

Jamaican culture and society



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Culture refers to the pattern that is practiced by individuals over and over again. It is transferred from generation to generations, and it eventually becomes their way of life. Culture is manifested through a people's language, customs, literature, religion, art and costumes. Culture, differs from one community to the other. As such, it differs from one country to the other resulting, in a variety of cultures all over the world. Culture also goes down to the beliefs of different individuals from different parts of the world. This paper deeply seeks to examine the culture adapted by the Caribbean people. It seeks to understand the cultural characteristics of Jamaica. The paper also seeks to make a comparison between the culture and the society of the Caribbean people.

Culture could be defined simply as a people's way of life. The society too could be defined as a group of people who have lived together for sometimes and thus have common practices and beliefs the Caribbean region was developed as a money making machine for the European nations. In its early stages the Caribbean developed with characteristics of people who were enslaved there to provide labor. These were the Tainos, Caribs, Africans, Indians and the Chinese. Its formation marked the first phase of globalization and it happened through the process of colonialism it being an island, it has a population of close to forty million people with diverse ethnicity. This population is as a result of waves of immigration.

On the other hand, there was the presence of the culture of the typical Jamaican, who is the vast majority of the population, with cultural beliefs and practices that are strongly African in their orientation. However, the subordinate culture had to find strategies to accommodate the dominant

culture, while maintaining a sense of identity through grounding it in its own ontology. Nettleford has argued that survival was possible only through the subjugated group's use of its 'creative imagination' (Nettleford, 2003). With the end of colonialism and becoming an independent state, the gap between the "Two Jamaica's" has been reduced, but is still present in many aspects. The Jamaican culture has been merged with so many other cultures to come up with a new kind of culture. This could be called Creole society.

The Caribbean history can be looked at in three distinct levels. These levels or stages will help us analyze the modern history as they are based on European activities in the area at those particular periods. The first period covers most of the slave era (1493-1838) and is commonly referred to as the exploration to the emancipation period. The second stage would be emancipation to independence period which stretched from 1838 to the 1960's. Last but not least would be the time from independence to now. It is worth noting that all this stages did not happen simultaneously in all of the Caribbean islands.

Generally cultures are not static. They change with the people and are thus very easily influenced. New cultures tend to influence the local existing ones. However, given Jamaica's particular history, this is more deeply embedded in the way in which the culture operates. The level of value that a specific behavior has will help to determine if the new behavior will be included in the culture. Different values would also be tested and a new aspect of meaning creation or new interpretation will be adopted, based on the value that it offers to the core cultural values and experiences. This idea is drawn from justification using epistemological foundationalism, which at its most

basic formulation argues that there is “ at least one non-inferentially justified belief”, which provides the justification for other justified beliefs.

The Language

The official language of the Jamaican people is English. On the other hand, Patois (Creole), which is an amalgamation of English and other African languages, is used in rural areas and has escalated to the in urban areas at an alarming rate. The most peculiar characteristic of this language is that nearly everyone in Jamaica is able to converse and understand Patois; however, it is not a written language. The best part of Jamaican speech is that, even in English, has an idiosyncratically rhythmic and melodic quality.

The Family

The Jamaican family comprises of an interdependent, mutually supporting and a close-knit web of aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents. Families support each other in matters dealing with emotional and economic maintenance to its members. The family is mainly the significant set a person belongs to, and as such, it the group with whom a person spends most of his/her time developing and maintaining cordial relations. Trust in families has a productive role in a nutshell. This is evident with the fact that Jamaicans have a hale and hearty distrust of those in power and this prompts them to place their whole belief, trust and faith in their acquaintances or rather people they know well. This trickles down to the family setting because blood is thicker than water. This mindset makes the citizens of Jamaica to be so embedded in their family ties thus protecting and helping each other in times of difficulty and desolation. They believe in their

extended family and close friends who are treated as if they were family. As an illustration, this can be perceived in the actuality that many still have a preference to form a partnership with friends and family rather than go to a bank to secure a loan. A partner is regarded as a financial agreement between friends and neighbors. Each and every person in the group agrees to donate a set amount into the partner for a precise number of weeks. After the funds are accumulated, they are used to make down payments for large procurements such as buying a house or a business. This is a component of highly valued trust in and/or for the partner. The fundamental prerequisite of the partner is trust. This is why they have implemented policies like, for one to become a member of the entity or elite group, he or she must be approved by a trusted friend or relative.

Religion

No other country worldwide has a strong belief in religion like Jamaica. Religion is basic factor in the everyday lives of the Jamaican people. With reference to the bible, this is so evident which in everyday speech. The Caribbean Island not only has the most number of churches per head in the world, but also more than 100 diverse Christian denominations. Most Jamaicans are Christians; the largest denominations are the Anglicans, Baptists, Methodists, Pentecostals, Brethren and Roman Catholics. Religious holidays, especially Christmas, is characteristically celebrated by various denominations with Communion services, candlelight ceremonies, concerts, fasting, all-night prayer meetings and the singing of Christmas carols. Another key indicator and unifying aspect Jamaican culture, is that, it has developed an only one of its kind type of religion. The main type called

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Pocomania, which was a merger of European Christianity and African religious practices, the derivative is Rastafarianism. This religion is practiced by a small number of people in the country, hence is not really a unifying feature but gives Jamaican culture through religion its exceptionalism which deserves utterance. Rastafarians accept as true that they are one of the lost tribes of Israel, who were sold as slaves to Babylon, which they believe is Jamaica itself. This gives then the notion and prime belief that they don't belong there but they should return to their healthier home (Zion) which they hold to be Ethiopia. The movement does not have prearranged worshippers, a paid clergy or even a written canon. There are three types of Rastafarians in Jamaica: members of the Bobo Shanti order who put on long robes and tightly wrapped turbans on their heads. They act like they are in their own self-governing nation within Jamaica with their personal constitution. They imitate such lifestyles like those of the Old Testament Jewish Mosaic Law, whereby they believe in the observance of the Sabbath from dusk on Friday to dusk on Saturday, sanitation policies, and also special greetings among their fellow members; members of the Nyahbinghi sect center their belief largely on Emperor Haile Selassie and they state publicly that he is the embodiment of the Supreme divinity. They set in motion their repatriation to Ethiopia, as they believe all black people came from there. Ethiopia sets the stage in this sect; The Twelve Tribes which was founded in 1968 by Dr. Vernon ' Prophet Gad ' Carrington is the most laissez-faire of the Rastafarian groups. Members are permitted to worship in a church of their choosing or within the seclusion of their homes. Their direct ancestors, as they believe, are the 12 Sons of David.

Relationships and Communications

The Jamaican people observe greeting as a critical part of social relations. The most widespread greeting is a handshake with direct eye contact, not forgetting a warm smile. They use a suitable mode of greeting according to the time of day e. g. good morning, good afternoon, or good evening.

Once a friendship has been established, women may hug and kiss on each cheek, starting with the right. Men often pat each other's shoulder or arm during the greeting process or while conversing. Address people by their honorific title (Mr., Mrs., or Miss) and their surname until a personal relationship has developed. Always wait until invited before using someone's first name. As your friendship deepens, you may be asked to call the person by their nickname. (Gray, Obika, 1991)

There is no essentiality in introducing a third-party, however, such introductions can enhance the time it takes to widen the personal relationship so necessary to conducting business successfully. Networking and healthier relationships can be fundamental to long-term business success. The superficial warmth and friendliness of the Jamaican people often appear distant in the preliminary stages of introduction; they are reserved and will only open up after they know someone a little deep. Nevertheless, they value Socializing as an important ingredient of relationship building. Even though they hate authority, they respect the trusted authorities and refer to such people as "bossman" or "bosswoman" when the person addressing them is of a higher rank. Jamaicans are easily outspoken and are not fearful to say what they think and feel openly. Their

anticipation is that others should be just as undeviating. They also have a thing for perception and sensitivity and dislike obvious hostility. They are polite when it comes to expressing to someone what they think, even if a party disagrees with them. They value reason or logic in their line of thinking. It is vital to display high esteem and respect to those in positions of power. Informal communication is normality when dealing with natives of the same level as they stand close to each other while communicating. A man may lay a hand on the arm or shoulder of another man, or even finger his collar during verbal communication.

Dining Etiquette

During meal taking, observing table manners are somewhat casual. Although not all occasions display this feature, there are times that are formal. These are only applicable in strict protocols. When in doubt, they observe what others are doing and imitate their behaviour. Someone should not sit down until he is told where to sit. Table manners are Continental — the fork is held in the left hand and the knife in the right while eating. Meals are often served buffet-style. Strictness comes in whereby one should not start consuming his meal before the guests start. Hands are rested on the lap while not eating which is acceptable. It is advisable to try tasting everything on the table as it demonstrates graciousness. Only utensils are used in meals and finishing everything in the plate shows respect to the host and nature.

Culture Wars: Femi phobia and Sexuality

Jamaica has a strong homophobia and in this view, Hope's (2004) 'femiphobia' view where she argues that the structure of the female body is a <https://assignbuster.com/jamaican-culture-and-society/>

key part of how Dancehall defines its concepts of masculinity. Both are inter-related. This is tantamount with Dancehall's own brand of the Jamaican nation as the female gender is well thought-out as a dangerous 'state of affairs'. Consequently, the "punaany" (vagina) has to be dominated as a comprehensible way of mastering sex and power in the wider society. Songs such as "RDX's" Bend Over undoubtedly describes this. The Jamaican "rudeboy"/ "ghettoyute" is warned against performing the emasculating rituals of oral sex (with women), which gives away his masculine powers to this dangerous female. Notably, Ranks is not clear about his feelings of male to male oral sex in such a context, though this is, in part, understood by his consistently anti-homosexual stance adopted, locally and worldwide. In Hope's outlook, Jamaican men, particularly those represented in and by Dancehall's political public speaking are especially concerned with emasculation, though, there are also acknowledged areas of ambivalence within these constructions as Dancehall also recreates elements of the homogeneity and heterosexism it critiques in middle class politics in its own discourse. Explicit sex is a crucial ingredient of Dancehall's performances of its revolutionary genders (and sexualities). As a result, the penis is an exceedingly valued part of this sexual perceptive and practices as critical parts of the national and political rebirth Dancehall prediction for Jamaican society. (Cooper 2004). The vigilant receptiveness of and references to sexuality in the music are a good suggestion of this. Sexual violence, therefore, becomes the figurative discharge of the large groups of powerless and crestfallen black men which is further mediated all the way through the narrative's demonstration of the Jamaican middle-classes as 'the other'.

Art and Clothing

Art and Clothing of the Jamaican people are both very significant in constructing their culture. Jamaican art revolves around the everyday lives of the Jamaican people. This is seen in sculptures, paintings, collage and craft works. This is a direct transfer from the more intangible form of European art and even the African more melancholic types of art that puts emphasis on olden times. Their clothing also reflects on their culture. Even though Jamaican clothing and fashion is not as well-liked as European and African clothing it is defined by the use of primary colors and the admired use of cotton because of the acceptable tropical climate.

Jamaican culture is a culmination of various divergent religions, beliefs, folklore, art, and customs. The doctrines in the cultures that are portrayed disagree in many ways than they agree. Therefore there are different groupings with divergent relationships but is close-nit.