

# Impact of american media on caribbean culture

Media



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Stewart-Andre Wilkinson 409001306 Impact of American media on Caribbean mediacultureandmusicRap, Hip Hop, Pop, Fashion; all these are areas in which the culture of North America has influenced the culture in the Caribbean. To be able to determine the full extent to which American culture affects the Caribbean, we must first define what Caribbean culture is. In its broadest definition it is the actions and way of life practiced by the people who live amongst the islands of the Caribbean Sea that stretch from the Bahamas in the north to Guyana in the south. Caribbean culture as the result of the violent mixture of indigenous people from Quisqueya, Xaymaca, Borinquen and Cuba, European immigrants who invaded these territories and African slaves brought to work in the gold mines, sugar plantations and sugar mills” (Wilson 1998). The culture of the Caribbean has been developing over centuries and due to its dynamic nature it changes with the presence of external pressures. The largest external force affecting Caribbean culture is in the form of North America; the main instrument used to cause this influence is the media.

Although America’s impact is diverse, one of the major impacts it has is on the media culture and music in the Caribbean. This article will discuss how American media has affected the local media in Caribbean territories and the music industry in the region in three main ways: 1. The change in popular music in the Caribbean; 2. Treatment of local celebrities versus foreign celebrities. 3. Impact on Carnivals and television. The first major impact that American media has had on the region is on the perception of popular music.

In the past reggae and calypso were the music genres of choice and the many songs produced could be heard regularly on the radios. Reggae

originated in Jamaica but has found its way throughout the region so that the popular songs were sung by everyone. Calypso music which came out of Trinidad was heard throughout the region; popular artist such as The Mighty Sparrow were well known throughout the Caribbean. This is not to suggest that there was no music which came from America, because there were several popular groups and songs which originated from the United States, such as The Platters, The Drifters and The Temptations.

What is noteworthy is that these songs were still popular but they would never be heard more than the local or regional music. This ratio is much different than what is heard today. " Hip hop and Top 40 tunes stream from radios as much, if not more than Soca, calypso and reggae. " (Cummings-Yeates, 2000). This can be clearly seen in the amount of airtime that the respective genres are played on the radio. Calypso is only heard in high quantities around the time of Crop Over in Barbados; reggae is heard in small amounts as is the genre of dub.

In contrast to these is the fixation on American music such as Pop which is at the moment the most popular genre of music. Turn on the radio at any given time to the most popular on radio stations and you are probably going to hear music originating from the United States. There is a notion that since it comes from America the standard must be of the highest quality. Within the songs of local artists, this notion of America being the standard can be seen; their voices as well as the melody of the songs follow the pattern which is set by the United States, there is hardly any resemblance of the local customs or traits.

The second impact that is observed is how local celebrities are treated in contrast to international celebrities. There is an old saying, "A king is never welcomed in his own kingdom"; this has proven true for local celebrities within the region, especially in Barbados. Local singers and actors are viewed as amateurs; this is also related to the notion of American music and film being the benchmark. "Young people idolize celebrities from 'foreign' more than their own, homegrown role models" (Cummings-Yeates, 2000).

This idolizing can have a grave impact on the youth of the region. Multiple studies in Trinidad found that "The more hours Trinidadian female adolescents spent watching American sitcoms, the less satisfied they are with their body image...(and) also resulted in the increase in the adolescents' awareness and internalization of the American norms and expectations for thinness, as well as the pressures to adopt those norms and expectations" (Ferguson, 2011). This behavior is not shown towards local celebrities; they are seen as being no better than the other locals.

On the contrary the foreign celebrities are idolized and imitated. Thirdly, the impact that America has on the various cultured festivals or carnivals is uncanny. This impact can be directly related to the importance of tourism in the region. The respective festivals within the region usually had some cultural or traditional significance to it. In Barbados for example, the festival of Crop Over had with it the Queen and King of the Harvest, these were main attractions of the festival; there were other traditional practices which had its roots in colonial days.

With the switch to tourism as main source of foreign exchange for the country, the festival had to become more marketable for tourists. As a result

the traditional features of the festival were no longer the focal point but rather the women and dancing of Kadooment. An example of this is the sidelining of calypso with its social commentary in favor of the more catchy Soca. Advertising on American are somewhat to blame for this because they don't advertise the cultural side of the festival but only the sexual aspect which appeals to prospective tourists.

On one hand there is the changing of the traditional festival but on the other hand there is also the introduction of new festivals from the United States which is bigger than the traditional festival. These include the materially-driven festival, Christmas as well as Easter, Father's and Mother's day. They are celebrated in the same fashion and characterized by the same extent of commercialism as in developed societies. It is the commercial aspect of the celebrations that marks the degree of Western influence.

Finally another impact seen is through the domination of television which originates in America. Caribbean residents have become exposed to this culture difference through "the pervasive commoditization and consumption of the United States way of life via cable television and other instruments" (Baptiste, 1988). As stated by Baptiste the television has been one of the major instruments used; various shows and programs from the United States are shown. This can be contrasted to the lack of local programs that are aired. In conclusion then the impact that America has had on Caribbean media is immense.

It is clear that through the popularity of the music that we listen to as well as how we treat our local celebrities in comparison to how we idolize the foreign celebrities that this is the case. The changes in the various Carnivals that are

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celebrated around the region give another testament to this. There was a change in the traditional Carnival to make it more marketable to the tourists as well as the influx of festivals from outside of the region which have become larger than traditional festivals. The change in the media coverage has also been a major impact on the region. References 1.

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