

Music and the Rise of Caribbean Nationalism: The Jamaican Case

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Abstract

Caribbean nationalism emerged in many ways, but music played a vital role in furnishing emotion and ideological cohesion, and fueled the excitement and sustainability of nationalist identification leading up and following independence. This study employs the musical form, ska, to exemplify how music generated a sense of nationalism in Jamaica during the late 1950s and early 1960s, and as such provided strength for independence stability and some of the courage and excitement that sustained it through its early manifestation. Music created metaphorical and emotional meanings as well as political meanings through lyrics and rhythms that helped frame independence as more than an image of freedom from colonial rule. This study utilizes interviews, music lyrics, and literature to conclude that a cultural force, like, music, created a stronger sense of nationalism among Jamaicans, which facilitated the rise of a cultural uniqueness and collective identity.

History has shown that music profoundly shapes the goals and objectives of a people moving toward collective identity, cultural nationalism, and political independence. Music also transmits ideologies and political demands to adherents and activists of political, cultural, and social movements. This musical effect played out dramatically in the rise of Caribbean nationalism.¹ Caribbean nationalism emerged in many ways, but music played a vital role in furnishing emotion and ideological cohesion, and fueled the excitement and sustainability of nationalist identification. This effect is exemplified with, for example, merengue in the Dominican Republic, calypso in Trinidad-Tobago, and rumba in Cuba. Ska music, as this paper demonstrates, assisted the rise of nationalism and independence awareness in Jamaica during the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Jamaican independence and the emergence of a uniquely Jamaican popular music are inextricably linked and illustrate how cultural forms, like music, are important forces in shaping a collective national consciousness and a democratic political system. This study examines the musical form ska as the instrument that exemplified this phenomenon in Jamaica. Ska music sent deep metaphorical and emotional meanings as well as political meanings through lyrics and rhythms that helped capture nationalism and independence as more than images of freedom from colonial rule. This study employs interviews, music lyrics, and literature to conclude that a cultural force, like music, forged a stronger sense of nationalism among Jamaicans, which gave rise to a stronger sense of cultural uniqueness and collective identity.

Nationalism based on the idea of being Caribbean, or more specifically, Jamaican, sustained a common identity rooted in a common history and culture. An important component of this common identity is music, which influenced the sense of community that Jamaicans had and formed an identity based on a common idea of Jamaicaness. Music represented a form through which Jamaicans expressed their satisfaction and/or dissatisfaction with the political and cultural priorities practiced in Jamaica, the Caribbean, and internationally. Musicians evoked in Jamaicans an awareness of their socio-structural realities, cultural traditions, and prospects for the future, while the Jamaican people in turn imbibed the messages and rhythms from the music in their everyday lives. In Rex Nettleford's writings on Caribbean identity, he delineated and advocated a fundamental link between culture and people that is rooted in their historical experience.²

Rex Nettleford asserted a strong connection between people's art forms and their everyday life. The arts, argued Nettleford, formed the basis of resistance and cultural survival, and should, therefore, be expressed in ways that advance self-awareness and social change, because the creative imagination lies beyond the clutches of the worst kind of oppressor.³ Nettleford clearly understood the linkages among the arts, culture, and nation-building. He noted that astute politicians watch signals from the Caribbean masses who have something to say about their own destiny which is clearly expressed through their deep appreciation and tenacious retention of their cultural forms. Cultural forms, such as music, embodied elements that highlighted the Jamaican experience specifically and the Caribbean experience in general.

Music maximises its ability to foster social cohesion and political identity if its meaning fits with the ideology of the moment. Social cohesion and group solidarity are vital to countries seeking majority support for political and economic changes that accompany movements toward independence and music assists this effect. Michael Balter points out in, “Seeking the Key to Music,” how music can evolve to strengthen group solidarity and that music is critical for maintaining social cohesion and that music essentially developed to facilitate a sense of belonging among a community of people.⁴ Once a significant amount of social cohesion is achieved among a nation’s citizenry, mobilization into political action and nationalist enthusiasm is empowered, and since music is often inspirational, music at dances, demonstrations and political rallies, where repetitious refrains are chanted, allows social cohesion to intensify.⁵ This cohesive effect occurred in Jamaica from the late 1950s through 1964. Songs like, Al T. Joe’s “Rise Jamaica Rise; Independence Time is Here, Lord Creator’s “Independent Jamaica,” and Derrick Morgan’s “Forward March” exemplify this cohesive effect. They fit the ideology of the moment, they were inspirational, and their basic lines enabled repetitious refrains at political and national gatherings. “Independent Jamaica” was the official song celebrating Jamaica’s independence from Great Britain. In terms of influencing and advancing nationalism, ska lyrics, such as, “rise Jamaica, independence time is here” are much easier for popular consumption than an ideological phraseology rooted in the political-economic thought, which was left to the political and cultural leaders responsible for guiding Jamaica out of colonisation, political oppression, and western cultural emphases for interpretation and application.

Contextual Underpinnings:

The seeds of Jamaican nationalism were sown during the historical struggle of forced relocation to the Caribbean from Africa and the subsequent centuries of colonial oppression. One way that such suffering and trauma imprinted a deep and collective (un)consciousness appears in everyday life is through cultural retention and everyday expression.⁶ The horrible atrocities committed on enslaved Caribbean Blacks, are expressively described by Clinton A. Hutton in “Slavery and Cosmological Roots of African Caribbean Art”: their suffering “... encompasses every imaginable torture and dehumanising act possible, penetrated into the inner will to survive.”⁷ Hutton notes that Africans coped, survived, and resisted enslavement and colonial subjection by drawing from the creative stream and ethos of the African diaspora and the cosmological roots of African diaspora arts and aesthetics for the inner courage, endurance, and culture required to cope with and resist the forces of enslavement and colonial subjugation. The steely and vise-like grip of this era of oppression and slavery forms the painful remembrance and backdrop that fuels the appearance of cultural forms, like music, that serves as the binding force in individual identity and consequently nationalist identity.

In terms of political rights and suffrage, 1944 saw Jamaica’s first election with universal adult voting rights, and Alexander Bustamante’s Jamaica Labor Party (JLP) won the election over Norman Manley’s Peoples National Party (PNP). The JLP, although a labor party became the capitalist party over time, while PNP, became a democratic socialist party. The PNP won the 1955 election and Manley continued demonstrating his sensitivity to Jamaica’s liberal and creative communities. In 1961, an anti-Federation campaign led by activists, like Bustamante resulted in a referendum on Jamaica’s membership in the West Indies Federation. Put to a leave-the-Federation-or-

not referendum in 1961, Jamaicans voted to exit, which led to Jamaica's establishment as an independent member of the Commonwealth on August 6, 1962, with Bustamante as the first prime minister of an independent Jamaica.⁸

After years of voicing their discontent with the colonial system, by organising strikes and promoting protest marches, Jamaicans were assisted by the British Empire's further weakening after World War II at which time it began readying its colonies for independence by changing constitutions and local political policies to include more rights and participation. Local activism among colonial populations and a weakened economic situation made physical colonisation no longer practical for Great Britain. In 1958, Britain assisted in the formation the West Indies Federation which included ten countries of which Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, and Barbados were the principal members. This federation was groomed to become independent as one state with Port-au-Spain, Trinidad-Tobago as the proposed capital. As the federation's largest member, in terms of population and land mass, Jamaica received only one third of the representation. In short, Jamaicans did not favor being a part of a federation coalition of nations with one-island one-vote possibilities. Rather, most Jamaicans held to a total independence stance advanced by major supporters of breaking with the Federation.

Part of this strong nationalist bent among the populace flowed from the music, which was clear, straight, and to the point. For example, Lord Creator in "Independent Jamaica" sang in reference to the referendum that "the people voted wisely and now everyone is happy, there is no more Federation."⁹ This song, in fact, blared forth lyrics indicating a clear national political consensus that enabled political rivals Norman Manley and Alexander Bustamante to travel to England to bring official independence

back to their homeland. The seeds of Jamaican nationalism sown in the historical struggle for rights and justice were ready for harvesting by 1960 and ska music formed an essential component that helped move the country to independence.

Arts and Politics: Ska the Musical Nexus:

Certain Jamaicans understood that culture equaled politics in importance in terms of impacting movements for justice, rights, and independence. Jamaica, for instance, had progressive political and cultural leaders like Norman Manley and Rex Nettleford who understood what Jamaica needed to achieve independence, as well as a representative post-independence Jamaican life. In 1937 Norman Manley founded Jamaica Welfare to help ease rural to urban migration after a collapse of the banana industry. Over time, Jamaica Welfare aided local community development through crop programs and assisted in the development of the creative arts. Development of the arts was aided by artists, like Edna Manley, who sculpted images that reflected Jamaica's struggle for independence, taught art classes, and ultimately helped to establish the Jamaica School of Art and Crafts.

In 1959, Norman Manley formed the Jamaica Broadcasting Corporation (JBC) as a companion and alternative to Radio Jamaica. JBC's programming included local music, such as mento and early ska. Rex Nettleford also founded the National Dance Theatre Company in 1959 to highlight cultural forms, like dance and drama. This blending of culture and politics demonstrates how and why a cultural form like ska could emerge as a strong force in the development of nationalism, independence, and identity.

Most of the musical references in this study stem from songs which explicitly refer to nationalism and independence because they best typify the thesis that ska music

played a major role in transmitting nationalist ideas and independence excitement. This should not be obscured by the fact that ska music overall was the communicative force. In addition, this study does not imply that those who did not listen to nationalist-based ska lyrics would not gain increased cultural awareness or extra political traction, but they would miss a crucial part of the total Jamaican nationalistic experience. There were other active forces, including: literature, drama, dance, political mobilisation, and general education. And contrariwise, those who did listen to cultural and political lyrics did not necessarily become activists in advancing nationalist cultural or political positions, but they were more aware than those who did not expose themselves to this music at all, who were few in number.

Mass acceptance of Jamaica's desire for independence was vital to its success. Ska, rooted most especially in poor and working-class neighborhoods facilitated bringing this segment of the population into nationalist and independence development. Ska, as well, helped to alleviate suspicion, most especially in poor neighborhoods, that Jamaica's elites would use independence to further their own agendas without concern for the poor or the working poor. Ska, particularly between 1960 and 1964, created metaphorical and emotional meanings as well as nationalist meanings through lyrics and rhythms that brought all Jamaicans into the idea of Jamaicaness and Jamaican independence.

Ska melded musical forms from the United States, especially Rhythm & Blues and jazz, with traditional Jamaican folk music rhythms. Ska blends Jamaican mento rhythm, a Jamaican folk-music rhythm, with United States rhythm and blues and jazz.¹⁰ For example, the drum intones the blues and swing beats of rhythm and blues, and the guitar resonates the mento sound.¹¹ Ska features a strong bass and drum-rhythm section,

guitars, keyboards, horns and brass. Ska innovator Ernest Ranglin put it simply by stating that ska changed the emphasis on the Rhythm and Blues beat from 1 and 2 and 3 and 4 to 2 and 4.¹²

Ska arose out of the growing transnational popularity of African- American Rhythm and Blues that surged in popularity among increasingly large radio audiences. This fostered the birth of the Jamaican recording industry capitalised on by Jamaican recording and music entrepreneurs who initially imported Rhythm and Blues records and eventually produced “home-grown” music. Operators running 'Sound Systems' would power turntables and powerful speakers with a generator and held street parties. These festive gatherings created an excellent outlet for promoting their creative and entrepreneurial agendas.¹³ According to Edward Seaga, an early record producer who founded West Indies Recording Limited in the late 1950s:

“The sound-system operators picked up the challenge, and, in seeking exclusivity to popularize their dances, began to encourage the introduction of a Jamaican beat for Jamaican compositions.”¹⁴

This locally produced music, ska, ignited a consciousness among the people that this was their music, a Jamaican music that was written, produced, and performed by Jamaicans. Record producers named their sound systems with nationalistic titles, like Prince Buster’s The Voice of the People.

Music entrepreneurs on the production side also began a reverse transmission of Jamaican music by exporting it beyond Jamaican borders, which highlighted Jamaicans’ pride in ska as their music.¹⁵ For example, Edward Seaga, said that his company, West Indies Limited, was the first to bring Jamaican ska to international audiences.¹⁶

This discussion of record producers, DJs, and recording artists does not mean that peace and cooperation existed between them, because, for instance, the intense competition among sound-system producers sparked friction among themselves, recording artists, and attendees of their dances. The national impact of the music on Jamaicans, as a whole overshadowed those problems.

Ska music between 1960 and 1961 did not intone calls for political action or nation-state recognition. It, rather, focused on themes that stimulated excitement at dances and/or inspired one-up-man-ship over musical and sound-system competitors. There was even a mainstream/commercial element present in the music. This period also commended to Jamaica, and internationally, that a unique style of music was arising and solidifying in Jamaica that would be essential for defining and galvanising a Jamaican identity that would implore for independence.

There were exceptions to the lyrical preferences of 1961, like “Freedom” by Clancy Eccles. A sample of Eccle’s lyrics are:

Freedom, oh Freedom

Well I want freedom over me,

Before I be a slave,

I skip over my grave,

And go home to my father and be free

No more crying, no more crying,

No more crying over me,

Before I be a slave,

I skip over my grave¹⁷

Eccles's lyrics are defiant and put listeners on notice that revolutionary political and economic changes will not occur absent courageous sacrifices. The song resonates with the affecting emotion that a lifetime of slavery cannot be overcome without the high costs of unwavering commitment and sacrifice. A life of freedom cannot be purchased without great cost. While the lyrics refer specifically to Eccles, the wider symbolic message resounds forth and reaches forward to all who labour in the throes of exploitation, poverty, and injustice. With its resounding call for freedom and a willingness to sacrifice life to reach lofty goals, these lyrics form an excellent backdrop to the political songs extolling political and cultural independence that especially permeated the music of 1962.

Jamaican Independence Intertwined with Lyrics and Rhythms:

Lyrics and rhythms spark the appreciation and practice of specific types of music created to provoke particular responses. The responses are usually celebratory, but also political and spiritual. Popular Jamaican musicians Lord Creator and Derrick Morgan represent popular artists that brought Jamaican celebratory, political, and cultural themes to a wider range of Jamaicans. Their music, played on the radio, and the "sound system" dances, popularised them as drivers of Jamaican culture to the masses. Sound systems, like those created by Coxsone Dodd and Duke Reid, played the sounds that Jamaicans listened and danced to as they moved toward independence. During the early 1960s, ska transcended all political, social, and economic classes in terms of listening audiences.

Sonorous music resonating from ska artists intoned noticeable strains of United States music, like jazz, but particularly Rhythm and Blues music, like Al T. Joe's "Rise

Jamaica.” Al T. Joe’s vocals mirror New Orleans Rhythm and Blues singer Fats Domino. Fats Domino performed in Jamaica in early 1961 and impressed Jamaicans, according to Heather Augustyn, who quotes Lester Sterling of the Skatalites as saying that “we were playing...Fats Domino type of music, bluesy-like.”¹⁸ Both Domino, Joe, and Sterling enjoyed mainstream and/or commercial acceptance, but they differed in that Domino did not record political or nationalist songs whereas the Jamaican performers did. In “Rise Jamaica,” for instance, Al T. Joe exhorts Jamaicans to rise up and recapture stolen opportunities to engage in everyday Jamaican life to the fullest. In these explicit lyrics from “Rise Jamaica,” Joe tells Jamaicans that they will be swept up by the wind of social and political change and that they should not remain passive:

Rise Jamaica rise

And let us celebrate

Lets’ forget the past

Independence time is here

It is equality that we will enjoy

It never ever tries to destroy¹⁹

Al T. Joe challenges Jamaicans to ascend from the era of British rule and to not dwell on the injustices therein. Forgetting what lies behind does not mean forgetting the African cultural past or lessons learned from the struggles of slavery, however.

While some sectors of Jamaican society would have been satisfied to lay these memories to rest, those aware of the value of the past continued to stress the value of

these remembrances. This difference of opinion generated post-independence tension between nationalists who advocated an all-Jamaica stance and those who argued for a strong Jamaican Pan Caribbean, Pan African, and Third World connection. Deborah Thomas, for example, notes that Rastafarian and Rude Boy music eventually denied the notion of racial harmony by casting Jamaica as a country that oppressed black people thereby demonstrating the limited attraction of Jamaican nationalism among significant sectors of the population and encouraged, to varying degrees, interest in a broader pan-Africanist sensibility.²⁰ This view contrasts sharply with other influential forces in the music industry such as Edward Seaga who espoused multi-racial cooperation and a focus upon Jamaicaness as characterized in folk history.

Moreover, Al T. Joe's line "it is equality that we will enjoy" was taken seriously, and when it did not appear to be an early or long-term reality, individuals and groups from politics and arts began shaping political and cultural responses according to denials of the promise. Political life in general was weakened by internal struggles for power and economic gains, along with international politics, most especially the Cold War, eroded prospects for equality not only worldwide but in Jamaica. Jamaica, in particular, was prone to Cold War influence because of its proximity to Cuba and the United States need to dissuade other Caribbean countries, politically from leaning left of center.

Derrick Morgan, who led bands that combined ska-mento influences, recorded "Forward March" to elevate independence passion in Jamaica. Morgan's lyrics express a passion for freedom and independence that is nationalistic and embraces all Jamaicans. The title, militaristic in tone, captures the intended message of Jamaica and Jamaicans moving onward by asking Jamaicans to,

Gather together, be brothers and sisters

We're independent, we're independent

Join hands to hands, children started to dance

We're independent, we're independent

Don't be sad and blue, the Lord is still with you

Because the time has come when you can have your fun

So make a run, we're independent

Brothers and sisters give joy and praises

While it's under, yeah, yeah

Brothers and sisters give joy and praise²¹

And by asking everyone to come together as one, Morgan's song fits well into the spirit of unity desired and the second chorus acknowledges the religious temper of Jamaica's population. The line "the Lord is still with you" is not only a phrase to comfort the religious faithful, and acknowledge civil religion, but adds an element meant to appeal to all, as opposed to music which would, lyric-wise, appeal to a particular group or segment of society. Morgan also asks that the "joy," which will come from celebrating independence, be accompanied with "praises." The lyrics carry strength because they can be interpreted metaphorically and literally. In a live performance of "Forward March," Morgan commends that joy and praise be given to Norman Manley and Alexander Bustamante for their efforts in securing Jamaican independence. The lyrics also convey empowered consciousness that embraces the longing for an identity that is complete,

especially with the inclusion of Jamaican youth as the line “children started to dance” clearly implies. In regards to refrains and repetition, the phrase “we’re independent, we’re independent” is chanted in the background several times by a chorus in the call-and-response technique, which is a time-tested motivator and spirit raiser between caller and groups of responders.

Joe White and Chuck wrote and performed a version of “One Nation (Jamaican Independence Ska), which seizes the exhilarating crescendo of independence. “One Nation” reminds Jamaicans that:

We are all one nation,

One nation we are,

Independence celebration we all should jump for joy,

Lets’ join hands together to celebrate the day

Brothers we are marching on to independence,

Sisters we are marching on to independence²²

Again the common refrains, like “one nation,” “join hands,” and “celebrate the day” occur in “One Nation.” The message being that coming together drives cohesive movement for change. These inspirational lyrics encapsulate the motivational power of a positive definition of what it means to be Jamaican. Like the other lyrics, the metaphorical meaning of “marching on to independence” implies a sense of freedom for the individual constrained over the years by restrictions favoring elites and/or colonist powers yet inspired by the fact of Jamaica becoming independent and enjoying the same status as other nations.

Lord Creator's version of "Independent Jamaica" rallied all Jamaicans around the theme of independence with the following lyrics:

Independence is good for the young and the old,
 Also for you and me,
 Yes, independence is good for the whole population,
 including your children too,
 So I believe if we try our best it will be a great success,
 So let us live in unity for the rest of prosperity.²³

The way in which Jamaicans view themselves and imagine their "nation" resonates through the song "Independent Jamaica." The title speaks strongly against inferiority complexes etched in the hearts of Jamaicans by power brokers representing colonial social and cultural values, but the lyrics take the opposition to self-image abasement further. The lyrics don't just chasten, they powerfully affirm Jamaican culture.

One of the most inspirational and clearest messages of independence, hope, and calls for peace is Basil Gabbidon's "Independent Blues." Blues refers more to the influence of blues music than to blues in the sad melancholy sense. Gabbidon declares:

We want to be free, that's what we say
 We want to be free every day
 No more grinding, no more slaving
 Yes we want to be oh so behaving
 That's why we sensed it was independence

I want to be free that's what I say

That is why we are having Independence Day
 No more slaving, no more fighting
 Everything is going to be so inviting
 We're going to be free, we're going to be free, you and me²⁴

Here Gabbidon shows resolve to overcome oppression and repression, and the lyric “no more slaving” demands a reversal of the heavy burden of unjust political power and economic exploitation by the pre-independence colonisers.

Although some of the popular music of the era was influenced by nationalist ideology and independence themes, the celebratory nature of some of the music was influential without including nationalistic or independence lyrics. The most compellingly relevant fact is that melodies and rhythms were inspirational and celebratory, and ska was Jamaican. Consequently, 1962 was not entirely about ska's advancement of nationalism. More commercially-based music and internal rivalries that existed before 1962 continued to exist. Songs ranged from Byron Lee's and the Dragonaires release of “Come Fly with Me,” a song recorded and associated with Frank Sinatra (1958), to Carlos Malcolm and his Afro-Jamaican Rhythms' “Skamania (The Sound of the Soil).”²⁵

Some of the nationalistic ska lasted until 1963, but increasingly the music embodied the typical themes that had existed since ska's earlier origins. Ska themes ranged from the religious to the political. Delroy Wilson, for example, released “Lion of Judah,” Bob Marley and the Wailers “Simmer Down,” and Prince Buster “Madness.” In “Madness” Prince Buster voiced political dissatisfaction by referring to “propaganda ministers,”²⁶ but also reserved time to write and record a critique of producer rival, Derrick Morgan. Derrick Morgan responded to Prince Buster's criticisms by recording

“Blazing Fire” which had with lyrics such as; “live and let others live, and your days will be much longer.”²⁷

Negotiating Post-1964 Jamaican Culture, Politics and Ska Interconnections

By 1964, ska had solidified its identity and place as truly the dominant form of popular music in Jamaica. The promotion of ska as an international form of music and dance dominated the 1964 strategies and objectives of successful promoters, numerous influential politicians, and ska musicians. The Jamaican government, for instance, sponsored Jimmy Cliff’s, the Blues Busters, Eric “Monty” Morris, Byron Lee and the Dragonaires’ and Prince Buster’s participation in the 1964 New York World’s Fair to promote ska internationally. The ska of this select group meshed well with the image advocated by Jamaican leadership in 1964. Byron Lee and the Dragonaires, who released “Jamaica Ska” in 1964, was a more popular mainstream interpreter of ska, for example. On the other hand, the Skatalites, very accomplished musicians and well known, were not chosen to perform at the 1964 World’s Fair.

Their omission was likely related to the cultural and political images reaching beyond Jamaica’s geographical boundaries that Jamaican authorities and organisers did not favor for presentation. This concern is exemplified by Skatalite titles such as: “African Blood,” “Addis Ababa” and “Fidel Castro.” These compositions not only illustrate Jamaican artists’ cultural and political sympathies and connection to nations outside Jamaican borders, but reveal identity problems between those who preferred more intricate rhythms and lyrics that demand a critique of unequal relations of power and cross national cultural relations to a more sanitized image of Jamaica popularized by ska music with upbeat themes of romance and goodwill.

Ska, as a musical form remained strong as the national music of Jamaica, but on the other hand its nationalist theme, based on definitions of nationality containing strong cultural identity, was diminishing. The independence-themed songs shared in common the positive links which exemplify the impact of psychological and emotive causal mechanisms on individual and collective identity development and on the surrounding cultural milieu. As a whole, ska contained these mechanisms, but the development of collective identity represented by the intentions of collective identity was slowed in the post-independence years by emphases on particular aspects of Jamaican society that wanted to connect with who they were as Jamaicans, as well as, where their deeper roots came from.

Artists, scholars, and other observers, such as Rex Nettleford, clarified this dialectical disconnect as it occurs outside the economic and image frameworks by raising questions relative to identity seeking. He found, for example, that the search for identity formed linkages which the newly independent people had difficulty grasping owing to their colonial past and their worries surrounding self-governance. Nettleford delineated a deeper split between the desire to reject African cultural retentions and the desire to absorb the cultural symbols of the contemporary white/brown ruling elite. One way of solving this division of the mind into two parts is to cultivate the connection between the peoples' art, their everyday experiences, and their historical experiences, particularly since art as a source of cultural survival and resistance promotes awareness of self and social change.²⁸

Generally, ska musicians, record producers, and DJs did not respond well to linking Jamaican nationalism and independence struggles and victory to external

Jamaican cultural and political influences, but they were aware of rallying around the issue of Jamaican independence, common values, such as beliefs in Jamaican culture. Even though many Jamaican record producers generated numerous nationalist and independence-themed records based on their self-interest in profits, markets, and sound system dominance the Jamaican populace benefited constructively from and were affirmatively uplifted by these thematic recordings. The political and cultural-tinged lyrics and melodies positively affected listeners and the subsequent attainment of elevated cultural and national awareness.

Once the economic poverty and political divisions of post-independent Jamaica emerged from the euphoria of independence hopes and images, the cultural, political, and social statements of the music turned to subjects related to these realities. The consensual popular hope, illustrated by the nationalist lyrics and rhythm, among the populace divided as well. Rastafarian-rooted music strengthened its focus on the virtues of African and black consciousness and the Rude Boys arose in response to the street-life survival skills needed to live in communities of poverty and crime. According to Deborah Thomas, Rasta and “Rudie” eventually denied the notion of racial harmony by highlighting Jamaica as a country that oppressed black people thereby demonstrating the limited attraction of Jamaican nationalism among significant sectors of the population, and arousing Pan-Africanist sensitivity.²⁹ Clinton A. Hutton notes that by 1965, the die was cast as criminality accelerated. He revealed that the transformation of pre-independence gangs into warring tribal entities reflected the driving force of political organization and mobilization, and showed an ontological signature in the definition of political culture and political power in the making of the post-colonial Jamaican landscape.³⁰

Theoretical Implications:

This study details what ska is about and what the music meant to the people, especially the masses. It does not delve into what it meant for politicians exploiting the music for political gains, record producers making records for profit, or “rude boys” looking to establish tough reputations. Popular cultural forms, like music, can be powerful tools for externalizing a community’s collective consciousness, communicating its sensibilities and consolidating its codes of belonging. The representational authority of popular culture in a nation is partially aided by its associative link with elements that signify the “traditional,” the “indigenous,” and the “people.”

The music instilled a sense of self, strength, and pride in Jamaicans, while demonstrating that for nationalist theory, to explain more effectively political movements and nationalist tendencies it has to move beyond a focus on politics or economics to become a stronger explanatory tool. The sense of a strong cultural connection furnishes a strong variable for nationalist theoretical structure and analytical strength, but also a strong framework useful for nationalists and politicians to garner support from the general populace. This sense of being truly Jamaican manifested itself in music production and composition which demonstrated greater Jamaican control over what they wrote. This greater control over what they wrote, recorded, and performed owes gratitude to the opportunity structures forged by men such as Norman Manley and Rex Nettleford.

This study of Jamaican ska lyrics shows the dialectical relationship between the Jamaican arts and politics. With the development of black pride and black self-determination gaining sway over decades of cultural and political activism, and peaking

at independence, musicians used this for commentary in their songs and showed the didactic tenor of ska.

While the focus of this study is on lyrics, because they clearly represent political-cultural-nationalist themes and strengthen the study's argument, instrumentals require specific acknowledgement. Instrumentals identify ska with familiar rhythm and beats that ignite a discernable feeling and recognizance among people listening to the music. The importance of non-lyrical musical forms is important to deciphering the role of music, because it is full of different moods and timings that relate to how people experience particular aspects of their life. Garth White, a Jamaican popular music historian, comments that:

People who feel the thing, will know it immediately, but it is difficult to say.

Where the music sometimes without the lyrical content, the music give it that feeling, if it is sufficiently forceful in itself to foster and support this confidence in blackness, our identity, even if it isn't addressing class or race issues.³¹

White's quote contains the acknowledgement that not all the music require lyrics to communicate confidence and respect for cultural identity and awareness of class divisions. There was an extensive amount of instrumental ska recordings between 1960 and 1964. Among the numerous instrumentals were Rico Rodriguez and Johnny Moore's "Freeman Lane Shuffle" (1961) through the Skatalite's "Mesopotamia" (1964). Ska instrumentals demonstrated that any style or combination of lyrics could be applied to with the ska backbeat and it would be ska. The Skatalites, for example, were widely sought as a session and back-up band for singers and vocal groups. Skatalite's were master musicians, like, Don Drummond and Tommy McCook, that used Jazz, Rhythm

and Blues, and mento influences to inform their music. Skatalites could delve into improvisational solos with John Coltrane influences while the basic ska rhythm continued to flow.

The musical inspiration of ska has sustained itself over time as a catalyst for post-independence music forms, such as, rocksteady and reggae that sustain Jamaican cultural pride and political activism. Much of the nationalist influence of music showed an ascertainable ideological bent, which evoked strong political and social emotions. Through the use of a myriad of lyrics and beats, ska increased political enthusiasm and lends insight into the unique blend of music and nationalism that is found in forms of subsequent Jamaican music.

Although there is a contemporary connection between the politics, culture, and current Jamaican music, the question is: why hasn't the power of the political-cultural music in reggae, for example, resulted in more political-cultural activism among listeners? This answer in part is related to the absence of the overall political conditions that existed during the pre-independence era. In addition, the nationalist ideology that guided and inspired much of the music of the late 1950s and early 1960s independence years no longer exist in an easily accessed way.

As contemporary musicians seek to regain intensity through reggae music, for instance, they may have to link their music concretely to political ideology and activism and again confront the overly commercial nature of the music and musicians by record companies, if they are to have an impact with their culturally challenging music. In regards to contemporary music Robin Small, who has been involved with Jamaican music for decades, notes that:

The music is just as full of the message today, but those who are producing the more stirring messages positive messages, don't get as much amplification. The more frivolous music gets more amplification, will sell more, and so on. But there are artists and musicians who are just as stirring today as during that time. But of course the more frivolous ones... gets more exposure, and commercial traction than some of the more serious and more revolutionary ones.³²

Due to the strong role of commercialism, many reggae artists are successful at making money with nonpolitical themes, which limits the desire to engage the listeners at deeper levels of cultural and political consciousness. However, as Small notes, the music is there, but it is not streaming from the popular outlets, which makes it difficult for the masses to hear it.

Jamaican independence, which called for Jamaicans to unite and organize around a strong sense of self and community, set forth a concrete model combining political opportunity and cultural structures that was strengthened by a cultural form, like music. Moreover, when messages of community togetherness and nationalist pride were embedded in music celebratory energy infused the establishment of identity. This study also reveals that political mobilisation and social strategy comprise critical components of successful political and social policies aimed at nationalist and collective identity. Moreover, the addition of powerful cultural forces can profoundly enhance the goals and objectives of these objectives. Jamaica serves as an exemplar of Caribbean nationalism, which called for Caribbean countries, still under colonialist rule, to rally around a powerful sense of self and community strengthened by the addition of cultural forms.³³

This study shows the vital role played by ska in the formation of national cultural, political, and social structures. Furthermore, it also reveals that when togetherness resonates from the musical message of nationalistic ideology a strong note of celebratory energy is added to its tenor. The forces of collective action, cultural mobilisation, political organising, and belonging are all fostered when music is added to the matrix of national political thought and life. Furthermore, the lyrics and melodies examined in this study demonstrate that in order to create and maintain social importance, music must be an active and living force and be made compellingly relevant to the political and cultural environment in which it subsists.

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Small, Robin interview on June 5, 2011.

White, Garth interview on June 3, 2011.

¹ Caribbean nationalism focuses on particular characteristics, history, people, and positive aspects of the region. Caribbean history has given the region its nationalistic tendencies, with Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the United States playing roles. These roles stem from colonising, forced labor, and cultural transmissions. Nationalism is the foundation that bonds a people together and validates a country's power over the residents. In the Caribbean, the nationalist imagination centers on cultural and historical foundations. The Caribbean "culture" is one that includes characteristics of survival, colonialism, and cultural self-determination. Cultural retentions were a strong stimulation in forging a nationalist identity.

² Marcus Garvey also identified the fundamental connection between nationalism and the arts, and believed that in order to challenge oppression black people needed to develop their own cultural norms and aesthetics for music, dance, literature, and visual art. See for example, Beverley Hamilton, "Marcus Garvey: Cultural Activist," *Jamaica Journal*. V. 20, #3, (1987): 21-30.

³ Rex Nettleford, *Dance Jamaica: Cultural Definition and Artistic Discovery*, New York, Grove Press, (1985) 15.

⁴ Michael Balter, "Seeking the Key to Music," *Science*. V. 306, (November 12, 2004): 1120.

⁵ Social cohesion does not have to be nationalistic as post-1962 Jamaica exemplifies. It can be lower levels of social cohesion, like gangs and political parties. Clinton Hutton notes the destruction of communities, like, Back-o-Wall in 1963, anti-Chinese riots in 1965, and the banning of black consciousness advocate Walter Rodney from the University of West Indies in 1968 as examples of the breakdown of the hopes of communal nationalism is August 1962. (pp. 57-58). Clinton Hutton. "Oh Rudie: Jamaican Popular Music and the Narrative of Urban Badness in the Making of Postcolonial Society," *Caribbean Studies Quarterly*, V. 56, #4, (December 2010): 22-64.

⁶ In an article on Jamaican trombonist and Skatalite, Don Drummond, Herbie Miller wrote that he hears in the music a collective unconsciousness that is embedded in the Jamaican nation that holds a source of identity and dignity. P. 185. Herbie Miller. "Don Drummond: Just How Good Was He?" In, *The African-Caribbean Worldview and the Making of Caribbean Society*, Horace Levy, ed. Kingston, University of West Indies Press, (2009): 170-186.

⁷ Clinton Hutton, "Slavery and Cosmological Roots of African Caribbean Art," Forthcoming in Martinique Cultural Commission book on Caribbean art. (2011).

⁸ Jamaica's population at independence was 76.8% Black, 16.9% Mixed Race, 0.9% White, 0.6% Chinese, 1.7% Indian and 3.1% others. Colin Clarke, *Kingston, Jamaica: Urban Development and Social Change 1692-1962*, Berkeley, University of California Press, (1975): 152.

⁹ Kentrick Patrick (Lord Creator). "Independent Jamaica." Island Records 001. (1962).

¹⁰ Even though United States jazz and Rhythm and Blues were major influences on ska the African influence should not be lost in ska discussions. For example, one of the earliest recordings linked to ska, "Oh Carolina" (1959-1960), which included Rastafarian drummer/percussionist Count Ossie. Count Ossie was invited. Along with his four drummers, by Prince Buster to set the rhythm in this recording out of the Jamaican Broadcasting Corporation's recording studio. Count Ossie played the African *burru* rhythmic style of drumming. This intersection of African cultural retention with a recording intended for commercial (and mainstream) release is an excellent component of the cultural nationalist picture that enhanced the transmission of Jamaican identity. According to Garth White, Rastafarian influenced drummers were not as prominent as the more secular musicians in 1962-1964, but they were there. White notes that they were a heavy by way of the kind of impact on some of the musicians who were playing the more secular forms. As an example, he mentions Skatalite drummer Lloyd Knibb's inclusion of the *burru* because he came under the influence of Count Ossie. White says there is also a mood set by Rastafarian rhythms, which influences the melodic instrumentalists too, like Don Drummond's songs where the trombone has a vocal voice and rasta feel that comes from his association with the Rastafarians. Interview with Garth White on June 3, 2011.

¹¹ Mento is a mostly rural music typically with lyrics related to living and work conditions. Mento is basically acoustic with vocals often accompanied by a banjo, a gourd shaker, a thumb piano, a mbira (an African thumb piano), and a single-hand drum.

¹² Ernest Ranglin interview in British Broadcasting Company documentary "Reggae: The Story Of Jamaican Music." (2002). www.torrentz.com.

¹³ For an excellent discussion of the Jamaican music and the role of jukebox, which is largely neglected in discussions of the rise of ska and other Jamaican music see Clinton Hutton, "Forging Identity and Community Through Aestheticism and Entertainment: The Sound System and the Rise of the DJ" (pp. 16-31) and Dennis Howard "Punching for Recognition: The Juke Box in the Promotion of Popular Jamaican Music (Pp. 32-46) both in *Caribbean Quarterly*, v. 53, # 4, (December, 2007).

¹⁴ Edward Seaga. *My Life and Leadership: Volume 1, Clash of Ideologies, 1930-1980*, New York, MacMillian Publishers, (2010): 120.

¹⁵ Of interest is Curtis Mayfield, a prolific popular R & B musician among Jamaicans co-produced "The Real Jamaica Ska" for the United States market in 1964. Epic Records, 1964. BN 261119. Released in September 1964 and recorded in Kingston, it featured Lord Creator and Jimmy Cliff. One example of Mayfield's music is the Jamaican group, the Uniques's version of Mayfield's "Gypsy Woman." "Diamond Baby" written by Bob Marley, but based on Curtis Mayfield's "Talking 'Bout my Baby" was recorded with the Peter Tosh and Bunny Wailer with backing by the Skatalites was recorded in 1965 on Coxsone.

¹⁶ Edward Seaga. "Jamaican Music Industry as a Side of Nationalistic Fervour." Lecture on University of West Indies TV. (February 20, 2010).

¹⁷ Clancy Eccles "Freedom." Blue Beat 451 BB 67-A. (1961).

¹⁸ Heather Augustyn, *Ska: An Oral History*, London. McFarland and Company, (2010): 38.

¹⁹ Al T. Joe. "Rise Jamaica." Dice, CC9. (1962).

²⁰ Deborah Thomas, *Modern Blackness: Nationalism, Globalization, and the Politics of Culture in Jamaica*, Durham, North Carolina, Duke University Press, (2004): 74.

²¹ Derrick Morgan. "Forward March." Beverly's/Island ILP 903. (1962).

²² Joe White and Chuck Josephs "One Nation." (1962) *Reissued on Trojan Ska Rarities Box Set*. Trojan TJETD 238.(2005).

²³ Kentrick Patrick (Lord Creator). "Independent Jamaica." Island. 001. (1962).

²⁴ Basil Gabbidon. "Independent Blues." Blue Beat BB124. (1962).

²⁵ It should be noted that Carlos Malcolm helped ska connect to two areas of importance for national (and international) acceptance as a serious music by writing professional arrangements. He accomplished this as musical arranger for Jamaica Broadcasting Corporation (JBC), where he led the JBC orchestra and wrote formal ska arrangements for musicians like Jimmy Cliff and Derrick Morgan. Malcolm was also the first

musical director of the Jamaica National Dance Theatre Company, which was founded by Rex Nettleford. He held both positions in 1962 the year of independence.

²⁶ Prince Buster. "Madness." Blue Beat, BB 170. (1963).

²⁷ Derrick Morgan. "Blazing Fire." Island Records. (1963).

²⁸ Rex Nettleford, *Dance Jamaica: Cultural Definition and Artistic Discovery*, New York, Grove Press, (1985): 15.

²⁹ Deborah Thomas, *Modern Blackness: Nationalism, Globalization, and the Politics of Culture in Jamaica*, Durham, North Carolina, Duke University Press, (2004): 74.

³⁰ Clinton Hutton, "Oh Rudie: Jamaican Popular Music and the Narrative of Urban Badness in the Making of Postcolonial Society," *Caribbean Studies Quarterly*, V. 56, #4, (December 2010): 22-23. 1964 was also represented by political ska, including critical words for governing leaders, such as a popular protest song by Justin Hinds and the Dominoes' named 'Carry Go Bring Come' in which they protested Jamaica's leaders for ignoring Jamaica's poor community.

³¹ Interview with Garth White on June 3, 2011.

³² Interview with Robin Jerry Small on June 5, 2011.

³³ Among the rich literature available for further discussion and analysis of Jamaica's national(ist) ideology see Kathleen Norris, *Jamaica: The Search for an Identity*, London, Oxford University Press, (1962) and Rex Nettleford, *Caribbean Cultural Identity: The Case of Jamaica: An Essay in Cultural Dynamics*, Kingston, Ian Randle Publishers, (2003).