



Lecture 3: Jamaican Sound System

MUS 17: Hip-Hop

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Jamaican Roots of Hip-Hop

Jamaican Sound System

Jamaican Influence on Hip-Hop

- Both the sound of Jamaican music and Jamaican modes of doing things had a huge impact on Hip-Hop.
- There were three main structural influences:
 - The *sound system* social dance gathering (predecessor of Hip-Hop DJ and party)
 - *Dub* practice of reusing instrumental tracks of already existing songs (predecessor of sampling)
 - DeeJay's *talkover* music (predecessor of MC and rap)

GENIUS



A Brief History Of Sound Clash

Jamaican Sound System

- By the 1950s, in Jamaica, the sound system had grown into proper social dance gatherings.
- People pay small entrance fees to listen, dance, socialize, and patronize vendors selling food and drink.
- The sound system provides people with the means to listen to music with little cost.
- This term, sound system, is more of a social structure complex than a technological one. It refers to the whole network of putting on a party: the speakers, the records, the DeeJay, the selector, the promoter, the dancers, etc.

Jamaican Sound System

- A sound system set consists of a single turntable, an amplifier (pre-amp), and a mixing board with speaker components, and cables connecting everything together.
- These components are often custom-built or modified from stock models that were made for public speaking.



Jamaican Sound System

Sound system crew members who run the set include:

- **Box boys** who move and set up the components.
- **Selectors** who spin the vinyl.
- **Deejays** who provide commentary and chat on the microphone in between the records (single turntable)
- **Audio engineers** who ensure the sound quality(copious bass in the mix without distortion) and build and repair the audio components.





Bass Culture

- The valuing of low frequencies, branded as *bass culture*, was included in African American music prior to the formation of Hip-Hop.
- The bass culture of Jamaican sonic sensibilities is characterized with less emphasis on melody and large emphasis on the *drum beats* and *low frequency bass vibrations* to draw attention to the social grounding to the culture.
- The bass culture in Jamaica is a product of the loud sound system that plays music outdoors rather than in the house or on the radio.

Riddims

- In Jamaican culture musical material sans melody and lyrical content exist as entities in and of themselves, which are called *riddims*.
- Riddims offer a sonic foundation on top of which different other sounds are incorporated to form innumerable versions.
- Some of these versions are instrumental with an organ or saxophone playing lead, some have vocalists singing or toasting new lyrical content on them, while others are dub versions.

Riddims

Stalag Riddim



Diwali Riddim



Get Busy



Dub (Version)

Define the style of making mixes of other records that dropped out various elements and altered them, especially through the use of echo and reverb.

- The original vocal track partially or completely omitted to provide sound systems with a means to feature the “toasting” of their DJs.
- Adding or subtracting musical materials, adding effects in real-time sound system or studio versioning by playing the mixing board.

This resulted in performance practices that were not predicated on the vinyl being thought of as a finished product.





Talkover

- Radio DeeJays in Jamaica developed flamboyant on-air personalities while talking over the music.
- At parties the standard practice became to talk over instrumental dubs of popular songs.
- The popularity of Deejays as an essential component of the sound system created a need for instrumental songs, as well as instrumental versions of popular vocal songs.
- Eventually these performances were recorded and released as their own records.

Deejay

- In Jamaica, the person who plays the records is the *selector* and the person who talks into the microphone is the *DeeJay* or *DJ*
- In Hip-Hop, the person who plays and manipulates the records is called DJ (Disc Jockey) and the person who uses the microphone is MC (Master of Ceremony).
- *Toasting* or *deejaying* is the act of talking, usually in a monotone melody, over a rhythm or beat by a deejay.

Toasting

- With the bare beats and bass playing and the lead instruments dropping in and out of the mix, Deejays began toasting, or delivering humorous and often provoking jabs at fellow deejays and local celebrities. Over time, toasting became an increasingly complex activity, and became as big a draw as the dance beats played behind it.
- When rocksteady and reggae bands looked to make their music a form of national and even international black resistance, they used Jamaican culture.
- Many elements of hip-hop—boasting raps, rival poses, uptown throwdowns, and political commentary—were all present in Jamaican music.



Jamaican Music and Hip-Hop

- Jamaican sound system crews are about *re-processing* music that's been processed already. The set is an apparatus for the *re-presentation*, rather than the representation of music. *Re-performances* combine the tradition of interpretation with a record (as with a classical musical score), together with that of improvisation (as with jazz).
- DJ Kool Herc used percussion-filled, instrumental drum breaks as a substitute, conceptually, for the *reggae riddims*. Herc could manipulate the song structure by stringing together endless drum breaks, in real-time.

Sound System and DJ Kool Herc's Party

- DJ Kool Herc spent his childhood at the Trenchtown section of Kingston, Jamaica until 13, where he heard the sound system and understood the power of it.
- DJ Kool Herc automated his set with two McIntosh 2300 power amps, speaker, and Technique 1100A turntable.
- This adapted sound system is what DJ Kool Herc used to throw the first Hip-Hop party.
- Extending the drum breaks, with the “merry-go-round” style of playing records was unique to DJ Kool Herc, and Hip-Hop, which was not created in Jamaican sound systems.



Shared-Culture Practice

- Back in the 1970s, the community living near Bronx was an amalgamation of African-American, Puerto Rican, Jamaican, immigrants from other places and people of different races.
- They shared cultural and living habits without deliberate separation. The children went to school together and in the shared community, cultural fusion happen naturally (especially for the younger generation).
- *This sharing between Bronx residents was sometimes overt, or more often, covert. This is not to suggest that people was trying to hide their cultural influences, but rather it's to emphasize that the merged culture is a result without participants or observers knowing or caring about the origin of what they were doing.*

Hip-Hop as Shared-Culture Product

When DJ Kool Herc knew he didn't have an audience for Jamaican music he decided to apply his ideas from concepts he learned from that style to particular pieces of American music that displayed a shared aesthetic in form and texture:

I never played too much reggae. I never had the audience for it and people wasn't feelin' it at the time...So I introduced similar music in a funky way. So this is your funky music to me. And it's similar for what I was trying to do for reggae music. And apply it.

Hip-Hop is deeply influenced by music such as reggae, disco, funk, soul, latin jazz, etc.



Thank You!