

# History and culture of jamaica



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Introduction Jamaica is the third most populous Anglophone country in the Americas after the United States and Canada. Although a small island in the Caribbean Sea, Jamaica is a melting pot of cultures from all around the world. From the beginning, the island was inhabited by ancient tribes with different customs, beliefs and backgrounds. Since Columbus discovered the island in 1494 nothing remained the same, the Spanish colonists assumed control of the island and forced most of its native inhabitants into slavery. Due to slavery, disease and war the aboriginal people were exterminated in about two hundred years. The Spanish conquistadors had no interest in converting the natives to Christianity, like they did with the Aztecs or the Mayans in south America, so they literally worked the Tainos to death.

Bit by bit they were replaced by African slaves from which the modern black population descends from. The Spanish rule lasted until 1655, when the English seized the island after many years of pirate attacks, even though they were recognized as rulers of the island only in 1670 through the Treaty of Madrid. Slavery was abolished by the English only in 1834 after hundreds of thousands slaves died on the sugar cane plantations. Jamaica remained an English possession until 1962 when independence but remained part of the English Commonwealth. I find Jamaica interesting not only for its history but especially for its culture. Jamaican culture, at least its music, has, over the years sprung different music genres, music trends and artists.

Jamaica is the birthplace of genres like ska, dub and reggae and in recent years dancehall or jungle. Not even the English language remained unchanged in Jamaica, most of the population speak Patois or Patois, which is a mixture between American English, British English, French and African

dialects. Adapting the English language gave birth to a new dialect that has transformed a sentence like: " The children are making too much noise" into " Di pickney, dem a mek too much nize" or " Those boys are hungry, you should give them something to eat" into " Den de bwoy dem belly a yawn, yu a fi gi dem sintin fi heat". Jamaicans have their own take on Christianity, the island being the birthplace of a philosophical and religious movement called Rastafarianism, a religious cult that accepts the former emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie I as God incarnate, to whom they refer as Jah.

One of the most visited islands in the Caribbean Jamaica isn't just sun, sand and palm trees, it's people, it's culture and it's history have something special to offer to anyone who's interested in human cultures, human habits and beliefs. Jamaica's motto: " Out of many, one people" speaks greatly about the cultural and racial diversity of the island, who over the years come to incorporate all the different customs of it's inhabitants into the national culture heritage. These next pages will show that, from a cultural point of view, Jamaica is one of the richest countries in the world. Early history Jamaica's ancient history is one of tribal colonization from south America from where different tribes arrived on canoes between 5000 BC and 900.

The first people to colonize Jamaica were the Guanahatabey, a tribe of Amerindians who arrived on the island somewhere between 5000 B. C. and 4000 B. C and came from the Yucatan Peninsula. They were cave dwelling people, who used basic tools for fishing and gathering.

They were peaceful people who lived in very small groups, without interacting with the outside world. Not very much is known about them and

their culture, due to their primitive social and intellectual status. The next wave of Amerindian tribes who came on the island, were the Saladoid or Igneris that arrived in 300 A. D. They came from the Orinoco region in Venezuela and were the first Arawakans to arrive in Jamaica.

They, unlike the Guanahatabey had a form of social organization and had a skill in fine ceramics. DUJO But the most influential of the south American tribes who inhabited at one moment the island were the Tainos. Tainos were also Arawakans who came in two different waves on the island, first in 650 A. D. and then in 900 A. D.

The Tainos didn't colonize only Jamaica, they controlled all the islands in the Greater Antilles, the Lesser Antilles and the Bahamas. They named the island Xaymaca, meaning the land of springs and water, from which the modern names derives. In a few years they absorbed the Saladoids and their culture, making them slaves and denying them of Tainos luxuries such as hammocks and cassava (manioc). Tainos lived in villages called " yucayeque" in the center of which existed a plaza where ceremonies and other social events took place.

Most of the population lived in large circular buildings called " bohio", made from wooden poles and palm leaves. They were constructed near the town plaza and could house 10 to 15 families. The town chief or " cacique" and his family would live in rectangular buildings called " caney". In every Taino home there were cotton hammocks, mats made from palms, wooden chairs (dujo) and cradles for children.

**BATEY COURT**Tainos played “ batey”, a ceremonial game very similar to modern volleyball, in which two teams of ten to thirty men or women had to score points for their village, as the game was played for the resolve of problems between different communities. The game was played in the village plaza or on specially designed ball courts. Taino society was composed of two social groups: “ naborias”, who were the Saladoid slaves and “ nitainos”, the Taino nobility. They were governed by the “ caciques”, who were either males or females, and had supreme power. They were advised by priests/healers called “ bohiques”, who could talk to the Taino gods.

Taino were mainly farmers, growing cassava, “ batata” (sweet potato) and tobacco, but they would also eat fish, lizards, turtles or birds. They were master carvers and didn’t wear clothes except for a small apron worn by married women. From a religious point of view, life was very complex, as Taino believed in “ zemis” or “ cemis”(gods and spirits). The two supreme gods in Taino culture were: Yucahu(spirit of the cassava) the god of cassava and sea and Atabey(Yucahu’s mother), who was the goddess of fresh water and fertility. Other gods include: Boinayel and his twin brother Marohu who are the gods of rain and weather respectively, Guabancex the goddess of storms and Deminan Caracaracol a male hero from whom the Tainos believed to have descended from. Before special ceremonies Tainos used to induce vomiting by swallowing a stick or by fasting and sniff a hallucinogenic powder called “ cohoba” prepared from beans.

**TAINO DOLL** Also they used to pierce their ears and noses as sacrifice for the gods. Technologically wise Tainos would make fish nets and ropes from

hemp and cotton, canoes (that could carry up to 150 people) from palm trees and as a weapon they would use the “ macana” a wooden club one inch thick. The “ macana” came in use when a warrior tribe from south America , the Caribs, tried to seize the island on several occasions . Ironically, the thing that stop them was the arrival of the Spanish on the island.

Columbus found out about Jamaica from the Tainos in Cuba, but he failed to land on the island on his first attempt as 40 war canoes repelled him and his vessels. Non the less the conquistadors eventually landed on the island at Cow’s Bay, as they named it , where they were greeted , to their surprise, by a cacique and his followers. It is said that after seeing the cacique and the warriors with him who were dressed in bright feathered cloaks and head dressed with ornaments, made of semiprecious stones, around their necks and foreheads, and faces painted with different colours, Columbus said that the cacique he encountered in Jamaica was “ the most intelligent and civilized leader in the New World”. This initial respect for each others culture did not last, as the Spanish, as they did elsewhere, killed al the caciques and turned the rest of the native population in to slaves.

Not only slavery caused the wipe-out of the Taino population in Jamaica, but also European diseases like smallpox or the plague, who hit the island in 1520. It is even said that Tainos were killed for training by the Spanish soldiers on the island. All these things combined, plus a massive wave of suicides wiped clean the island of it’s natives. So at the moment of the British takeover there was virtually no Tainos left on the island, although in 1598 the Governor of Jamaica Fernando Melgarejo made an attempt to save <https://assignbuster.com/history-and-culture-of-jamaica/>

the few Tainos left, by putting them in a reservation but the colonists refused as they would have no more slaves to work the land. Much of the records that survived about this interesting civilization is written by Spanish explorers as the Tainos had no written language.

Tainos and their legacy are present even in the English language, in which we can find words of Taino descent: barbacoa (barbecue), hammaca(hammock), canoa(canoe), tabaco(tobacco), yuca(yucca), and huracan(hurricane). British takeover It was not until 1655, however, that the Spanish were driven from the island by Admiral William Penn and General Robert Venables. The Spanish were forced to flee the island but not before freeing the slaves who took to the hills where they remained a constant thorn in the side of the English. In an effort to settle the island Oliver Cromwell issued his famous proclamation, which granted land to British citizens who were willing to settle on the island. In 1656 approximately 1,600 immigrants arrived and settled around Port Morant. Although the Spaniards were driven out they never gave up hope of recapturing the island of Jamaica and in 1658 another Spanish force landed but was defeated at the decisive battle at Rio Nuevo.

The island began to prosper under the rule of the British. Great wealth was brought to the island by the buccaneers, who operated mainly from Port Royal, by plundering Spanish ships which transported gold and silver from South America. By the late Seventeenth Century, Port Royal had earned the reputation of being the richest and the wickedest city in the world. In 1692 this town suffered destruction by an earthquake in which more than half of

the town sank beneath the sea. This signaled the end of piracy in the West Indies.

The second half of the Seventeenth Century saw the beginning of the “ sugar revolution”. Large parcels of land were planted in sugar cane. The whole process of making sugar required a huge labour force. The English planters sought various groups to provide the much needed labour. African slavery was not new to the West Indies and had been introduced by the Spanish and the Portuguese.

Later, the Dutch supplied slaves from Africa, and they taught the English the techniques necessary for the production of sugar. The Africans brought in were from many tribes, although the majority were Coromantees from the Gold Coast, Eboes from the Bight of Benin and Mandingoes. The Coromantees are described as being a strong, brave, proud and fierce race. Most of the slave revolts in Jamaica were led by Coromantee slaves. The slaves were divided into two main groups, the field slaves and the domestic/house slaves.

In the case of the former they were further divided into skilled workers such as carpenters, coopers, drivers, masons, blacksmiths, and unskilled workers, that is, those who worked in the field. Punishment was a regular part of estate life and ranged from lashings, to maiming and ultimately death. There was resistance to slavery by slaves, both passive and active. Examples of passive resistance included poisoning of masters, destruction of property, and infanticide.



In the case of active resistance, there were open rebellions, and many slaves ran away and joined forces with the slaves who were set free by the Spanish or who had fled to the interior hills of the island. They were later called Maroons. In 1735 – 1739 they fought against the British in what was called the First Maroon War. Although Jamaica's sugar industry continued to grow and provide England with great wealth it was not without its problems. For instance, wars throughout the Eighteenth Century, caused a reduction in trade between the colonies and Great Britain.

The lack of supplies affected the health of the slaves, and ultimately lowered the production of sugar. The abolition of the slave trade in 1807, marked the beginning of the end of slavery and the economic power of the Jamaican planters. By 1813, the wealth of the West Indian planters could no longer muffle the cries of the abolitionists and humanitarians to free the slaves. Consequently, in 1833 slavery was abolished in the British West Indies and a system of apprenticeship was adopted.

The objective of the apprenticeship system was to help the slaves adjust to their free status and to supply the planters with a source of constant labour until they could adjust to full wage labour. HOUSE OF CORRECTION The abuses of the system brought about a premature end to slavery and in 1838 full freedom was given. Although taken from their country of origin the slaves retained some aspects of their culture. In the case of their language some African words, such as “nyam”, “duckunoo”, “patoo”, and language patterns which include the repetition of a word, as in the case of “chaka chaka” meaning chaotic, and “little little” meaning very small, were retained.

The abolition of slavery saw a rise in the construction of Free Villages, and growth in peasant farming. There was also an increase in the membership of Nonconformist Churches and a system of education for the free blacks was introduced. In addition, the planters' fear of mass migration of ex-slaves from the plantation saw the introduction of other racial groups to replace slave labour. Groups brought in included Europeans (Germans, Scots and Portuguese), Free Africans, Chinese and East Indians. Although many things had changed, social conditions remained more or less the same for blacks. By the 1860's the situation had worsened and gave rise to what was later called, the Morant Bay Rebellion.

The Morant Bay Rebellion brought about some changes in Jamaica, firstly, the system of Government changed from Representative to Crown Colony (or direct Crown rule), secondly, the Anglican Church was disestablished, thirdly, the Institute of Jamaica was founded to encourage literature, science and art. By 1872 the capital was transferred from Spanish Town to Kingston. There was an improvement in the water supply and a number of schools were established. There was a shift from sugar to banana production. The Great War (1914 - 1918) gave many Jamaicans the opportunity to travel which in turn helped to shape their views of the system of Government.

In addition, during the early Twentieth Century, many Jamaicans left in search of employment in the Panama Canal Zone, and in Costa Rica, Cuba and Honduras to work on the plantations. The movement of people brought about a change in ideas by the 1920's. Marcus Mosiah Garvey, who promoted unity among blacks and pride in their race, became a prominent figure during this period. Port Royal-pirate capital Jamaica, and especially its

former capital Port Royal were the launch base for almost all pirate and buccaneer efforts in the Caribbean. From the “ wickedest city on earth” to a thriving commercial centre of the New World, Port Royal, Jamaica, has been the subject of much popular interest.

While the image of a decadent and lavish city bears some truth, it obscures a more complex history of English colonization and the African slave trade, of skilled craftsmen as well as crafty men, , of urban devastation and preservation—all of which is part of the story of a town whose sleepy present hides its past of excitement and intrigue. Soon after their arrival in Jamaica in 1655, the English began a defence of Port Royal against recapture by the Spanish. To protect the harbour, they hastily erected Fort Cromwell, which was renamed Fort Charles following the crowning of Charles II in 1660. By the time of the earthquake in 1692, an impressive array of forts and stone lines encircled Port Royal, making it one of the most heavily defended cities in the Caribbean. In the years immediately following the English conquest, Jamaica remained vulnerable to Spanish attacks. Thus, Governor Edward D’Oyley enticed buccaneers, who were already preying on ships in the region, to occupy Port Royal and provide the city with maritime protection.

Since the English government officially commissioned these pirates, they were known as ‘ privateers’. The most infamous of them, Henry Morgan, was commissioned in 1668 and carried out several spectacular raids against Spanish fleets and ports. Though the Treaty of Madrid between England and Spain in 1670 abolished privateering, the practice continued. After being appointed the lieutenant-governor of Jamaica in 1674, Sir Henry Morgan apparently both suppressed and encouraged privateers.

During the 1660s and 1670s, the privateers brought tremendous wealth into Port Royal in the form of Spanish silver, gold and precious stones. This wealth, in turn, allowed the residents of the city to carry out a flourishing trade in European staples and luxury goods—such as wines, sweet meats, refined clothing and jewellery, and to import porcelain from China and ivory from Africa. By 1692 Port Royal had an estimated population of 6, 500, of whom perhaps 2, 500 were enslaved Africans. Many of the white residents of the city were indentured servants. Though a portion of the population lived in great luxury, most survived under much more humble circumstances.

In 1680 there were approximately 1, 000 houses in Port Royal, built in a manner that resembled an English town. Large houses were often multi-story brick structures with four-room floor plans. Ground floor rooms that fronted the street were sometimes used for shops or offices. In their private chambers, ladies fussed and tidied up themselves, received guests and wrote letters. A man's bedchamber, on the other hand, doubled as his office or study(a place to secure money, weapons and books).

The splendour of the finest homes was comparable to that of London. Official events were grand displays of the King's authority with parades and the changing of fort guards to fife and drum bands. While there were lavish balls and banquets, much of Port Royal's social life revolved around the numerous taverns and included the usual drinking, brawls, smoking, eating and even sleeping. Other activities, considered inappropriate contributed to the city's reputation for decadence and wickedness.

Though freewheeling, Port Royal was certainly not all wicked. According to observer John Taylor: “ they allow of a free toleration of all religions”. Indeed, there were Roman Catholics, Presbyterians, Quakers and Jews, along with the Anglican congregations of Christchurch and Saint Paul’s. It was about 11:42 am on Wednesday, June 7, 1692.

The residents of Port Royal were retiring home, or to a tavern, for a drink and their meals when a roar came from the hills across the harbour. Shockwaves had the land suddenly “ rowling and moving” and, within minutes, three tremors tore through the ground. The sea swept in from all sides. The earthquake had struck. An anonymous eyewitness stated: “ The sand in the street rose like the waves of the sea, lifting up all persons that stood upon it, and immediately dropping down into pits; and at the same instant a flood of water rushed in, throwing down all who were in its way; some were seen catching hold of beams and rafters of houses, others were found in the sand that appeared when the water was drained away, with their legs and arms out”.

By the end, only 25 of Port Royal’s original 60 acres remained and 2. 00 people were killed instantly. One Port Royal resident, a Frenchman named Lewis Galdy, was swallowed up by the earth and subsequently spewed out alive. Most, however, did not have his good fortune. To many, the calamity was a sign of God’s wrath, His retribution upon this “ Sodom of the Indies” with its hosts of reckless pirates, prostitutes and moneylenders.

Following the earthquake, survivors established Kingston across the harbour but did not abandon Port Royal. The community rebuilt itself, though it

continued to be devastated by fires, hurricanes and earthquakes. In 1951 Hurricane Charlie wiped out Port Royal, leaving only a few of its wooden buildings standing. The old Naval Hospital, which remained intact, provided a safe home for almost the entire population. Once again, the citizens of Port Royal rebuilt their town. Surviving buildings of the naval station served as a police academy and small military base and, at present, provide a headquarters for the Jamaica Coast Guard.

Today, Port Royal's ruins from the 1692 earthquake appear as ghostly silhouettes at the bottom of the shallow waters surrounding the existing town. Since the 1950s, countless artefacts have been recovered through underwater archaeological excavations, though less than 10% of the catastrophic site has been surveyed to date. Whether crushed, mangled or shattered, these artefacts are evidence of the history of a town that has seen many defeats as well as numerous attempts at rebirth. In 1999 the Jamaica National Heritage Trust designated Port Royal a National Heritage Site. The underwater city is undeniably one the world's archaeological wonders.

Jamaican culture 1.

Religion The Rastafari movement or Rastafarianism is a “ messianic religio-political movement” that began in the Jamaican slums in the 1920's and 1930's . The most famous Rastafari is Bob Marley, whose reggae music gained the Jamaican movement international recognition. There is significant variation within the Rastafari movement and no formal organization. Some Rastafarians see Rasta more as a way of life than a religion. But uniting the diverse movement is belief in the divinity and/or messiahship of Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie I, the influence of Jamaican culture, resistance of

<https://assignbuster.com/history-and-culture-of-jamaica/>

oppression, and pride in African heritage. The Rastafarian lifestyle usually includes ritual use of marijuana, avoidance of alcohol, the wearing of hair in dreadlocks, and vegetarianism.

Followers of the Rastafari movement are known as Rastafarians, Rastafaris, Rastas, or Ras Tafarians. The movement is named for Ras Tafari Makonnen, who was crowned Emperor Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia in 1930. Rastafari developed in the slums of Kingston, Jamaica, in the 1920s and 30s. In an environment of great poverty, depression, racism and class discrimination, the Rasta message of black pride, freedom from oppression, and the hope of return to the African homeland was gratefully received.

The Rastafarian movement began with the teachings of Marcus Garvey (1887-1940), a black Jamaican who led a “ Back to Africa” movement. He taught that Africans are the true Israelites and have been exiled to Jamaica and other parts of the world as divine punishment. Garvey is regarded as a second John the Baptist and famously prophesied in 1927, “ Look to Africa, for there a king shall be crowned. ” On November 2, 1930, Ras Tafari Makonnen was crowned emperor of Ethiopia (he ruled until 1974). At his coronation he took the name Haile Selassie, meaning “ Might of the Trinity. ” Followers of Garvey’s teachings believed that Selassie is the messiah that had been predicted, and that his coronation indicated the divine punishment was completed and the return to Africa would begin.

Rastafarians named their movement for Ras Tafari and regarded the emperor as the physical presence of God (Jah) on earth. Haile Selassie was an Ethiopian Orthodox Christian who denied his divine status as proclaimed

in Jamaica. In a radio interview with Canada's CBC news in 1967, he said, " I have heard of that idea " that I am divine". I also met certain Rastafarians. I told them clearly that I am a man, that I am mortal, and that I will be replaced by the oncoming generation, and that they should never make a mistake in assuming or pretending that a human being is emanated from a deity. This denial didn't stop Rastafarians from believing the emperor to be divine.

The sacred text of Rastafarians is the Holy Piby, the " Black Man's Bible. " It was written by Robert Athlyi Rogers of Anguilla from 1913 to 1917 and published in 1924. The Holy Piby is a version of the Christian Bible that has been altered to remove all the deliberate distortions that are believed to have been made by white leaders during its translation into English. Rastafarians do not believe in an afterlife but instead look to Africa (called " Zion") as a heaven on earth. True Rastas are believed to be immortal, both physically and spiritually, a concept called " everliving".

Another central concept is Babylon, which refers to the white power structure of Europe and the Americas. Rastas seek to resist Babylon, which once cruelly enslaved blacks and still continue to hold them down through poverty, illiteracy, inequality, and trickery. The greed and wickedness of Babylon is contrasted with the simplicity and naturalness of the Rastas. Rastafarians are perhaps best known for their religious use of marijuana, which grows plentifully in Jamaica. Rastas know it as ganja, the holy herb, lley or callie, and believed was given by God. Scriptural support is found especially in Psalm 104: 14: " He causeth the grass for the cattle and herb for the service of man.



” Other texts interpreted to refer to cannabis include Genesis 3: 18, Exodus 10: 12, and Proverbs 15: 17. In addition to ritual use, Rastas also use marijuana for medicinal purposes , applying it to a variety of diseases including colds. Marijuana is used mainly during the two main Rastafari rituals: reasonings and nyabinghi. The reasoning is an informal gathering at which a small group of Rastas smoke ganja and engage in discussion. The ritual begins when one person lights the pipe, or “ chalice,” and recites a short prayer while all other participants bow their heads.

The pipe is then passed around the circle until all of the people have smoked. The reasoning ends when the participants depart one by one. The nyabinghi, or binghi for short, is a dance held on Rasta holidays and special occasions. These dances can last for several days and bring together hundreds of Rastafarians from all over Jamaica.

They camp in tents on land owned by the host Rastas. Formal dancing takes place at night in a hut especially set up for the occasion. The Rastas sing and dance until the early hours of the morning. In the daytime, they “ rest and reason”.

There are several Rasta holidays, most of which center around events in the life of Emperor Haile Selassie. The most important celebrations are:

- November 2 – the coronation of Selassie
- January 6 – ceremonial birthday of Selassie
- April 21 – Selassie’s visit to Jamaica
- July 23 – Selassie’s personal birthday
- August 1 – emancipation from slavery
- August 17 – Marcus Garvey’s birthday

One of the most visible practices of Rastafarians is the wearing of hair in dreadlocks. Dreadlocks have several purposes and layers

of meaning for Rastafarians, including: •the biblical command not to cut one's hair (Leviticus 21: 5) •the appearance of the lion's mane, representing strength, Africa, Ethiopia, and the Lion of Judah •naturalness and simplicity, which are associated with Africa The other main Rasta symbol besides dreadlocks, are the colors of red, gold and green. Red stands for the triumphant church of the Rastas as well as the blood of the martyrs in the black struggle for liberation. Gold represents the wealth of their African homeland and green symbolizes Ethiopia's beauty and lush vegetation. Black is often also included, representing the color of the Africans.

Another important symbol is the Lion of Judah, which represents Haile Selassie as the King of Kings, Africa, and strength. The most dedicated Rastas follow a dietary law called Ital. Ital food is food which is completely natural (not canned and free of chemicals and preservatives) and eaten as raw as possible. Old Testament prohibitions against pork and shellfish are part of Ital; most Rastafarians are vegetarians or vegans. Coffee and milk are also rejected as unnatural.

Rastafarians reject the use of alcohol, since it is a fermented chemical that does not belong in the temple of the body and it makes a person stupid, thereby playing into the hands of white leaders. This is contrasted with the holy herb of marijuana, which is natural and believed by Rastas to open their mind and assist in reasoning. There are between 3, 000 and 5, 000 Rastafarians in the United States. However, these figures may be slightly distorted as a result of the large number of people who have adopted the external appearance of Rastafarians. Worldwide, the total following is approximately 1, 000, 000 people. 2.

Arts and Literature Jamaica is well-known for its music, which is central to Jamaican life and has had a world-wide impact. Church services feature gospel choirs, and singers of the genre have risen to fame. Ska music developed in the early 1960s. Rock Steady, a slower, more soulful rhythm with a heavy bass beat, was next on the music scene, but it was quickly eclipsed by reggae. Originating in the Kingston ghetto in the early 1970s, reggae rose to dominate the international music scene under the leadership of Bob Marley, its undisputed king.

Reggae style blends Afro-American rhythms with modern instruments and often caustic political and social commentary. Jamaican music is still producing new innovations and is a major influence in dance clubs around the world. Jamaican literature includes poetry, folklore, novels, short stories and essays. Much of the island's literary movement appeared after independence in 1962.

The most famous Jamaican writer, poet Claude McKay, is credited with having inspired the Negritude (“Blackness”) movement in France and was a part of the Harlem Renaissance in the United States, where he emigrated at the age of 22. Before moving to America, he had established himself as a poet in Jamaica. McKay is known for his style, which, though classical, expressed uniquely Jamaican ideas in his earliest works. His later works helped to inspire some of the most important writers of the Harlem Renaissance and is placed alongside Langston Hughes as a founder of the movement. His works are well respected throughout the Western World. An annual literary festival includes competitions in writing poetry, short stories and essays.

Numerous Jamaican writers, including Velma Pollard, author of “ Karl and other Stories” (1993) and the poet Kwame Dawes, author of “ Progeny of Air” (1994) have won international awards. Jamaica’s own literature has grown out of this storytelling tradition, capturing a unique blend of spoken and written forms. In fact, the island’s natural speech is one of the most important elements in many of its writers’ novels and stories. Others use language to capture the musical rhythm of the island, with its unusual beats.

This can play an important role in defining the island’s literary character. The 1970s saw the arrival of dub poetry, a new genre in which poems are often set to heavy reggae bass and drums. Jamaican visual art has a long and powerful tradition. The most common themes are slavery, nationalism, spirituality and the family.

Jamaica has internationally known sculptors and painters, as well as a tradition of wood carvers who sell their folk art along Jamaica’s highways. Edna Manley is a well-known sculptor. Barrington Watson is also an artist who received wide acclaim. Jamaican theatrical artists put on performances throughout the country.

The best known of these stage productions are the Little Theatre Movement’s pantomimes, which are often based on the character of Anancy. The National Dance Theatre Company, a company of creative dancers, musicians and singers, has won wide acclaim in Jamaica and internationally for decades. The female troupe Sistern has won international acclaim performing plays and skits on women’s issues. 3.

Music THE BIRTH OF SKA Like mento before it, ska was born out of a combining musical elements. Both mento and jazz were combined to produce a new style that was initially called ' Shuffle' Popular shuffle hits were recorded by Neville Esson, Owen Grey and the Overtakers. The newly set up recording studios were always on the look out for the next new sound. With the popularity of American R&B artists like Fats Domino and Louis Jordan many Jamaican performers incorporated the 12 bar blues chord progressions and boogie bass lines with mento guitar rhythms. Increasing emphasis was placed on the offbeat rhythms of mento.

The offbeats became shorter and more detached. These distinct syncopated rhythms were sounded on guitar and piano. The new style of music became known as ska. The first person to record this ' ska' rhythm was Ernest Ranglin when performing with Cluet Johnson (Clue J. ) and the Blues Busters.

Clue J was well known for greeting his friends with a call of ' Love Skavoovie'. Many believe the name of ska is a shortened form of this greeting. Ska quickly became the most dominant form of music in Jamaica. Its success coincided with the independence and the departure of the English in 1962. There was a new attitude towards indigenous music.

Ska was already enormously popular in Jamaica and music producers attempted to export it to the rest of the world, a move that was supported by the government. It was the national music of Jamaica and was demonstrated to the the world at the 1964 Worlds Fair in New York. The Jamaican big names included Byron Lee and the Dragonaires, Jimmy Cliff , Prince Buster and dancers Ronnie Nasralla and Jannette Phillips who taught the world the

moves for the ' Backy Skank', the ' Rootsman Skank' and the ' Ska'. Early ska dance movements and some lyrics were influenced by the religious revival era. Songs such as ' Wings of a Dove' performed by both The Blues Busters and The Wailers, ' Oil in My Lamp' by Eric Morris and ' King of Kings' by Jimmy Cliff are revival tunes with lyrics that are sped up. ' Israelites' by Desmond Dekker also features revival characteristics in the lyrics.

Other ska lyrics were pop orientated and feature very little Jamaican patois. These songs were either nonsense lyrics such as Eric Morris' Humpty Dumpty' and " Solomon Gundi" or romantic such as Delroy Wilsons " Dancing Mood", which was one of the first songs to bridge the gap between ska and it's slower successor Rocksteady (more later). In contrast are the political ska lyrics that reflected the social concerns of rude boys. RUDE BOYS These were the primary listeners to ska in Jamaica. They were rebellious out of work and reacted against poverty and injustice.

They emulated Hollywood gangster fashions by wearing black suits, thin ties and pork pie hats, the type of look that is still seen today in Tarantino's movies " Reservoir Dogs" and " Pulp Fiction". Rude Boys often lived outside of the law and were also sometimes called " Scofflaws" (people who hate the law). Ska lyrics at the time reflected the life and times of Rude Boys. Some examples include The Soul Brothers " Lawless Street", The Heptones' " Gunmen Comin to Town", Desmond Dekkers " 007 Shanty Town", Dandy Livingstones " A Message to You Rudi" and Prince Busters " Judge Dread" who handed out 400 year sentences to Rude Boys. Clement Dodd backed a young group who envisioned themselves as rudies - The Wailers -Bob

Marley, Bunny Livingstone (Wailer) and Peter Macintosh (later shortened to Tosh).

The way rude boys danced to the music also influenced the ska sound. They rhythmically pumped their arms back and forward and adopted a more menacing posture than the traditional style demonstrated by Ronnie and Jannette. As a result the music became more menacing. Bass lines became more syncopated rejecting the easy going walking boogie style.

**ROCKSTEADY TO REGGAE** By 1966 in Jamaica many audiences had grown tired of the insistent ska beat and tempo. Around 1966 the beat of ska was slowed and rocksteady was born. Some say that it was a particularly hot Jamaican summer that led to this more relaxed style but the real reason for this change can be traced once again to the continuing influence of American R&B. By the mid 60's R was developing into the smoother soul styles of Motown, Memphis and Philadelphia soul. Jamaican musicians responded to this with their own slower smoother styles.

The most notable hit of the rocksteady era was “ The Tide is High” by The Paragons. In the 80's this was covered by Blondie and was one of their biggest hits. The influence of another religious revival, Rastafarianism led to further musical developments of ska and rocksteady and reggae was born. **The BIRTH OF BRITISH SKA** Ska went to England with the immigrants of the early 1960's and was initially known as ‘ Bluebeat’. The first international ska hit was “ My Boy Lollipop” by Millie Small.

It was recorded in England in 1964 for Island Records and featured a young English Rod Stewart, just beginning his own music career on Harmonica. Ska

<https://assignbuster.com/history-and-culture-of-jamaica/>

gained popularity amongst the Mod scene and several hits followed including “Guns of Navarone” by the Skatalites, “Carry Go Bring Come” by Justin and The Dominoes, and “Rudy, A Message to You” by Dandy Livingstone. In 1969, “The Israelites” by Desmond Dekker became the first Jamaican produced recording to become a number one hit in Britain. Other big ska chart hits in 1969 included “Monkey Man” by Toots and the Maytals, “Long Shot Kick De Bucket” by The Pioneers and “Liquidator” by The Harry J Allstars.

It is interesting to know that these hits had all been recorded several years earlier in Jamaica and gradually climbed the tops into the UK charts over a long period of time. TWO TONE In 1979 ska enjoyed a revival of popularity. Initially the ska revival was an English phenomenon, but gradually spread to the rest of the world, including Australia. The most notable bands associated with the second wave of ska popularity were The Specials, Madness, The Beat, and The Selecter.

All these bands recorded their first albums for “Two Tone Records”, a label established by The Specials keyboard player Jerry Dammers. The label was named after the two tone tonic suits worn by the original ska stars of the 1960's and also reflected the multi racial membership of the bands signed to the label. The trade mark of the company was based on a negative photo of Peter Tosh from an early Wailing Wailers album cover. This “Rude Boy” logo became known as Walt Jabsco.

The Two Tone artists relied heavily on the first wave ska stars attitudes and philosophy. The Specials took their name from the special one off recordings



made for the early sound system operators in Jamaica and “ Madness” are named after a Prince Buster song. REGGAE The word “ reggae” appeared around 1960 in Jamaica to identify a “ ragged” style of dance music, that still had its roots in New Orleans rhythm ‘ n’ blues. However, reggae soon acquired the lament-like style of chanting and emphasized the syncopated beat. It also made explicit the relationship with the underworld of the “ Rastafarians”.

Compared with rock music, reggae music basically inverted the role of bass and guitar: the former was the lead, the latter beat the typical hiccupping pattern. The paradox of reggae, of course, is that this music “ unique to Jamaica” is actually not Jamaican at all, having its foundations in the USA and Africa. An independent label, Island, distributed Jamaican records in the UK throughout the 1960’s, but reggae became popular in the UK only when Prince Buster’s “ Al Capone” (1967) started a brief “ dance craze”. Jamaican music was very much a ghetto phenomenon, associated with gang-style violence, but Jimmy Cliff’s “ Wonderful World Beautiful People”(1969) united reggae with the “ peace and love” philosophy of the hippies, an association that would not die away. In the USA, Neil Diamond’s “ Red Red Wine” (1967) was the first reggae hit by a pop musician. Shortly afterwards, Johnny Nash’s “ Hold me tight” (1968) propelled reggae onto the charts.

“ Do the Reggay” (1968) by Toots (Hibbert) and The Maytals was the record that gave the music its name. Fredrick Toots Hibbert’s vocal style was actually closer to gospel, as proved by their other hits . A little noticed event would have far-reaching consequences: in 1967, the Jamaican disc-jockey Rudolph “ Ruddy” Redwood had begun recording instrumental versions of

<https://assignbuster.com/history-and-culture-of-jamaica/>

reggae hits. The success of his dance club was entirely due to that idea.

Duke Reid, who was now the owner of the Trojan label, was the first one to capitalize on the idea: he began releasing singles with two sides: the original song and, on the back, the instrumental remix. This phenomenon elevated the status of dozens of recording engineers.

Reggae music was mainly popularized by Bob Marley first as the co-leader of the Wailers, the band that promoted the image of the urban guerrilla with “ Rude Boy” (1966) and that cut the first album of reggae music, “ Best of the Wailers”(1970); and later as the political and religious (rasta) guru of the movement, a status that would transform him into a star, particularly after his conversion to pop-soul melody with ballads such as “ Stir it up” (1972), “ I Shot the Sheriff”(1973) and “ No woman No cry”(1974). DUB More and more studio engineers were re-mixing B-sides of reggae 45 RPM singles, dropping out the vocals and emphasizing the instrumental texture of the song. The purpose was to allow disc-jockeys to “ toast” over the record. Engineers became more and more skilled at refining the instrumental textures, especially when they began to employ sophisticated studio devices.

Eventually, “ dub” became an art on its own. The first dub singles appeared in 1971, but the man generally credited with “ inventing” the genre is Osbourne Ruddock, better known as Tubby, a recording engineer who in 1970 had accidentally discovered the appeal of stripping a song of its vocal track, and who engineered the first dub record, Carl Patterson’s “ Psalm of Dub” (1971). When he got together with producer Lee “ Scratch” Perry, “ Blackboard Jungle” (1973) was born: the first stereo “ dub” album. It was a revolution: the engineer and the producer had become more important than

the composer. DUB STUDIO It also marked the terminal point of the “ slowing down” of Jamaican music, a process that had led from ska to reggae to rock steady.

Compared with the original, dub was like a slow-motion version. A collaboration with melodica player Augustus Pablo led to another important work, “ King Tubby Meets Rockers Uptown” (1976). Lee “ Scratch” Perry (Rainford Hugh Perry) was born in 1936 in Kendal, a small town in the rural parish of Hanover, in the northwest of Jamaica. Perry arrived in Kingston in the late 1950’s, and immediately tried to enter the music business. He started working for Coxsone Dodd as a “ bouncer, spy, talent scout, uncredited songwriter and eventually performer”. Perry left Coxsone’s after a disagreement over payment, moving to a new label (Amalgamated) set up by Joel Gibson, where he recorded an early reggae hit called “ People Funny Boy” (which was a verbal attack aimed at his previous employer Coxsone).

Perry became well known as a producer and was instrumental in Bob Marley’s and the Wailers early success. He linked up with Marley and the Wailers in 1969, beginning a collaboration that resulted in “ definitive versions of some of the Wailers strongest work”. Perry, through his work as an artist, producer and engineer, has been one of the main people responsible in shaping the sound of Jamaican music over time. “ Scratch” Perry, who had produced for the Wailers, pretty much set the reference standard for generations to come with “ Double Seven” (1974), the first reggae album that overdubbed synthesizers, “ Revolution Dub” (1975) and “ Super Ape” (1976), one of the genre’s masterpieces he last forty years.

Dub will come to later influence almost every genre of music, being used by producers to create sequential tracks in: hip-hop, pop, breakbeat, drum & bass and other electronic linked genres. Conclusion One of the smallest countries in the world Jamaica I think is a melting pot of cultures people and traditions. Behind its beautiful exterior Jamaica has a dark and violent past, yet throughout the years it came to overcome the past. Present day Jamaica is a symbol for the fight for liberty and peace. Bibliography: •[www. wikipedia. org/jamaica/history/taino](http://www.wikipedia.org/jamaica/history/taino) •[www. jamaica-guide. com/info](http://www.jamaica-guide.com/info) •[http://www. jamaicans. com/articles/primearticles/taino. shtm](http://www.jamaicans.com/articles/primearticles/taino.shtm) •[http://www. iexplore. com/dmap/Jamaica/History](http://www.iexplore.com/dmap/Jamaica/History) •[www. religionfacts. com/a-z](http://www.religionfacts.com/a-z) •“Religia in istoria popoarelor lumii”-S. A. Tokarev •[www. cp-pc. ca/english/jamaica/arts. html](http://www.cp-pc.ca/english/jamaica/arts.html) •[www. history of ska. com](http://www.historyofska.com) •[http://www. scaruffi. com/history/reggae. html](http://www.scaruffi.com/history/reggae.html) •[www. history of port royal. com](http://www.historyofportroyal.com) •[www. rastafaris. com](http://www.rastafaris.com) •[www. jamaicaisland. com/history/english period](http://www.jamaicaisland.com/history/englishperiod) •[www. history of slavery. com/Caribbean/Jamaica](http://www.historyofslavery.com/Caribbean/Jamaica) •[Encyclopaedia Britannica/jamaica](http://www.Encyclopaedia Britannica/jamaica) •[Encarta/history of jamaica](http://www.Encarta/historyofjamaica)