

**History of Rock  
Chapters 20 and 21  
Ska, Reggae, Hip Hop, and Rap**

Because of its closeness to the United States, persons living in Jamaica were able to listen to American AM radio. In addition, Jamaica is a rich mixture of cultures that includes cultures from the United States, Britain, Spain, and Africa. The Jamaicans played a slow kind of music called *mento*, a slow version of a Cuban-styled rumba combined with African rhythms. The name, mento, is actually derived from the Spanish word *mentar*, to mention. This referred to the subtle ways the lyrics expressed personal complaints or social criticisms. This subtlety was used in order to avoid offending the person or group being criticized while still getting the point across---something lacking in the United States. The music usually included one singer or instrumentalist (usually a melody instrument) leading the performance, accompanied by percussionists as well as guitar or banjo players providing both rhythm and harmony.

During the late 40's and early 50's, American R&B became quite popular in Jamaica as a result of AM coverage on the island. By the 60's, much of the popular American music had become too popular in Jamaica and disc jockeys obtained recordings from various doo-wop groups to play on large stereo systems. They would set up a system on a truck and take that truck to vacant land areas to attract listeners. The disc jockeys would travel to southern cities like Miami and New Orleans to find new labels that had yet to be heard in their country. The competition grew to be so tough that disc jockeys would remove the labels from the records to prevent others from learning the information about the recording.

**Ska**

With the different musical styles coming to Jamaica, the musicians there began combining them, developing their own special style of music, *ska*. This included elements of R&B, mariachi, jazz, and swing. Modern instruments sometimes were combined with traditional folk instruments. Ska combined so many different kinds of music that the sound of the different groups varied significantly. Common to all the styles of ska was a four-beat pattern used by R&B with some instruments playing a strong accent on the off-beat. That strong off-beat was accented enough that it began to be heard as if it were the main beat, creating the feeling of a delayed beat.

Harmonically and melodically, ska was related to R&B. However, mosts ska placed little emphasis on the bass line, resulting in a light, smooth music, unlike the bass-heavy reggae.

One of the most often recorded groups was The Skatalites, a group that included a brass section, a woodwind section, and guitars, keyboard, drums, and bass. The Skatalites had hits in Jamaica that even made the British charts.

*Listen to The Skatalites---Guns of Navarone* (1:1) (1967)

## **Reggae**

Jamaican disc jockeys began to talk in a rhythmic patten over ska and rock steady (slowed down gospel style music with a heavy bass line) music. In 1968, The Maytals recorded a fast form of rock steady with *Do the Reggay*. This style became known as reggae. Reggae, to the Jamaicans meant the king's music." Reggae groups used modern, amplified instruments including lead and rhythm guitars, piano, organ, drums, and electric bass, along with Jamaican percussion instruments. Reggae accented the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> beats, unlike ska. Reggae differed from the R&B beat through the use of syncopated bass lines and the influence of other, Latin-styled rhythms. Reggae also distinguished itself as some singers began to sing lyrics that were more open, or less subtle, about the conditions sung about. The term, *rudeboys*, soon came to be used for those singers.

Many reggae musicians were followers of Ras Tafari. Rastafarians were vegetarians, made sacramental use of marijuana, and did not comb their hair. This caused it to mat together in a style that became known as dreadlocks.

One of the most influential of the Rastafarian reggae groups was The Wailers. At the beginning, both Bob Marley and Peter Tosh were members of The Wailers.

***Listen to Bob Marley and The Wailers---I Shot the Sheriff (1:2) 1973***

Bob Marley died of cancer in 1981. His family maintained the Marley name having successful careers, themselves.

Peter Tosh worked for a while with Bob Marley. He became an outspoken opponent of war and other social concerns in Jamaica. His life was threatened many times and he was fatally shot in 1987.

***Listen to Peter Tosh---I Am That I Am (1:3)***

Ska and Reggae had an impact on rock, as seen in this recording by The Police.

***Listen to The Police---Roxanne (1:4)***

Among the most outspoken bands in the movement was Steel Pulse.

***Listen to Steel Pulse---Back to My Roots (1:5)***

By the early 80's an intense combination of punk and ska was favored by skinheads and rudeboys. The style became known as Oi!

***Listen to the Cockney Rejects---Oi! Oi! Oi! (1:6)***

Another style that grew from ska and reggae was called *dub*. With this style, portions of music were stripped from reggae recordings. One of the earlier creators of the style was King Tubby (Osbourne Ruddock).

***Listen to King Tubby---Rude Boy Dub (1:7)***

### **Hip Hop and Rap**

The hip hop culture and rap music originated in New York during the mid-70's and grew to popularity in the 80's. Rap involved spoken lyrics performed over complex, funk-styled rhythms. Spoken poetry has long been an important aspect of African and African-American culture.

A group of writers in Harlem during what was termed the Harlem Renaissance wrote honest and insightful works portraying ghetto life. At times they used street dialects and speech patterns that were not considered to be correct English. Langston Hughes was one such poet who was criticized by his own people for exposing their underground language.

### **East Coast Rap**

One of the first rap records was made by The Sugar Hill Gang. *Rappers Delight* was recorded in 1979 and immediately appealed to dancers.

***Listen to The Sugar Hill Gang---Rappers Delight (1:8)***

As rap became popular, various techniques were employed. One of these, *scratching* involved quick changes of a turntable's direction in a rhythmic manner to create a rhythmic pulse over which they would rap. Sometimes multiple turntables would be used and sections of one recording would be *cut* into another. Much rap began with disc jockey's use of pre-recorded records so rappers began to practice *sampling*. This involved taking samples of other recordings and mixing them into a background for a new recording. Many lawsuits resulted and rappers began giving credit to the other artists and also began to share royalties. Also, synthesizers and drum machines became common replacements for samples.

Sal-N-Pepa was one of the first successful female rap groups. They sometimes sang in a 60's girl group style along with their patter-spoken vocals. They won a Grammy for their recording of *None of Your Business* (1994).

***Listen to Salt-N-Pepa---None of Your Business (1:9)***

Sometimes called the Black Panthers of rap, Public spoke out to let the world know what they thought about the low-class status of many African-Americans. One goal of their primary rapper, Chuck D, was to let people know what the lives of real African-Americans were like and to say he and his people were not going to put up with it any

longer. Fellow rapper, Professor Griff, set Public Enemy up for being criticized for racism by making anti-semitic remarks to a reporter. This put them and their message in a very bad light causing Chuck D to fire Professor Griff, making it clear that those views were not shared by the rest of the group.

***Listen to Public Enemy---911 is a Joke*** (1990)(1:10)

Another popular female rapper is Queen Latifah. Dana Owens chose her name *latifah* because it represents delicate sensitivity in the Muslim culture. Queen Latifah won a Grammy for *U.N.I.T.Y.* (1994), which she dedicated to her brother who died in a motorcycle accident.

***Listen to Queen Latifah---U.N.I.T.Y.*** (1:11)

The goal of many of the political and social statements made by East Coast rap was to encourage more unity among African-Americans and urge them to make stronger demands for equality. In that sense, rap is similar to much of the music already produced by James Brown, Bob Marley, and even Bob Dylan. But, rap tended to be more angry and rappers took the ideas of self-expression to the point of using foul language, causing their music to be banned from many radio stations. One strong case is 2 Live Crew and their album, *As Nasty as They Wanna Be* (1989). The publicity that came with the banning of these albums likely caused the albums to sell better than they might have without the controversy.

### **West Coast Rap**

While East Coast rappers spoke out against general social and political issues, West Coast rappers took a stand against issues that were more gang related. In particular, they spoke against the way police handled (or contributed to, they would say) street violence. At times rappers were accused of encouraging violent behavior. From their point of view, however, they were merely reporting about it from an inside perspective.

One of the most outspoken of the West Coast rap groups was N.W.A. (*Niggas with Attitude*). *Gangsta Gangsta*, from their *Straight Outta Compton* (1988) album even begins with gunshots. *Express Yourself*, from the same album, makes it clear that they intend to continue to say it like it is.

***Listen to N.W.A.---Express Yourself*** (1:12)

Police brutality was the subject of many rap recordings. Some followed the 1992 L.A. riots that occurred after the outcome of the Rodney King verdict. Ice-T stressed the subject of police brutality with more anger than ever with his song, *Cop Killer* (1992) in which he said he would go out and *dust off some cops*.

The violence associated with West Coast rap was made clear with the murder of Tupac Shakur who was shot to death while riding in a car with the owner of his record company.

At the time of his murder, Shakur was waiting for an appeal of his conviction for sexually abusing a 19 year old girl. Another passenger in that car, Marion Knight, had also been in and out of jail for various charges including assault and probation violations. Death Row Record's other star rapper, Snoop Doggy Dogg, had recently been acquitted of murder charges at the time of Shakur's death.

This violent reputation was mitigated somewhat by the light-hearted, non-violent works of Coolio. Coolio's music was not untouched by the problems of his community. The title cut from his album, *Gangsta's Paradise* (1995) took a thoughtful look at the world of gang rivalry and the people who are more hurt than helped by it.

***Listen to Coolio---Gangsta's Paradise* (1:13)**

### **Latino Rap**

Latino rap became particularly important in Los Angeles because of the desire to match ethnic orientation of gang raps by African American rappers. One of the leading Latino rappers was Kid Frost. Kid Frost used his stage to point out instances of street violence and police brutality in his own neighborhood. The track *La Raza (La Raza Mix)* from his 1990 album, *Hispanic Causing Panic* became an anthem representing Latino rap.

***Listen to Kid Frost---La Raza (La Raza Mix)* (1:14)**

Arrested Development presented a more positive message for fans by suggesting that the *f* word young fans should be hearing in music was the word *freedom*. Their positive message reached many rap fans through their two top 10 hits, *People Everyday* (1992) and *Mr. Wendal* (1992).

***Listen to Arrested Development---People Everyday* (1:15)**

Digable Planets combined rap with jazz.

***Listen to Digable Planets---Where I'm From* (1:16)**