays a role in shaping individual character and reflecting the conditions of society at a given time, thereby remaining relevant in daily life (Vana, 2020b).

One example of a work with significant influence is Bob Marley's song "One Love". This song conveys a message of unity, peace, and universal love amidst the differences within society (Kelly & Smith, 2025). Through its simple yet powerful lyrics, the song encourages listeners to set aside conflicts and live in harmony. This message was not only relevant in its time but remains meaningful to this day across the globe (Stupacher et al., 2022).

Furthermore, "One Love" also reflects how literary works in the form of music can serve as tools for social change. The song emerged from the challenging life and struggles of the Jamaican people, thereby carrying a spirit of hope and unity (Stupacher

et al., 2022). With its distinctive reggae rhythm, the song reaches diverse groups and cultures, proving that art can transcend geographical boundaries and become a symbol of global peace (Savage et al., 2021).

Bob Marley's "One Love" offers significant benefits in fostering a sense of unity and tolerance amidst diversity. Through its powerful message of love and togetherness, the song encourages listeners to respect differences in ethnicity, religion, and culture. The positive values conveyed help cultivate empathy and strengthen social bonds, thereby creating a more peaceful and harmonious environment (Pardo-Olmos et al., 2025).

Additionally, "One Love" serves as a source of motivation and inner peace. The laid-back reggae rhythm combined with hopeful lyrics provides a calming effect and helps reduce stress (Adiasto et al., 2022). The song is often used as a reminder to maintain a positive mindset and inner peace, even in difficult situations. Thus, this work not only entertains but also has a positive impact on the mental and emotional well-being of its listeners (de Witte et al., 2022).

The theory of literary sociology is an approach in literary studies that examines the close relationship between literary works and the social conditions of society (Vana, 2020a). This approach posits that literary works do not emerge in isolation but are influenced by the social, cultural, economic, and historical backgrounds of both the author and their society (Wellek & Warren, n.d.). Scholars such as Wellek and Warren in their book "Theory of Literature" explain that literature can be understood through three

main aspects: the author, the work itself, and the reader within their social context (Laurenson & Swingewood, 1972). Thus, literary analysis does not focus solely on the text but also considers the external factors that shape it.

Furthermore, Alan Swingewood, in his work “The Sociology of Literature”, emphasizes that literature can function as a mirror of society as well as a tool for social critique. He divides the study of the sociology of literature into several perspectives, such as literature as a reflection of social structure, literature as a product of ideology, and literature as a social institution. Through this theory, readers can understand how literary works represent social reality, voice injustices, and play a role in social change. Therefore, the sociology of literature is crucial in uncovering the broader meaning of a literary work.

Research on Bob Marley’s song “One Love” can be framed through several questions, such as: how are the messages of unity and peace represented in the song’s lyrics, and how did the social context influence its creation? Based on these questions, the objective of this study is to analyze the meanings contained in the lyrics of “One Love” and to identify the social values conveyed to the public. Additionally, this study aims to understand the relationship between musical works and the social conditions that underlie them.

The contribution of this study is to provide a deeper understanding of the role of literary works in the form of music as a medium for conveying social messages. This study can also serve as a reference in the field

of literary sociology, particularly in examining how songs can reflect social reality and promote positive change. Furthermore, the research findings are expected to raise public awareness of the importance of the values of unity, tolerance, and peace in daily life.

The song “One Love” by Bob Marley can be linked to the “Sustainable Development Goals” (SDGs), particularly Goal 16 on peace, justice, and strong institutions (Walsh et al., 2022). This song conveys a message of unity, love, and peace that encourages people to live in harmony without conflict. These values align with global efforts to create a safer, more inclusive, and harmonious world. Through its lyrics, “One Love” invites individuals to contribute to creating a peaceful and mutually respectful social environment.

Furthermore, “One Love” is also relevant to SDG 10 on reducing inequality, as its universal message emphasizes equality regardless of racial, cultural, or social background differences (Walsh et al., 2022). This song reflects the importance of global solidarity in facing various social challenges. Thus, this literary work in the form of music serves not only as entertainment but also as an educational medium that supports the achievement of sustainable development goals, particularly in raising awareness of the importance of unity and social justice.

Based on the background of the study, the research questions are formulated as follows:

1. How are social values reflected in the lyrics of the song One Love/People Get Ready by Bob Marley?
2. What social themes (such as unity, peace, and resistance) are represented in the song?
3. How can the song be interpreted through the perspective of Sociology of Literature?
4. In what way does the song function as a reflection of the social conditions at the time it was created?

- a. Documentation, which involves collecting song lyrics as the primary data.
- b. Literature review, which involves examining theories and references relevant to the study.

#### 4. Data Analysis

The data analysis follows the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), which consists of four main steps<sup>3</sup>:

##### 1. Data Collection

The researcher collects the lyrics of the song as the main data, along with supporting information from academic sources related to the theoretical framework and social context.

##### 2. Data Condensation

In this stage, the data are selected, focused, and simplified. The researcher identifies relevant parts of the lyrics that contain social themes such as unity, love, resistance, and hope, while excluding unrelated information.

##### 3. Data Display

The selected data are then organized and presented in a structured form, such as tables or thematic categorizations, to make interpretation easier. This step helps in clearly showing the relationship between the lyrics and the identified social themes.

##### 4. Conclusion Drawing and Verification

The researcher interprets the findings

## METHOD

### 1. Research Design

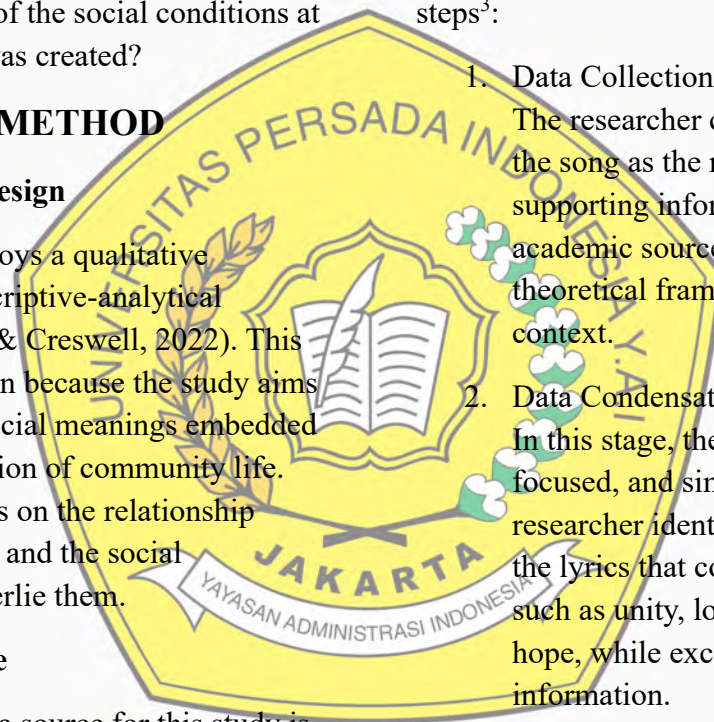
This study employs a qualitative approach using descriptive-analytical methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). This approach was chosen because the study aims to understand the social meanings embedded in songs as a reflection of community life. The analysis focuses on the relationship between song lyrics and the social conditions that underlie them.

### 2. Data Source

The primary data source for this study is the lyrics of the song “One Love/People Get Ready.” Secondary data was obtained from books, academic journals, and reliable sources related to the sociology of literature and the sociocultural context that influenced the work (Matthew B. Miles, A. M. Huberman, 2020).

### 3. Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was conducted through:



and draws conclusions about how the song reflects social reality. The conclusions are continuously verified by re-examining the data and ensuring consistency with the theoretical framework.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 1. The Social Context Behind “One Love/People Get Ready”

To fully understand the depth of Bob Marley’s “One Love/People Get Ready,” it is essential to first situate the song within the sociopolitical landscape from which it emerged. Jamaica in the 1960s and 1970s was a society deeply fractured by inequality, political violence, and racial discrimination conditions inherited from a long history of British colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade. The Rastafari movement, to which Marley devoted his life and artistic vision, arose precisely as a spiritual and cultural response to these conditions. Rastafarianism posited that the oppression of Black people, which its followers termed “Babylon,” would eventually give way to divine liberation. This theological and political framework is inseparable from Marley’s music, and “One Love/People Get Ready” is one of its most direct expressions.

Originally recorded in 1965 and later re-released in 1977 on the album “Exodus,” the song was composed at a time when Marley had narrowly survived an assassination attempt in Kingston. Rather than retreating into bitterness, he channeled his experience into a renewed call for peace and collective resilience. The song blends his original composition with elements of Curtis

Mayfield’s gospel-influenced “People Get Ready” (1965), a song born out of the American civil rights movement. This fusion is itself a sociological act Marley deliberately drew a line of solidarity between the Black liberation struggles in Jamaica and the United States, asserting that their suffering and aspirations were one and the same. From the perspective of the sociology of literature as articulated by Wellek and Warren (1956), this creative choice demonstrates how an author’s social position and historical consciousness directly shape the content and form of a literary work.

Wellek and Warren emphasize that literature cannot be fully understood without examining the social, cultural, and biographical context in which it was produced. When applied to this song, this framework reveals that the lyrics are not simply a celebration of abstract love. They are, more precisely, a political and moral statement issued by a man who had witnessed the devastating consequences of social division and who believed, with profound conviction, that human unity was both a spiritual imperative and a practical necessity for survival. The song’s creation therefore represents a conscious act of social engagement, in which the artist uses music as a medium to respond to the failures and injustices of the society around him.

### 2. Lyrical Analysis: Unity, Love, and Resistance as Social Themes

A close textual analysis of the lyrics of “One Love/People Get Ready” uncovers several dominant social themes: unity, love, moral accountability, resistance to oppression, and collective hope. These

themes operate simultaneously at the individual and societal level, making the song remarkable for its ability to speak to personal experience while simultaneously addressing structural injustice.

The song's opening refrain functions as more than a feel-good chorus. Linguistically, it uses inclusive plural pronouns and imperative verbs that address the listener not as an isolated individual but as a member of a broader human community. This collective mode of address is central to the song's rhetorical strategy: it does not ask what any single person can do for themselves, but what all people can accomplish together. This reflects what sociologists of literature describe as the cultivation of a "we-consciousness" a sense of shared identity and collective agency that literary works can build within and across communities. The consistent use of the word "one" throughout the song is particularly significant: it asserts not sameness but oneness, a unity that acknowledges difference while transcending division.

The theme of moral accountability is equally prominent. The lyrics pose a direct moral challenge to the listener, questioning whether those who have contributed to wrongdoing and suffering are truly satisfied with the consequences of their actions. This rhetorical question is directed not merely at individuals but at systems of power and institutions that perpetuate inequality and injustice. In this sense, the song functions as a form of social critique it holds both individuals and societies accountable for the conditions they create or allow to persist. Alan Swingewood's (1972) framework for

the sociology of literature identifies this kind of moral indictment as a key function of socially engaged literary works: literature as an instrument of critique that challenges those in power and gives voice to the marginalized.

The theme of resistance within the song is expressed through the Rastafarian concept of Babylon a symbolic reference to any system of oppression, corruption, or injustice. The lyrical call to fight against this force is not a call to physical violence but to a moral and spiritual mobilization: a collective rising of consciousness against forces of dehumanization. This is consistent with the tradition of prophetic literature across cultures, where artists and poets take on the role of social prophets, warning society of its moral failures and calling it toward a more just order. Marley positions himself within this tradition, using music as the instrument of prophecy and popular culture as the platform for social awakening.

The theme of hope is equally central to the song's social message. The integration of "People Get Ready" by Curtis Mayfield adds a gospel dimension that speaks of preparation for a coming deliverance. Within the context of the civil rights and Black liberation movements, this imagery of preparation and readiness was not merely religious but deeply political—it signaled that a change was coming and that people needed to align themselves with the forces of justice and love rather than those of hatred and division. In this way, the song refuses despair and insists on the possibility of a better world, one that can be achieved through collective moral action and the

cultivation of a shared sense of human dignity.

### **3. Music as a Mirror of Society: Applying Swingewood's Framework**

Alan Swingewood's tripartite model for analyzing literary works through a sociological lens provides a highly productive framework for interpreting "One Love/People Get Ready." The three dimensions he proposes—literature as a reflection of social structure, as a product of ideology, and as a social institution—can each be clearly identified in this song, revealing the multiple layers of meaning embedded within what may, on first hearing, seem like a straightforward anthem of love.

As a reflection of social structure, the song mirrors the deeply divided Jamaican society of its time. The lyrical acknowledgment of wrongdoing, suffering, and the urgent need for reconciliation is not abstract philosophy—it is a direct representation of a society in which violence, poverty, and racial inequality were everyday realities. Bob Marley, growing up in the impoverished community of Trenchtown in Kingston, witnessed these conditions firsthand. The song does not romanticize social reality but confronts it honestly, acknowledging that things are profoundly wrong even as it calls for change. This is precisely what Swingewood means when he argues that literature holds up a mirror to society: it reflects social contradictions, tensions, and struggles rather than offering a sanitized or idealized image of the world.

As a product of ideology, the song is deeply shaped by Rastafarianism. This

spiritual and political system, which was itself a response to the ideology of white supremacy and colonial exploitation, provides the conceptual vocabulary of the song. The language of love, unity, and spiritual readiness, as well as the implicit reference to Babylon as a corrupt and oppressive system, all derive from the Rastafarian ideological framework. Understanding this is crucial to a full interpretation of the song, because it reveals that what might appear to be simple optimism is, in fact, a sophisticated counter-ideological statement—an assertion of dignity, worth, and hope by a community that had been systematically denied all three. The song thus demonstrates that literary works do not emerge in a vacuum but are always shaped by the ideological currents within which their creators are embedded.

As a social institution, "One Love/People Get Ready" has acquired a life far beyond its original context. It has been used at peace concerts, sporting events, political rallies, and humanitarian campaigns around the world. Jamaica's tourism industry has adopted it as a kind of unofficial national anthem, and the song has been recognized internationally as a cultural symbol of solidarity. In this institutional dimension, the song has become a shared cultural resource—a text that communities draw upon to articulate values of mutual respect and collective aspiration. This is what Swingewood means by literature as a social institution: works of literary art become part of the social fabric itself, shaping collective identity and providing common moral reference points that communities can rally around.

#### 4. Formation of Collective Social Consciousness Through Music

One of the central arguments of this study is that “One Love/People Get Ready” contributes to the formation of collective social consciousness. This concept, drawn from sociological theory, refers to the set of shared beliefs, moral attitudes, and understandings that operate as a unifying force within a society or across societies. Literary and artistic works play a significant role in shaping this shared consciousness, particularly when they manage to articulate values that resonate across social, cultural, and national boundaries. Music, as a form of literary and artistic expression, is uniquely positioned to perform this function because it combines cognitive, emotional, and aesthetic dimensions into a single unified experience.

The data analysis conducted in this study, following the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), identified several specific linguistic and thematic mechanisms through which the song accomplishes this. During the data condensation phase, the most socially significant lyrical elements were isolated: the repeated use of collective pronouns, the moral questioning directed at the listener, the spiritual call for readiness and preparation, and the invocation of a shared struggle. Each of these elements operates to dissolve the psychological and social boundaries between self and other, positioning the listener not as a passive recipient of a message but as an active participant in a moral community with responsibilities toward others.

The musical dimension of the song amplifies this effect significantly. The reggae

rhythm, with its characteristic offbeat guitar strumming, bass-heavy groove, and relaxed yet insistent tempo, creates a sense of communal movement it is music that invites people to move together, both physically and metaphorically. Research in music psychology suggests that synchronized movement to shared rhythms promotes feelings of social bonding and group cohesion. The relaxed pulse of reggae also lowers psychological defenses and creates an atmosphere of openness and receptivity, making listeners more emotionally available to the moral messages embedded in the lyrics. This interaction between musical form and lyrical content is what gives “One Love/People Get Ready” its unique power as a vehicle for social consciousness-raising.

Furthermore, the song’s emotional accessibility is a key factor in its effectiveness as a social text. Unlike academic treatises on inequality or formal political manifestos, the song communicates its vision of a just society through simple, memorable language and a melody that lodges itself in the memory long after a single hearing. This accessibility ensures that its message reaches audiences across educational levels, languages, and cultural backgrounds. The gospel heritage embedded in the “People Get Ready” section adds a further layer of emotional resonance, drawing on one of the most powerful traditions of communal music in the African diaspora—a tradition in which song has historically served as both spiritual sustenance and a vehicle for collective resilience in the face of oppression.

## 5. Relevance to the Sustainable Development Goals and Contemporary Social Challenges

The enduring relevance of “One Love/People Get Ready” to contemporary global challenges is one of the most striking findings of this study. The social values championed in the song peace, solidarity, tolerance, and justice align closely with several of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). This alignment is not coincidental; it reflects the fact that the social problems Marley addressed in the 1970s remain deeply relevant in the twenty-first century.

In relation to SDG 16, the song’s core message that peace is not merely the absence of violence but a positive condition of mutual love and respect reflects the goal’s emphasis on building inclusive societies and strong institutions founded on justice. The song challenges listeners to take personal responsibility for the conditions of their communities, recognizing that durable peace requires not just the cessation of conflict but an active and ongoing commitment to reconciliation, solidarity, and mutual accountability. This is consistent with SDG 16’s recognition that peace and justice are interdependent and that neither can be sustained without the other.

In relation to SDG 10, the song’s insistence on the equal worth and dignity of all people, regardless of racial, cultural, or social background, directly addresses the goal of reducing inequalities within and

among countries. The song’s remarkable cross-cultural appeal the fact that it has resonated with diverse audiences across Africa, Europe, Asia, the Americas, and beyond demonstrates that the aspiration for equality is not culturally specific but universally shared. At the same time, the song reminds its listeners that inequality is not a natural or inevitable condition but a product of human choices and social systems that can, with sufficient collective will and moral commitment, be transformed.

In the Indonesian context, where the national philosophy of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity) calls for the harmonious coexistence of hundreds of ethnic groups, languages, and religious traditions, the song’s message is particularly pertinent. Indonesia faces ongoing challenges related to religious intolerance, ethnic tensions, and social inequality that test the resilience of its national identity. The values promoted in “One Love/People Get Ready” empathy, solidarity, and the recognition of a shared humanity that transcends difference—offer a musical articulation of the very principles that underpin Indonesia’s founding vision. The song can therefore serve as a valuable cross-cultural pedagogical resource, particularly for younger generations who are increasingly exposed to polarizing content through social media and digital platforms.

## 6. Music as an Educational Tool for Peace and Social Justice

A significant implication of this study is the recognition that music, as a form of literary expression, has unique and largely underutilized potential as an educational tool for promoting peace and social justice.

Unlike traditional modes of civic education, which often rely on abstract principles, formal instruction, and cognitive engagement alone, music engages learners simultaneously at emotional, aesthetic, and experiential levels. It does not merely inform but can transform, altering attitudes and broadening perspectives in ways that more conventional educational approaches struggle to achieve.

“One Love/People Get Ready” is a particularly powerful example of this educational potential. Its lyrical simplicity makes it accessible to young learners, while its thematic depth provides ample material for critical reflection and meaningful discussion. Educators can use the song as a starting point for exploring broader themes of inequality, historical injustice, and the responsibilities of individuals as citizens within a diverse and interconnected global society. By analyzing the song through the lens of the sociology of literature, students can develop both their literary analytical skills and their capacity for social awareness learning to read cultural texts as living documents that both reflect and actively shape social reality.

Moreover, the song’s global recognition means that it can serve as a bridge between different cultural communities, providing a common reference point for discussions about shared values and aspirations. In multicultural educational settings, it can facilitate meaningful dialogue across cultural and religious differences, helping students to identify common ground without erasing the distinctiveness of their individual identities and traditions. This pedagogical function is consistent with the

broader goals of peace education, which seeks not to produce cultural uniformity but to cultivate a deep appreciation for diversity as a source of social richness and creative strength rather than a threat to social cohesion.

The findings of this study thus collectively support the conclusion that Bob Marley’s “One Love/People Get Ready” is not merely a song but a socially significant literary work that continues to perform vital cultural, moral, and educational functions across diverse contexts. As the sociology of literature teaches us, the most enduring works of literary art are those that manage to speak to the deepest and most persistent concerns of the human condition while remaining firmly rooted in the specific social realities of their time. “One Love/People Get Ready” achieves precisely this balance: it is both a product of a specific historical moment of struggle and injustice, and a timeless articulation of the values that human beings across all cultures and historical periods continue to strive for love, unity, peace, and justice. In this sense, the song transcends the boundaries of genre, geography, and generation, standing as enduring evidence of the power of literary and musical art to illuminate social reality, challenge injustice, and inspire collective human transformation.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that the song One Love/People Get Ready by Bob Marley reflects strong social values, particularly unity, peace, love, and collective harmony. These values are conveyed through simple yet powerful lyrics

that listeners to overcome differences and build a more inclusive society.

Furthermore, the dominant social themes identified in the song include unity among people, resistance against division and injustice, and hope for a better future. These themes highlight the importance of solidarity in facing social challenges.

Through the perspective of Sociology of Literature, the song can be understood as a literary work that is closely connected to its social context. It does not only function as entertainment but also as a medium of social expression that represents the collective voice of society.

Finally, the song serves as a reflection of the social conditions at the time of its creation, particularly issues related to inequality, conflict, and the need for unity. It demonstrates how music can act as a powerful tool to convey social messages and inspire positive change within society.

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