



The Father.
Photo © Marlon Ajamu Myrie

CAN'T STOP WON'T STOP: A HISTORY OF THE HIP-HOP GENERATION

4.

Making a Name

How DJ Kool Herc Lost His Accent and Started Hip-Hop

...the logic is an extension rather than a negation. Alias, a.k.a.; the names describe a process of loops. From A to B and back again.

Paul D. Miller

It has become myth, a creation myth, this West Bronx party at the end of the summer in 1973. Not for its guests—a hundred kids and kin from around the way, nor for the setting—a modest recreation room in a new apartment complex; not even for its location—two miles north of Yankee Stadium, near where the Cross-Bronx Expressway spills into Manhattan. Time remembers it for the night DJ Kool Herc made his name.

The plan was simple enough, according to the party's host, Cindy Campbell. "I was saving my money, because what you want to do for back to school is go down to Delancey Street instead of going to Fordham Road, because you can get the newest things that a lot of people don't have. And when you go back to school, you want to go with things that nobody has so you could look nice and fresh," she says. "At the time my Neighborhood Youth Corps paycheck was like forty-five dollars a week—ha!—and they would pay you every two weeks. So how am I gonna turn over my money? I mean, this is not enough money!"

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Cindy calculated it would cost a little more than half her paycheck to rent the rec room in their apartment building at 1520 Sedgwick Avenue. Her brother, whom she knew as Clive but everyone else knew as Kool Herc, was an aspiring DJ with access to a powerful sound system. All she had to do was bulk-buy some Olde English 800 malt liquor, Colt 45 beer, and soda, and advertise the party.

She, Clive and her friends hand-wrote the announcements on index cards, scribbling the info below a song title like "Get on the Good Foot" or "Fence-walk." If she filled the room, she could charge a quarter for the girls, two for the guys, and make back the overhead on the room. And with the profit —presto, instant wardrobe.

Clive had been DJing house parties for three years. Growing up in Kingston, Jamaica, he had seen the sound systems firsthand. The local sound was called Somerset Lane, and the selector's name was King George. Clive says, "I was too young to go in. All we could do is sneak out and see the preparation of the dance throughout the day. The guys would come with a big old handcart with the boxes in it. And then in the night time, I'm a little itchy headed, loving the vibrations on the zinc top 'cause them sound systems are powerful.

"We just stay outside like everybody else, you know, pointing at the gangsters as they come up, all the famous people. And at the time they had the little motorcycles, Triumphs and Hondas. Rudeboys used to have those souped up. They used to come up four and five six deep, with them *likkle* ratchet knife," Clive says. He still remembers the crowd's buzz when Claudie Massop arrived at a local dance one night. He wanted to be at the center of that kind of excitement, to be a King George.

Cindy and Clive's father, Keith Campbell, was a devoted record collector, buying not only reggae, but American jazz, gospel, and country. They heard Nina Simone and Louis Armstrong and Nat King Cole, even Nashville country crooner Jim Reeves. "I remember listening to Jim Reeves all the time," Clive says. "I was singing these songs and emulating them to the fullest. That really helped me out, changing my accent, is singing to the records."

In the Bronx, his mother, Nettie, would take him to house parties, which

had the same ambrosial effect on him that the sound systems had. "I see the different guys dancing, guys rapping to girls, I'm wondering what the guy is whisperin' in the girl's ears about. I'm green, but I'm checking out the scene," he recalls. "And I noticed a lot of the girls was complaining, 'Why they not playing that record?' 'How come they don't have that record?' 'Why did they take it off right there?' " He began buying his own 45s, waiting for the day he could have his own sound system.

As luck would have it, Keith Campbell became a sponsor for a local rhythm and blues band, investing in a brand new Shure P.A. system for the group. Clive's father was now their soundman, and the band wanted somebody to play records during intermission. Keith told them he could get his son. But Clive had started up his own house party business, and somehow his gigs always happened to fall at the same times as the band's, leaving Keith so angry he refused to let Clive touch the system. "So here go these big columns in my room, and my father says, 'Don't touch it. Go and borrow Mr. Dolphy's stuff,' " he says. "Mr. Dolphy said, 'Don't worry Clive, I'll let you borrow some of these.' In the back of my mind, Jesus Christ, I got these big Shure columns up in the room!"

At the same time, his father was no technician. They all knew the system was powerful, but no one could seem to make it peak. Another family in the same building had the same system and seemed to be getting more juice out of it, but they wouldn't let Keith or Clive see how they did it. "They used to put a lot of wires to distract me from chasing the wires," he says.

One afternoon, fiddling around on the system behind his father's back, Clive figured it out. "What I did was I took the speaker wire, put a jack onto it and jacked it into one of the channels, and I had extra power and reserve power. Now I could control it from the preamp. I got two Bogart amps, two Girard turntables, and then I just used the channel knobs as my mixer. No headphones. The system could take eight mics. I had an echo chamber in one, and a regular mic to another. So I could talk plain and, at the same time, I could wait halfway for the echo to come out.

"My father came home and it was so loud he snuck up behind me," he remembers. Clive's guilt was written all over his face. But his father couldn't

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believe it.

Keith yelled, "Where the noise come from?"

"This is the system!"

Keith said, "What! Weh you did?"

"This is what I did," Clive recalls telling his father, revealing the hookup.

"And he said, 'Raas claat, man! We 'ave sound!!!'

"So now the tables turned. Now these other guys was trying to copy what I was doing, because our sound is coming out monster, monster!" Clive says. "Me and my father came to a mutual understanding that I would go with them and play between breaks and when I do my parties, I could use the set. I didn't have to borrow his friend's sound system anymore. I start making up business cards saying 'Father and Son.' And that's how it started, man! That's when Cindy asked me to do a back-to-school party. Now people would come to this party and see these big-ass boxes they never seen before."

It was the last week in August of 1973. Clive and his friends brought the equipment down from their second floor apartment and set up in the room adjacent to the rec room. "My system was on the dance floor, and I was in a little room watching, peeking out the door seeing how the party was going," he says.

It didn't start so well. Clive played some dancehall tunes, ones guaranteed to rock any yard dance. Like any proud DJ, he wanted to stamp his personality onto his playlist. But this was the Bronx. They wanted the breaks. So, like any good DJ, he gave the people what they wanted, and dropped some soul and funk bombs. Now they were packing the room. There was a new energy. DJ Kool Herc took the mic and carried the crowd higher.

"All people would hear is his voice coming out from the speakers," Cindy says. "And we didn't have no money for a strobe light. So what we had was this guy named Mike. When Herc would say, 'Okay, Mike! Mike with the lights!', Mike flicked the light switch. He got paid for that."

By this point in the night, they probably didn't need the atmospherics. The party people were moving to the shouts of James Brown, turning the place into a sweatbox. They were busy shaking off history, having the best night of their generation's lives.

Later, as Clive and Cindy counted their money, they were giddy. This party could be the start of something big, they surmised. They just couldn't know how big.

Sacrifices

Clive Campbell was born the first of six children to Keith and Nettie Campbell. Nettie had moved to the city from Port Maria on the northern coast. Keith, a city native, worked as the head foreman at the Kingston Wharf garage, a working-class job with status.

Keith was something of a community leader, he held the kind of job title that drew the attention of politicians. But he chose not to take sides when the JLP and PNP began their violent jockeying for position. The year before Clive left for the United States, Edward Seaga had unleashed the West Kingston War in Back-O-Wall. Clive says, "I remember police riding around in big old trucks, tanks. And some people who were brothers or friends would turn on each other. It was like a civil war."

By then, the Campbells no longer lived in Trenchtown near the frontlines. They had moved east across the city to a house in Franklyn Town, a quieter urban neighborhood of strivers below Warieka Hill and the upper-class neighborhood called Beverly Hills. It was a modest but lush property near the famous Alpha Boys School.

"We had like seven different fruits growing in our yard. We had different types of peppers, flowers, you know, it was tight!" Clive recalls. "We wasn't too far away from the beach. So, as a matter of fact, it was a traditional thing with us for my father to take us to the beach on Sunday. Every Sunday we'd look forward to go out to the beach after church."

The Campbells were able to afford a housekeeper. Their grandfather, aunts and older cousins all pitched in to raise the children, a fact that would become significant when Nettie decided to supplement the family income by working and studying in the United States. Many other Jamaicans were already leaving for Miami, London, Toronto and New York City to escape the instability and seek their fortune. During the early 1960s, Nettie had departed for Manhattan to work as a dental technician and to study for a nursing degree. She saved

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money to send home and returned with a degree, convinced that the United States offered a better future for the family.

Cindy says, "She saw the opportunities. The public schools were free, because in Jamaica we went to private schools. So she told my father that when she finished with school that what she wanted was for the family to live here. And he didn't want to come."

But Keith could see Nettie's reasoning. Even his own friends and relatives were leaving the country. Before Nettie returned to New York City in 1966, they agreed to move to America. Clive would be the first to join her, then the rest of the family would follow. Cindy says, "A lot of immigrants have to do that. You have to make sacrifices. It breaks up the family for a small amount of time but eventually the family gets back together."

Clive and Cindy agree that Keith remained a Jamaican at heart. "He just said, 'America was a place for you to excel and do better for your kids.' But after a while you go back home, you go back to your country. And he believed in that. He loved his country," Cindy says. Years later, after raising his children with Nettie in New York City and becoming an American citizen, he returned to his beloved island for a visit. While swimming in strong currents off Bull Bay, he had a heart attack. The Campbells buried him in Jamaica.

Becoming American

From Kingston to the Bronx. Stones that the builders refused.

Clive Campbell came to New York City on a cold November night in 1967. A fresh snowfall lay on the ground, something the twelve-year-old had never seen before. He took a bus from Kennedy Airport into the gray, unwelcoming city. This wasn't the America he had seen on his neighbor's television, or imagined from his father's records. He had no idea how to begin again, he says, "All I could do was just look out the window."

His mother's apartment was at 611 East 178th Avenue, between the Bronx's Little Italy and Crotona Park, in what had been the Cross-Bronx Expressway's most contested mile. "Now I'm living in a tenement building. There's no yard. This is all boxed and closed in," Clive recalls. His mother feared Clive would fall prey to the heroin plague. She told Clive, "Don't let anybody tell you

they're gonna stick something in your arm. Don't let them trick you by calling you chicken."

Clive looked and spoke and felt like a country boy. "Here I am all hicked out, got a corduroy coat on, with the snow hat with the flip-up-and-come-over-your-ears. I had that on with these cowboy boots," Herc recalls. "And this girl at school started teasing the hell out of me. She was calling my shoes 'roach killers.' She had the whole hall laughing, 'Ah roach killers, roach killers!'

"At that time, being Jamaican wasn't fashionable. Bob Marley didn't come through yet to make it more fashionable, to even give a chance for people to listen to our music," he says. "I remember one time a guy said, 'Clive, man, don't walk down that way cause they throwing Jamaicans in garbage cans.' The gangs was throwing Jamaicans in garbage cans!"

Herc was learning the ways of the Bronx. He found himself hanging out with young Five Percenters, absorbing their slang and science. For a time, he even rolled with the Cofon Cats, the same Tremont gang that Benji Melendez had joined when he first moved to the Bronx a few years before. It wasn't much of an experience. The Cofon Cats spent one long afternoon getting chased out of Little Italy by the Golden Guineas.

At Junior High School 118, Clive began running cross-country and track and winning medals. His physicality won him American friends. After school, he began hanging out with a Jamaican American named Jerome Wallace, who was a unicyclist. Jerome had already been through the transition Clive was going through. He taught Clive how to ride on one wheel, and how to balance his Jamaican past and his Bronx present. Clive began to see the Cofon Cats as punks who were nothing without the security of the gang. "The gang members started asking us to be division leaders because they see we have respect. So we didn't need that anymore," Herc says. "And I had a few other things to worry about besides the gangs, like getting my ass whipped by my father."

Clive tuned into rock and soul disc jockeys like Cousin Brucie and Wolfman Jack as if he had caught religion, listening to these smooth men rap their silver-tongued rap. He began going to "First Fridays" youth dances at a local Catholic school and at Murphy Projects. His mother took him to house parties,

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where he heard music he had never heard on WBLS or WWRL. The Temptations, Aretha Franklin, Smokey Robinson, and, most important, James Brown became his tutors; they were teaching Clive how to lose his accent.

"I was more around Americans. And I was tired of hearing them say 'What did you say?' My accent really started to change," he recalls. By the time Clive began attending Alfred E. Smith High School, some of his Jamaican friends didn't even know he was Jamaican. He was in the process of reinventing himself, creating a new identity.

He wasn't alone. All across the city youths were customizing their names or giving themselves new ones and scrawling them across the naked city surfaces. The young graffiti writers were the advance guard of a new culture; they literally blazed trails out of the gang generation. Crossing demarcated turfs to leave their aliases in marker and spraypaint, they said "I'm here" and "Fuck all y'all" at the same time. Gang members, who had trapped themselves in their own neighborhoods, had to give them respect. Clive and the post-gang youths were a different breed, more interested in projecting individual flash than collective brawn, and they would soon render the gangs obsolete.

Graffiti expert Jack Stewart traces the emergence of the modern-day movement to Philadelphia's neighborhoods of color as early as 1965.¹ Aerosolist and activist Steve "Espo" Powers says that the Black teenager, CORNBREAD, who is credited with popularizing the tagging of the Philly subways, was only trying to attract the attention of a beauty named Cynthia. By 1968, the movement had spread to New York City. CORNBREAD's protégé, TOP CAT, moved to Harlem and brought with him the "gangster" style of lettering. A Puerto Rican youth calling himself JULIO 204—the number was the street he hailed from—began at about the same time. When a Greek American named TAKI 183 told the *New York Times* in the summer of 1971 why he tagged his name on ice cream trucks and subway cars—"I don't feel like a celebrity normally, but the guys make me feel like one when they introduce me to someone"—thousands of New York youngsters picked up fat markers and spray paint to make their own name.² Writers like LEE 163d!, EVIL ED, CLIFF 159, JUNIOR 161, CAY 161, CHE 159 and BARBARA and EVA 62 were saying their names loud all across buildings, bus stops, and subway

station walls uptown.

Roaming through gang turfs, slipping through the long arms and high fences of authority, violating notions of property and propriety, graffiti writers found their own kind of freedom. Writing your name was like locating the edge of civil society and planting a flag there. In Greg Tate's words, it was "reverse colonization."³ The 1960s, as the hip-hop generation would so often be reminded, were a great time to be young. The world seemed to shake under young feet so easily back then. The revolutionaries expected the whole world to be watching and when they were given the spotlight, they cast a long shadow. But these writers weren't like the revolutionaries, or even the philosopher-activist wall-writers in Lima, Mexico City, Paris, and Algiers. Theirs were not political statements. They were just what they were, a strike against their generation's invisibility and preparation for the coming darkness.

They held no illusions about power. No graffiti writer ever hoped to run for mayor. And unlike the gang bangers, none would submerge his or her name to the collective. They were doing it to be known amongst their peers, to be recognized for their originality, bravado, daring, and style. Norman Mailer, one of the first to write seriously about graffiti, got it instantly: the writers were composing advertisements for themselves.

In the summer of 1970, TAKI 183's tags seemed to explode across the city. Like thousands of other kids, Clive, Jerome and their friend Richard picked up markers and spraycans. Rich became UNCLE RICH, Jerome became YOGI and Clive became CLYDE AS KOOL.⁴

"They couldn't recall my name Clive," he says. "So the closest you could come was Clyde, from the Knicks basketball player. They'd be like, 'You mean like 'Clyde' Frazier?' 'Yeah. Clyde. Let's leave it like that.' So I started to write that. And where I picked 'Kool' from was this TV cigarette commercial. A guy was driving one of them Aston-Martins, like this James Bond car, and his cigarette was right there by the gear shift, white gloves, dark glasses and just driving through the countryside—whoooooo! The girl with him, she reached over to touch his cigarette; and he goes—rrrrrrrrnt! Stops the car, leans over, opens the door, points his finger, tells her, 'Get out!' And she got out. And the commercial said, 'Nobody touches my silver-thin.' I was like, wow, that's

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'Kool!' So I picked KOOL.

"Wherever you see UNCLE RICH, you see CLYDE AS KOOL," he says. "I put a little smiling face in it, the eyes, the nose, and mouth and a little cigarette hanging out, and a little tam on it, like a little Apple Jack's hat."

Writing brought him into contact with the premier stylists, and he began hanging out with the EX-VANDALS, the legendary supercrew that had begun in Brooklyn and now included SUPER KOOL 223, EL MARKO, STAY HIGH 149 and PHASE 2. As graffiti moved off the walls and onto the subway steel, EL MARKO and SUPER KOOL revolutionized the name game by painting top-to-bottom masterpieces on the train-cars in late 1971 and early 1972. Just as city officials enacted the first in what would become decades of increasingly severe anti-graffiti laws, the great Bronx writer PHASE 2 launched a series of next evolutionary steps, introducing ever more imaginative refinements on the rolling steel canvases.

But Clive would finally make his name elsewhere. He was running track, pushing weights, playing rough schoolyard basketball. His classmates kidded him, dubbing him "Hercules" for his bullish power drives to the hoop. "I went back to the block and I said, 'Yo fellas, this guy at school, man, he's calling me Hercules. I know he means well, but I don't like it.' So I said, 'What's the shortening for Hercules?' They said 'Herc.' Aaaaaah—sounds unique! So I said, 'Yo man, just call me Herc, leave off the 'lees', just call me Herc.' Between high school and the block, I put the two names together and I dropped the CLYDE. I started calling myself Kool Herc, and that was it."

New Fires

A fire sent the Campbells out of their Tremont apartment. Their baby brother was striking matches, lighting pieces of paper and tossing them out the window. A breeze caught a burning paper and blew it back in, setting the window curtains aflame. Although the firemen were able to put it out without anyone getting hurt, Cindy remains angry at what happened afterward. "When the fire department came in there, they were looking for money. The fire was really in one room, but in the bedroom the drawers were pulled out. My father had a tin-pan of quarters that he was saving, and that tin-pan had at least

three- or four-hundred dollars in quarters at the time. That was just missing," she says.

Populations were in flux. Whites were leaving for Co-op City and the suburbs. With government vouchers and assistance money, the Campbells joined the Black and brown exodus into the West Bronx. They moved into the Concourse Plaza Hotel on the Grand Concourse at 161st Street, where many burned-out families had been temporarily relocated.

After the family moved into a brand new apartment building at 1520 Sedgwick, Kool Herc would return to the hotel to frequent the disco downstairs, the Plaza Tunnel. A friend of his from high school named Shaft spun records there, as well as a DJ named John Brown. In gay and Black clubs at the time, DJs were pushing the emerging four-on-the-floor disco beat. But the Plaza Tunnel DJs had a rawer sound. John Brown "was the first to play records like 'Give it Up or Turn it Loose' by James Brown and 'Get Ready' by Rare Earth," pioneering hip-hop journalist Steven Hager wrote. "[Get Ready] was a favorite in the Bronx because it lasted over twenty-one minutes, which was long enough for the serious dancers to get into the beat. They loved to wait for the song's two-minute drum solo to show their most spectacular moves."⁵

The dance styles began as elaborations of moves people had seen James Brown doing on TV. Zulu Nation DJ Jazzy Jay, who began as a b-boy says, "You could be dancing with your girl and spin away from her, hit the ground, come back up. It was all about 'smooth.' Like how James used to slide across the floor and the fancy footwork and all of that." They even called it—a hard-won irony—"burning."

James Brown's career had peaked in the late 1960s with the Black Power Movement. He performed "Say it Loud (I'm Black and I'm Proud)" without apology on national television, and his mere presence in town, it was said, prevented riots in racially tense Boston in the immediate aftermath of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination.

But during the early 1970s, attitudes changed. Across the country, Black mayors took over in cities that had once burned, class gaps widened and Black radio shifted to the tastes of upwardly mobile listeners. Coleman Young

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became mayor of Motown, while Berry Gordy departed for Hollywood. James Brown's career went into steep decline.

Bronx-born hip-hop historian Davey D recalls, "If you listened to the Black radio station at the time, WBLS—Black-owned, Black-run, the station that everyone listened to—you did not hear James Brown. Not even at nighttime. So while James Brown was being tossed out, we were embracing him."⁶ His music, dance and style now possessed outlaw appeal. At the climax of a Plaza Tunnel night, when DJ John Brown put on "Soul Power," Hager says Black Spades would overrun the floor, hollering "Spade Power!" The firecracker energy being generated at the Plaza Tunnel gave Herc the standard to aim for with his own parties.

The Man with the Master Plan

At the same time, discos were shutting down and house parties were declining, partly because gangs like the Spades were making them unsafe. But the West Bronx had not suffered the same kind of devastation as the South Bronx. And all these youths needed somewhere to party. These reasons may explain why Sedgwick Avenue was ripe for a fresh new party scene.

The crowds at the Campbells' early Sedgwick parties were mainly high school students who were too young or too clean or living too far west to fall under the waning influence of the gangs. In those days, Herc would tell the weed-smokers to head around the block, and he'd even play slow jams. "Now and then a mom or pop might come in to see what's going on," says Herc.

Cindy adds, "My father was always there. People knew him in the neighborhood and they respected him so we never had violence or anything like that. We didn't have to hire security guards. We never searched people. When people came, they came out of respect. It was a recreation thing for them to meet people. A lot of people met their boyfriends or girlfriends there."

Buzz spread about the back-to-school party, and they found themselves throwing parties almost on a monthly basis at the rec room. "Herc actually took away a lot of house parties and basement parties," says Cindy. "At those house parties, after a while, the parents would come in, flick on the lights and tell you, 'You kids got to get out' or 'Too many people in here' or 'I don't know

who this one is' and 'Who's this burning up my floor with the cigarettes?' People didn't want to go back to that anymore."

Herc's reputation spread along the Bronx high-school circuit as well, after Cindy, through her role in student body government at Dodge High School, secured a successful boat cruise dance. By the summer of 1974, when Herc was playing regular parties to a loyal following, he decided to play a free party on the block. "And after the block party," he says, "we couldn't come back to the rec room."

Outdoors, he knew he was putting the sound system at risk, and that fights could potentially break out. "So when I come out there, I said, 'Listen. The first discrepancy, I'm pulling the plug. Let's get that straight right now. There's kids out here, there's grown folks out here and we're gonna have a good time. So anybody start anything any disturbance or any discrepancy, any beef, I'm pulling the plug because I'm not gonna be here for the repercussions. All right?' So they said, 'All right, Herc, no problem.' And I start playing for the older heads, and then I go on for the younger heads and I'll go back and forth like that," he says. "We broke daylight. I played to the next morning."

Herc wanted to summon the same kind of excitement he felt as a *pickney* down yard. Along with his immigrant friend Coke La Rock, he distinguished their crew from the disco DJs by translating the Kingstonian vibe of sound system DJs like Count Machuki, King Stitt, U-Roy and Big Youth for the Bronxites. Herc hooked up his mics to a Space Echo box, yard dance style. They set off their dances by giving shout-outs and dropping little rhymes. They developed their own slang. At an after-hours spot Herc spun at, a drunken regular greeted his friends with the call: "To my mellow! My mellow is in the house!" With lines like these, the two created larger-than-life personas.

Herc carefully studied the dancers. "I was smoking cigarettes and I was waiting for the records to finish. And I noticed people was waiting for certain parts of the record," he says. It was an insight as profound as Ruddy Redwood's dub discovery. The moment when the dancers really got wild was in a song's short instrumental break, when the band would drop out and the rhythm section would get elemental. Forget melody, chorus, songs—it was all

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about the groove, building it, keeping it going. Like a string theorist, Herc zeroed in on the fundamental vibrating loop at the heart of the record, the break.

He started searching for songs by the sound of their break, songs that he would make into his signature tunes: the nonstop conga epics from The Incredible Bongo Band called "Apache" and "Bongo Rock," James Brown's "live" version of "Give It Up Turn It Loose" from the *Sex Machine* album, Johnny Pate's theme to *Shaft in Africa*, Dennis Coffey's "Scorpio"—Black soul and white rock records with an uptempo, often Afro-Latinized backbeat.⁷ Then he soaked off the labels, Jamaican style. "My father said, 'Hide the name of your records because that's how you get your rep. That's how you get your clientele.' You don't want the same people to have your same record down the block," Herc says. Here was one source of hip-hop's competitive ethic and beat-this aesthetic.

In a technique he called "the Merry-Go-Round," Herc began to work two copies of the same record, back-cueing a record to the beginning of the break as the other reached the end, extending a five-second breakdown into a five-minute loop of fury, a makeshift *version* excursion. Before long he had tossed most of the songs, focusing on the breaks alone. His sets drove the dancers from climax to climax on waves of churning drums. "And once they heard that, that was it, wasn't no turning back," Herc says. "They always wanted to hear breaks after breaks after breaks."

To accommodate larger crowds, Herc moved his parties further up Sedgwick Avenue into Cedar Park. He had seen construction workers hooking up power by tapping the lightposts, and so he started doing the same. "I had a big Mackintosh amp. That thing cost a lot of money and it pumped a lot of juice. It was 300 watts per channel. As the juice start coming, man, the lights start dimming. And the turntables, I had the Technics 1100A, the big ones, so it wouldn't turn." Finally they found a tool shed in the park. They would send a young boy through the stone-broken window to plug into enough juice for the sound system.

The results shocked the borough, and brought in new audiences. Aaron O'Bryant, who would later become DJ AJ, was a marijuana dealer living near

St. Mary's Park. "Everyone was talking about this guy DJ Kool Herc. And I was really excited. I knew all the women was gonna be there. I was excited by Herc but I really wanted to see could I bag something!" he laughs. "I became a Kool Herc freak. Everywhere he played I was there."

A teen from Fox Street in the South Bronx named Joseph Saddler, who called himself Flash, also heard about Herc's exploits and went up to Cedar Park to see it for himself. "I seen this big six-foot-plus guy with this incredible sound system, heavily guarded. People just enjoying themselves from like four years to forty. I'm like, wow! He looked sort of like this superhero on this podium playing this music that wasn't being played on the radio. I liked what he was doing and what he was playing, and I wanted to do that, too."

The gangs were dissolving and Herc was popularizing a new hierarchy of cool. Turfs were still important but in a different way. Jazzy Jay says, "Instead of gangs, they started turning into little area crews where they would do a little bit of dirt. In every area, there would be a DJ crew or a breakdance crew. They would be like, 'Okay, we all about our music and we love our music but you come in this area wrong and we all about kicking your ass.' Competition fueled the whole thing."

Herc's parties drew in the crews, gave them a chance to strut their stuff and make their names. He kept the peace by taking a live-and-let-live policy and skillfully working the mic. "Everybody had to make money, even the stick-up kids. The guy selling weed would come to me, 'A-yo Herc, man, say I got weed.' I'd say, 'You know I can't say you got weed!' So I'd say it indirectly, 'Yo, Johnny, you know I can't say you got weed, right?' He'd take the heat."

"Or if I know there's a certain party up in there starting trouble, I never would say their name, I just say, 'Yo kill it, cut the bullshit out. You're my man, cut the dumb shit. You know and *they* know who I'm talking about. Okay? Alright.' They'd be like 'Oh shit, Herc gave me a little warning.' I might be playing music but I'm no sucker."

The real action was in the dance ciphers, with the kids who had come for Herc's "Merry-Go-Round," and were becoming personalities in their own right. They were too excitable and had too much flavor to conform to the precision group steps of dances like The Hustle. They would simply jump in

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one after another to go off, take each other out, just "break" wild on each other. Herc called them break boys, b-boys for short.⁸

There was Tricksy, Wallace Dee, the Amazing Bobo, Sau Sau, Charlie Rock, Norm Rockwell, Eldorado Mike, and Keith and Kevin, the Nigger Twins. They did dances like The Boyoing, where a b-boy sported a Turbans-like pom-pom topped hat, and stretched, wiggled, and shook back and forth to make the ball go "boyoing." "It was called that because that's basically what they see," says Jazzy Jay, "just bounce all over the place, hit the ground, go down. It wasn't like a lot of the acrobatics. It was more from style and finesse. You could do a whole routine standing up before you even hit the ground."

"Another kid uptown called it the cork-and-screw," says Jeffrey "DOZE" Green, a Rock Steady Crew member and second-generation b-boy who first saw The Boyoing in the North Bronx in 1975. "It's 'cause they used to spin down, pop up, do a split and then go whoop! Come up, and then go down again into a split into a few baby-rocks into a little baby freeze. People were spinning on their butts then, too."

"Tricksy had a huge afro," says Cindy. "And he had that soft hair because his hair grew. And he did a move where he would jump up and his afro would start to bounce also. There was also a move called the Frankenstein move, where he'd start moving like Frankenstein and his afro would start bouncing. It was like a show, you know?"

Herc assembled his own clique of DJs, dancers and rappers, and dubbed them the Herculords: Coke La Rock, DJ Timmy Tim with Little Tiny Feet, DJ Clark Kent the Rock Machine, the Imperial JC, Blackjack, LeBrew, Pebble Poo, Sweet and Sour, Prince, and Whiz Kid. He refused to call them a crew. "That name 'crew' took the place of gang. When they said, 'crew', we knew it was a gang. So it was never the Herculord crew. That's what people start calling us. But we never had on our flier saying 'The Herculord crew.' It was billed with the sound system we called the Herculoids."

After reinvesting his money in a few different sound system sets, Herc was ready to take it to the next level. By 1975, he was doing all-ages dances at the Webster Avenue P.A.L. But he was turning twenty, and didn't only want the kiddie crowd anymore. He found a club called the Twilight Zone on Jerome

Avenue near Tremont, and started hosting parties there with his clique and his sound system. He says he screened Muhammad Ali videos until they said, "Yo Herc, stop showing them Ali fights, you souping them motherfuckers up!"

At a hot spot called the Hevalo, he passed out flyers for his Twilight Zone shows until he was chased out. One day, he vowed, I'll play this spot. On a stormy night, Herc emptied the Hevalo by playing a party at the Zone. "Rain," he says, "was a good sign for me." The Hevalo owner quickly called him up to make a deal. Soon, Herc was playing there and at another club called the Executive Playhouse for a full-fledged adult crowd.

They came to hear Herc rap: "You never heard it like this before, and you're back for more and more and more of this here rock-ness. 'Cause you see, we rock with the rockers, we jam with the jammers, we party with the partyers. Young lady don't hurt nobody. It ain't no fun till we all get some. Don't hurt nobody, young lady!"

Coke and another crew member named Dickey let the crowds know: "There's no story can't be told, there's no horse can't be rode, a no bull can't be stopped and ain't a disco we can't rock. Herc! Herc! Who's the man with a master plan from the land of Gracie Grace? Herc Herc!"

By 1976, he was the number-one draw in the Bronx. No more roach killers. DJ Kool Herc dressed the role, sporting fabulous Lee or AJ Lester suits. All the high rollers, bank robbers, and hustlers from Harlem were coming up to see him. He says, "The reputation was, 'Who is making money up in the Bronx? Kool Herc and the guy Coke La Rock with the music.'"

Two Sevens Redub

1977 started off very well for Herc. But as it would be everywhere, trouble was ahead.

It was not, as many well-meaning journalists and academics would later erroneously write, that the block party or sound system showdown had replaced the rumble or the riot. That notion was as misguided as Robert Moses's contention that nothing good could ever again come from the Bronx. The truth was, in fact, much less dramatic and much more profound. In the Bronx's new hierarchy of cool, the man with the records had replaced the man

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with the colors. Violence did not suddenly end; how could it? But an enormous amount of creative energy was now ready to be released from the bottom of American society, and the staggering implications of this moment eventually would echo around the world.

By 1977, Herc and his competitors had divided the Bronx into a new kind of grid. In the South Bronx from 138th to 163rd streets, where the Bachelors, the Savage Nomads, the Savage Skulls and the Ghetto Brothers had once run, Grandmaster Flash, backed by the local Casanova Crew, was emerging as the area celebrity. In the Southeast, formerly the territory of the Black Spades, P.O.W.E.R. and the Javelins, Afrika Bambaataa held sway with his Zulu Nation. In the north, there was DJ Breakout and DJ Baron. And the West Bronx neighborhood and the East Bronx nightclubs were still Herc's. Herc remained the undisputed king of the borough by virtue of his records, his loyal crowd, and his sound system.

"It was ridiculous. He was god," says Zulu Nation DJ Jazzy Jay. At a legendary Webster P.A.L. contest, Herc drowned out Bambaataa's system with little effort. "Whenever Kool Herc played outside, shit was loud and crystal clean. When we'd play outside, we'd be hooking up a whole bunch of little wires, a bunch of four or five amps and—errnt! Zzzzt! Shit would be blowing up." And every time Grandmaster Flash came to a Herc party, Flash chuckles, "Herc always used to embarrass me."

After being threatened by some cops for his drug selling, Herc's fan Aaron O'Bryant moved on to promoting parties. He rented the Savoy Manor nightclub on 149th Street and the Grand Concourse. "I wanted to have Kool Herc versus Pete DJ Jones. Back then Pete DJ Jones was number one on the disco set and Kool Herc was just number one, period," he recalls. "So I had a commitment from Pete DJ Jones because he was a businessman, he took on all bookings. The first thing Kool Herc wanted to know was where did I get his telephone number from. And he was explaining to me that I was not a proven promoter. Plus, he also insinuated that he could go to the Savoy Manor and rent it himself and do that battle if he wanted. He didn't want to let me eat."

By the end of the spring, Herc noticed his audiences were declining. "People are getting older now, it wasn't all about me. All of a sudden now

you're not eighteen no more, you're twenty-four and twenty-five. You can drink now. You ain't coming to no little seventeen-, eighteen-year-old party," he recalls. "And other people was coming up."

After the blackout and the looting, there were plenty of new crews with brand new sound systems in the streets, and Herc's main rivals were luring away his crowd. Flash had precision, sophistication and an entertainer's flair. Bambaataa had his records and the power of Bronx River behind him. O'Bryant himself had begun DJing. As DJ AJ, he teamed with a new turntable tutor, Lovebug Starski, and expanded into Harlem. Herc says, "I stayed behind, I didn't move with them to downtown. I stayed up in the Bronx."

Herc finally agreed to play with DJ AJ at a back-to-school party at the Executive Playhouse. It was sold out, AJ recalls, but Herc was no longer the main draw. "Flash was at my show. I let Flash get on and I let Melle Mel get on the mic," AJ says. "But it didn't help Herc's career at all because he was fading fast."

A few months later, Herc was preparing for another night at the Playhouse, now renamed The Sparkle, when he heard a scuffle breaking out. "Mike-With-The-Lights had a discrepancy with somebody at the door," Herc recalls. Mike was refusing to allow three men into the club and they had become increasingly agitated. When Herc went to mediate the situation, one of the men drew a knife. Herc felt it pierce him three times in the side. As he put his bloodied hand up to block his face, the attacker stabbed him once more in the palm before disappearing with the others up the stairs and into the night. "It made me draw back into a little shell," Herc says, exhaling for a long moment.

It was 1977.

Bob Marley was in a foreign studio, recovering from an assassin's ambush and singing: "Many more will have to suffer. Many more will have to die. Don't ask me why." Bantu Stephen Biko was shackled, naked and comatose in the back of a South African police Land Rover. The Baader-Meinhof gang lay in suicide pools in a German prison. The Khmer Rouge filled their killing fields. The Weather Underground and the Young Lords Party crawled toward the final stages of violent implosion. In London, as in New York City, capitalism's crisis left entire blocks and buildings abandoned, and the sudden appearance

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of pierced, mohawked, leather-jacketed punks on Kings Road set off paroxysms of hysteria. History behaved as if reset to year zero.

In the Bronx, Herc's time was passing. But the new culture that had arisen around him had captured the imagination of a new breed of youths in the Bronx. Herc had stripped down and let go of everything, save the most powerful basic elements—the rhythm, the motion, the voice, the name. In doing so, he summoned up a spirit that had been there at Congo Square and in Harlem and on Wareika Hill. The new culture seemed to whirl backward and forward—a loop of history, history as loop—calling and responding, leaping, spinning, renewing.

In the loop, there is the alpha, the omega and the turning points in between. The seam disappears, slips into endless motion and reveals a new logic—the circumference of a worldview.



Fanga alafia ashé ashé
[Welcome, peace be unto you]

—Yoruban children's rhyme

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Sipple Out Deh

Jamaica's Roots Generation and the Cultural Turn

You know how a thing and the shadow of that thing could be in almost the same place together? You know the way a shadow is a dark version of the real thing, the dub side?

—Nalo Hopkinson

In Jamaica, you drive from the wrong side of the car on the wrong side of the road. Rounding the hill down into Montego Bay, you hug the curves on two-lane roads. Even at rush hour, you slow for cows and goats chewing grass along the gutter side, because apparently all the animals in Jamaica are free-range.

It's dusk on Thursday, a school night, but the youths have taken over Mobay's narrow streets. Traffic is backed up along all of the roads into and out of the seaside town. Even transactions at the turnaround in Sam Sharpe Square—where unmetered taxis swoop in to drop off and pick up customers in a bewildering free-for-all—are slowed by the weight of teenage bodies.

They stream through the streets like tributaries toward the ocean, where, in a waterfront spit of dirt called Urban Development Park, ten-foot high columns of speakers rise in a half-circle around a small stage. The pouting, Tupac-shirted boys and the spandexed, braided girls ripple through the 6:30 P.M. commute—concrete mixers, oil trucks, and family vans caught bumper to bumper on the Bottom Road—and in through a small gap in a low barbed-wire fence. On the field, they pass dice games played by kerosene lamp, higglers selling Red Stripe and Ting. The air smells faintly of ash from mountain fires.

Smoke from dozens of portable roast-peanut and jerk-chicken carts hazes the half moon rising.

The rest of the countryside follows. Uniformed schoolchildren swinging their book bags, young denim-skirted mothers with toddlers on arm, the barmaids and working boys stride off their shift and into the dance. The elder locksmiths and the gray-haired grannys sway to the music. In the front of an earbleed-inducing bassbin tower, a turbaned Boboshanti gives an inscrutable grin, his fingers touching finger-to-finger, thumb-to-thumb in the sign of the Trinity.

Through modern Jamaican history, much more than musical vibes could be at stake in settings like these. In the dance, political fortunes might rise or fall, society made or undone. If political parties controlled jobs and turf, wealth and despair, they rarely exerted much control here. This was the people's space, an autonomous zone presided over by music men and women, a shelter of collective memory.

Tonight, while the band sets up onstage for a star-studded bill of twenty-first-century dancehall stars, the sound-system operators, housed in a series of special tents that enclose the circle of speakers, drink up and play music. Candle Sound System, the local "foundation sound," is spinning the classics. An old Bob Marley song, "Chances Are," inspires a resounding wheel-up and cries of "Big tune!" It is a thirty-year-old ballad, not danceable, but something more—a sweet echo of the post-independence years, before Marley was an international star, when his was a voice of a young nation bursting with hope and pride. Everyone, no matter their age, seems to know all the words. They sing, "Though my days are filled with sorrow, I see it—a bright tomorrow."

From his turntables, Candle's selector shifts time forward, cueing a Dennis Brown bassline. Another roar of recognition goes up, and a blast of approving airhorns. This time, hundreds of lighters raise, flickering lights over a black sea. As Brown sings the opening lines—"Do you know what it takes to have a revolution?"—the country youths release their aerosol cans into the butane. At the start of a new century, they recreate an elemental, biblical sight. Against the purple sunset, bolts of flames shoot up, tongues of fire licking up the night sky like history and prophecy.

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The blues had Mississippi, jazz had New Orleans. Hip-hop has Jamaica. Pioneer DJ Kool Herc spent his earliest childhood years in the same Second Street yard that had produced Bob Marley. "Them said nothing good ever come outta Trenchtown," Herc says. "Well, hip-hop came out of Trenchtown!"

Reggae, it has often been said, is rap music's elder kin. Yet the story runs much deeper than just music. During the 1970s, Marley and the roots generation—the first to come of age after the island nation received independence from Great Britain in 1962—reacted to Jamaica's national crisis, global restructuring and imperialist posturing, and intensified street violence. Seeing politics exhausted, they channeled their energies into culture, and let it flow around the world. They pulled global popular culture into the Third World. Their story is the prelude to the hip-hop generation, felt as a portentous shudder from the dub side. "Some are leaves, some are branches," Bob Marley had sung. "I and I a di roots."

So Long Rastafari Call You

When the 1970s opened in Jamaica, national pride was surging.

A song contest had played a major role. In 1966, Edward Seaga, a ranking conservative in the leading Jamaican Labour Party (JLP), who had been one of the first music executives to record indigenous music, instituted the annual Jamaica Festival Song Competition. The contest supported the young island industry and fostered national identity by introducing and making stars of *patwa*-singing, ghetto-identifying artists like Toots and the Maytals and Eric Donaldson. Long before many of his contemporaries, Seaga understood that Jamaica was the kind of place where it was hard to tell where the politics ended and the music began.

But the economy, still dependent on the former colonial arrangements, sputtered. Banana farming needed price supports and protection. The bauxite and tourist industries—the kind of businesses that extracted more than they put in—were growing, but had little effect on an island where more than one in three was unemployed. Here was where the optimism of official nationalism broke down.

The gospel of Rastafari offered faith, history, prophecy and redemption, a

people's nationalism that countered the official nationalism. Rastafarians followed in the tradition of the Black nationalist Marcus Mosiah Garvey. Born in 1887 in the northern town of St. Ann's Bay, Garvey's mother had wanted to name him Moses. His followers in the Black diaspora of the Caribbean, North and Central America, and Africa—which, at the peak of his powers, likely numbered in the millions—called him the Black Moses.

Inspired by Booker T. Washington's *Up From Slavery*, and moved by the debased condition of Black farmers and canal workers he met on a visit to Panama, Garvey returned to the streets of Kingston to preach Black redemption and repatriation to a united Africa. He founded the United Negro Improvement Association in 1914 to formally spread the message. "Wake up Ethiopia! Wake up Africa!" he told his followers. "Let us work towards the one glorious end of a free, redeemed, and mighty nation. Let Africa be a bright star among the constellation of nations."

Two years later, Garvey left for Harlem after followers discovered he had used organization funds to pay for his living expenses. In the United States, Garvey's fiscal weaknesses were further exploited when he became the political target of a young Justice Department official named J. Edgar Hoover. But while his reputation had been sullied, his words remained the stuff of prophecy. He had said, "We Negroes believe in the God of Ethiopia, the everlasting God—God the Son, God the Holy Ghost, the one God of all ages." And by the mid-1930s, former Garveyites found that God in the figure of Ethiopia's newly crowned emperor, born Ras Tafari—"Ras" meaning "Duke" in Amharic and "Tafari" the surname of the royal family—and renamed Haile Selassie, "The Might of The Trinity."

To the followers of Rastafari, Selassie was god made flesh, the King of Kings, the conquering lion of Judah, the redeemer and the deliverer of the Black masses who had come in accordance with Garvey's prophecy. Rastafarianism was an indigenous fusion of messianism and millenarianism, anticolonialism and Black nationalism, and it gave the cause of "Black supremacy" spiritual, political, and social dimensions. The religion found a fast following in the impoverished western Kingston ghettos, especially in the yard called Back-O-Wall, where Rastas constructed a camp of wood and tin.

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Through the mid-1960s, amidst frequent and constant run-ins with the colonial authorities, their influence over the tenement yards grew.

Under a musician named Count Ossie, Rastafarians learned Burru drumming, an African art that had survived from the days of slavery and had come to the Kingston ghettos after slavery was abolished. Burru centered on the interplay of three drums—the bass drum, the alto *fundeh*, and the repeater. The repeater was reserved for the best drummer, who imbued it, in the scholar Verena Reckford's words, with color and tension, protest and defiance.¹ DJs, the Jamaican term for rappers, would later mimic the play of the Burru repeaters over reggae instrumentals, echoes across time.

Count Ossie gave the Rastas a medium for their message, and the drumming spread with Rastafarianism across Kingston from camp to camp. Ossie would receive and mentor many of the most important Jamaican ska, rock steady and reggae musicians at his haven on Wareika Hill. Due in no small part to his efforts, Jamaican musicians began to blend the popular New Orleans rhythm-and-blues with elements of folk mento, jongo, kumina and Revival Zion styles into a new sound.

But while Rasta thought—first in coded forms, then gradually more explicitly—spread through popular music, the authorities portrayed Rastas as bizarre cultists. Many of Jamaica's Black and brown strivers held the same opinion. As a child in Kingston, DJ Kool Herc recalls, he was told that anyone who had their hair twisted up was, in local parlance, a badman. In 1966, Rastas began to move from the margins to the mainstream of Jamaican society. On April 21, Haile Selassie came to Jamaica and was greeted by a gathering of more than a hundred thousand followers. As the plane landed, the rain stopped, which all gathered took for a sign.

"I remember watching it on TV," DJ Kool Herc recalls. "They took buses and trucks and bicycles and any type of means of transportation, going to the airport for this man who they looked upon as a god. That's when Jamaica really found out there was a force on the island."

"When that the plane came down, they stormed the tarmac," he continues. "Haile Selassie came out and looked at the people and went back on the plane and cried. He didn't know he was worshiped that strongly." The Rastas were

exuberant, and their ranks swelled with new converts.

But three months later, history took another sharp turn. Seaga—then the Minister of Community Development and Welfare—was in need of a new political base. The JLP leader, former music exec, and cultural patron was an ambitious man with dangerous connections. He once faced down some hecklers at a political rally by saying, "If they think they are bad, I can bring the crowds of West Kingston. We can deal with you in any way at any time. It will be fire for fire, and blood for blood."²

Now Seaga fingered the Back-O-Wall ghetto, the west Kingston yard where the camps of the Boboshanti and two other Rasta sects thrived. It was an area that had voted for the opposing political party, the democratic socialist People's National Party (PNP), and Seaga wanted it cleared. So on the morning of July 12, armed police filled the air with tear gas, and dispersed the residents with batons and rifles. Bulldozers rolled in behind the police, flattening the shanties. "When the first raided camp was demolished," Leonard Barrett reported, "a blazing fire of unknown origin consumed what remained to ashes while the fire company stood by."³

On the site, Seaga built a housing project named Tivoli Gardens and moved in a voting constituency of JLP supporters. He recruited and armed young badmen to protect the area and expand the JLP turf, a gang that called itself, appropriately enough, the Phoenix.⁴ The lines were now drawn for generations to come.

"And I can see it with my own eyes," Culture sang a decade later on "Two Sevens Clash." "It's only a housing scheme that divides." Politics, apocalypse—some reasoned—was it a coincidence the two words sounded so similar?

Globalizing the Roots Rebel

In 1973, Jamaica's record industry was on the verge of a major international breakthrough. Up until then, the island had produced occasional novelty hits, like Millie Small's "My Boy Lollipop," that crossed over from Britain's growing West Indian immigrant community to the Top of the Pops and the American top 40. But with the twin vehicles of film and music, the Third World roots

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rebel made his global debut.

Debuting in Jamaica in 1972, with wider global release the following year, Perry Henzell's movie *The Harder They Come* was a portrait of the Jamaica few yankees would ever tread. The movie opened with a country bus navigating a narrow northern road, the coconut trees of the stormy coastline eerily headless, their fronds and fruits sheered off by plague. Singer Jimmy Cliff played Ivan O. Martin, a peasant making the well-worn trip from rural parish to concrete jungle, the metaphoric journey of a newly freed nation into modernity. But this was not to be a narrative of progress.

Vincent "Ivanhoe" Martin was a real-life fifties Kingston outlaw who renamed himself Rhygin and summoned Jamaica's Maroon pride. *The Harder They Come* updated his story for a nation defining its postcolonial identity in and through its homegrown popular music. Cliff's Ivan was to be exploited by a greedy music producer, reviled by a Christian pastor, and eventually tortured and hunted by corrupt police. A country *bwai* innocent remade into the urban renegade Rhygin, he shoots down a cop and goes underground. A picture of him posing with two pistols hits the papers and his song controls the airwaves. "As sure as the sun will shine, I'm gonna get my share now, what's mine," he sings, "and then the harder they come, the harder they'll fall, one and all." The new legend of Rhygin would frame the island's turbulent seventies.

In another landmark 1973 film, *Enter the Dragon*, Jim Kelly's African-American activist character Williams had gazed at Bruce Lee's Hong Kong home from a sampan and said, "Ghettos are the same all over the world. They stink." Like Bruce Lee, the Third World reggae heroes seemed to First World audiences an intriguing mix of the familiar and fresh. The soundtrack to Henzell's film, and the debut album by Bob Marley and the Wailers positioned reggae as a quintessential rebel music, steeped in a different kind of urban Black authenticity.

The Wailers' album, *Catch a Fire*, would be a product of the sometimes giddy, sometimes halting dialogue between Third World roots and First World pop. When Bob Marley delivered the rough master tapes to the Island Records offices in London in the dead winter of 1972, a lot was riding on the getting the

mix right.

Just months earlier, the Wailers had been stranded in Britain, abandoned by their manager after a European tour failed to materialize. Island Records head Chris Blackwell, a prominent financier of Henzell's film, bailed them out by signing them, advancing them £4,000, and sending them home to Kingston to record the album. They took their opportunity seriously—it was a chance for the boys from Trenchtown to bring the message of Jamaican sufferers to the world.

Blackwell, a wealthy white descendant of Jamaican rum traders now living in London, was beginning to have success in the rock market, and knew he might be on a fool's mission in trying to cross reggae over. But, emboldened by the success of *The Harder They Come*, and embittered by Jimmy Cliff's snubbing to sign a deal with EMI, he was eager to see how far reggae could be taken into the mainstream. He gave the Wailers fancy album packaging and put them on tour with rock and funk bands. Most importantly, he sent the music back for over-dubs by rock session musicians, keyboardist Rabbit Bundrick and guitarist Wayne Perkins.

The album's leadoff track, "Concrete Jungle," illustrated the perils and promise of translating Jamaican music for First World audiences. The opening notes drifted into a disorienting key, Robbie Shakespeare's bassline seemed to omit more notes than were played, Bunny Wailer and Peter Tosh's harmonies floated and attacked like rope-a-dope boxing. Marley's lyrics described the unrelenting bleakness of the west Kingston yard. "No chains around my feet," the Wailers sang, "but I'm not free." It was utterly brilliant, but the music, Blackwell decided, sounded far too Jamaican.

When he first played the music to Perkins, the Muscle Shoals guitarist couldn't understand the riptide of riddims. But as the song built to the break, Perkins cut loose with a bluesy torrent, culminating in a ringing sustain. Blackwell and engineer Tony Platt hit the echo machine and the note fed back, soaring up two octaves. "It gave me goosebumps, it was one of those magical moments," Perkins says.⁵ Marley, who had spent long, cold, destitute years in America pursuing his pop dream, thought so, too.

Their album would only sell 14,000 copies in its first year, but the Wailers

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had taken the first step in turning their local music into an international phenomenon. *Catch a Fire* was a landmark moment in the globalization of Third World culture. Fulfilling the destiny the elder Rastas in Trenchtown had long seen for him, Marley was on his way to becoming a worldwide icon of freedom struggle and Black liberation—the small axe becoming the first trumpet.

Sounds and Versions

The pop audience demanded heroes and icons, but reggae, perhaps more than any other music in the world, also privileged the invisible music men, the sonic architects—the studio producer and the sound system selector. Together, during the seventies, these two secretive orders emerged as sources of power in Jamaica.

One center, though it may not have seemed so at the time, was an odd backyard studio in the Kingston suburb of Washington Gardens. Lee "Scratch" Perry, its eccentric owner, was a diminutive man with a feverishly large imagination. Beginning in December of 1973, and continuing night and day for five years, Perry recorded an unceasing parade of harmony groups, singers, and DJs in the tiny, stuffy, concrete structure that he called the Black Ark. The music emerging from the Ark—including Junior Murvin's "Police and Thieves," The Heptones' "Mr. President," and The Congos' "Children Crying"—was mesmerizing and shocking, and would soon reverberate across the globe.

It was a gloriously weird place, this Black Ark, another autonomous zone. Its exterior walls sported a blue, red, and white image of Emperor Haile Selassie and the Lion of Judah, surrounded by purple handprints and footprints like a child's finger paintings. The interior walls were painted red and green, and were crammed with Rasta imagery, Bruce Lee posters, Upsetters album jackets, Teac equipment brochures, Polaroid shots, record stampers, horseshoes, and other ephemera, all covered over by a dense layer of Perry's obscure, signifying graffiti.

Behind a cheap four-track mixing desk, which by the standards of the time was hopelessly outdated, Perry whirled and bopped and twiddled the knobs,

imbuing the recordings with wild crashes of echo, gravity-defying phasing, and frequency-shredding equalization. Influenced by his work with Osborne "King Tubby" Ruddock, Perry used aging analog machines like the Echoplex to turn sounds over and back into themselves like Möbius loops. Melodies became fragments, fragments became signs, and the whole thing swirled like a hurricane.

Upon his arrival in Kingston from his native northern countryside in 1960, Perry had headed straight for the powerful sound systems to try to find work, eventually becoming a songwriter for Duke Reid, then moving on to become a scout and operator for Reid's competitor, Coxsone Dodd. According to dancehall historian Norman Stolzoff, sound system culture had evolved in Kingston after World War II when the ranks of live musicians dramatically thinned due to immigration to the United Kingdom and the United States and the rise of the North Coast tourist industry.⁶ By the time Perry came to Kingston, sound systems had largely replaced live bands.

Outfitted with powerful amplifiers and blasting stacks of homemade speakers, one only needed a selector and records to transform any yard. The sound systems democratized pleasure and leisure by making dance entertainment available to the downtown sufferers and strivers. The sound systems championed the people's choice long before commercial radio, and as independence approached, they moved from playing mostly American rhythm-and-blues to homegrown ska, rock steady, and finally, reggae.

The fiercely competitive sound systems—including Duke Reid's Trojan, Coxsone Dodd's Downbeat the Ruler, Prince Buster's Voice of the People, King Edwards the Giant, and Tom the Great Sebastian—fought for audiences; some of them even sent thugs to shoot up their rivals' dances and destroy their equipment in fits of anger or desperation.⁷ More usually, they distinguished themselves from each other with "specials," records that no other sound system had, songs that mashed up their competitors and drew away their audiences. They even sometimes "clashed" live in the same hall or yard, song for song, "dub fi dub."

Early on, selectors made frequent trips to America to secure obscure exclusives. As the Jamaican music industry expanded during the sixties,

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sound systems began to record local artists' songs onto exclusive acetates or "dubplates."⁸ In 1967, a sound system head affiliated with Duke Reid named Ruddy Redwood stumbled onto Jamaican music's next great innovation.

One afternoon Redwood was cutting dubplates when engineer Byron Smith forgot to pan up the vocals on The Paragons' hit, "On the Beach." Redwood took the uncorrected acetate to the dance that night anyway, and mixing between the vocal and the dub, sent the crowd into a frenzy during his midnight set. Rather than apologize for his mistake the next day, Redwood emphasized to Reid that the vocal-less riddim could be used as a B-side on the commercial release of the singles. Reid, for his part, realized he could cut his costs by half or more. One studio session could now produce multiple "versions."⁹ A single band session with a harmony trio could be recycled as a DJ version for a rapper to rock *patwa* rhymes over, and a dub version in which the mixing engineer himself became the central performer—experimenting with levels, equalization and effects to alter the feel of the riddim, and break free of the constraints of the standard song.

Dub's birth was accidental, its spread was fueled by economics, and it would become a diagram for hip-hop music. A space had been pried open for the break, for possibility. And, quickly, noise came up from the streets to fill the space—yard-centric toasts, sufferer moans, analog echoes—the sounds of people's histories, *dub histories*, versions not represented in the official version. As musical competition was overshadowed by violent political competition, dub became the sound of a rapidly fragmenting nation—troubling, strange, tragic, wise slow-motion portraits of social collapse.

Roots and Culture

Every Jamaican politician knew what every Jamaican musician knew—the sound systems were crucial to their success. During the seventies, the fight for political dominance between the conservative Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) and leftist People's National Party (PNP) seemed inevitably to turn on the mood of the people in the dance. All any prime minister had to do to gauge the winds was to listen closely to the week's 45 rpm single releases; they were like political polls set to melody and riddim.

The message was becoming decidedly roots and radical. In the fall of 1968, the JLP-led government had banned Black-power literature and icons like the pan-Africanist leader Walter Rodney from the University of the West Indies campus, then violently crushed the political riots that ensued across the city. But this did not stop the electorate from moving hard left. Intellectuals high on Malcolm X, socialists stricken by Castro, middle-class strivers impatient for price stability, poor strugglers facing dim prospects, even Rastas traditionally reluctant to participate in what Peter Tosh called the Babylon *shitstem* all clamored for change. Sufferer anthems took over the sound systems. The resistance to roots reggae finally gave way on JBC radio, as listeners came home from the yard dances to demand that tunes like Delroy Wilson's "Better Must Come" and the Wailers' "Small Axe" (cut with Perry) be played during daytime hours. Burning Spear summed up the mood of the time: "The people know what it is they want, so they themselves go about getting it."¹⁰

Compared to Seaga, who had worked the nexus of culture and politics for years, Michael Manley, the democratic socialist PNP candidate, was a late-comer. But as Manley geared up for the 1972 elections, he began appearing at political rallies with his "rod of correction," a staff that he said had been handed to him by Haile Selassie, in explicit recognition of the influence Rastafarianism held among the poor. The rod, he said, would lead him to redressing injustice. Befitting his new image, he spoke of reggae as "the people's language," and selected Wilson's "Better Must Come" as his campaign theme. The following year, the PNP swept the JLP out of office. In Laurie Gunst's worlds, Jamaica in the '70s was "a fever-dream of raised consciousness and high hopes."¹¹

But better never came. The twin downpressing forces of Cold War positioning and global economic pressures ripped Jamaica apart.

Manley's democratic socialist government pushed through key social reforms, including lowering the voting age to eighteen, making secondary and university education free, and establishing a national minimum wage. But when Manley moved to reestablish relations with Cuba and build solidarity with leftist leaders in the Caribbean and Africa, CIA surveillance sharply intensified, and First World leaders withdrew aid and investments. In 1971,

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Jamaica received \$23 million in aid from the United States. By 1975, that amount was down to \$4 million.¹²

The worldwide oil crisis-fueled recession hit the Jamaican dollar hard, unleashing economic chaos. Prices tripled while wages declined by half; a paycheck suddenly bought one-sixth of what it used to. Labor unions unleashed an unprecedented number of walkouts. Between 1972 and 1979, there were more than three hundred strikes.

North American banks refused to renew aid loans. Jamaica's debt doubled between 1975 and 1980 to \$2 billion U.S., the equivalent of 90 percent of the country's gross domestic product.¹³ After a bitter internal fight, the PNP reversed course and finally agreed to accept emergency loans for Jamaica from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), who imposed severe austerity measures that caused goods shortages and massive layoffs. The IMF's plan wreaked long-term havoc on the island's economy, wiping out entire industries. To pay off the skyrocketing debt, the PNP raised taxes, causing other businesses to flee the island.

In 1973, gun violence broke out between rival gangs in the Kingston yards. Manley first placed the island "under heavy manners," expanding police powers to search and raid, and stepping up joint police-military operations. He then established a special Gun Court, where gunmen and illegal firearms traffickers faced mandatory indefinite sentences for their crimes.

By the end of 1976, when Manley declared a State of Emergency—the Jamaican equivalent of martial law—it was becoming clear that much of the violence was politically motivated. In the Kingston yards, gangs had divided and mapped their turf. As Seaga had long understood, gang leaders were useful to party machinery—they delivered a yard's votes in election years, fought the ground war during the off years. In turn, politicians granted jobs, favors, and programs to the area dons, who organized the youths into work-groups or militias.

Bounty Killer, the dancehall DJ who grew up in the Riverton neighborhood during the 1970s and '80s, says, "We used to love politics. When time de MP (Member of Parliament) come an' say, 'Buoy, we a go gi' weh dis an we a go gi' weh dat—we interested."

"A poor people—weh a look a likkle help an' a look a hope inna Jamaica—a listen when de Govament a talk," he added. "But no hope no deh deh. Dem haffi hold *oonu* (everyone) inna dat position so dem can get *oonu* attention."¹⁴ In 1974, singer Little Roy went into the Black Ark to record an anguished plea for peace, "Tribal War," a tune whose cyclical revival over the next three decades spoke to the permanence of political gang violence.

While Seaga and the JLP officials turned up the rhetorical heat on the Manley government in Parliament, the JLP gangs lit up PNP yards with Molotov cocktails and gunfire. PNP gangs retaliated in kind, fire for fire, blood for blood. When firefighters arrived in Rema, a JLP community, in January 1976, they confronted youths tossing stones from behind roadblocks of blazing tires. The shanties were left to burn.¹⁵ Manley felt he saw a design to the violence—a devil's bargain between the CIA and the pro-U.S. JLP, Washington bullets in the Kingston streets. He wrote in his memoirs, "I have no doubt that the CIA was active in Jamaica that year and was working through its own agents to destabilise us."¹⁶

With guns and money flowing to the opposition party, the tribal wars rose to a new pitch. Smoke thickened the heavy air in the zinc yards, and Rhygins in JLP green or PNP red raged through the ghetto. In May, the warfare peaked when gangsters surrounded a tenement yard in West Kingston at Orange Lane and set it ablaze, trapping five hundred residents inside. Gunmen blasted away at the police and firemen who arrived at the scene, and eleven perished in the conflagration. As debate raged in Parliament over which party was responsible for the carnage, and the elections neared, hundreds more were gunned down.

During the tribal wars of the mid-sixties, the Wailers had cut "Simmer Down," a tune encouraging rudies to "control your temper." Now Bob Marley met Lee "Scratch" Perry at the Black Ark to record another track that might cool down the ghetto, "Smile Jamaica," and agreed to do a free concert bearing the same name on December 5. Hearing this news, the PNP scheduled elections for December 20, and made a show of sending armed guards to watch Marley's up-town compound at 56 Hope Road. Marley was enraged. Like many Rastas, he had supported Manley and the PNP in 1972, but now he

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was disgusted with where *politicks* had led the country.

Two nights before the show, the armed guard mysteriously disappeared. Minutes later, six assassins entered the mansion. Rita Marley was shot in the head, and manager Don Taylor took five bullets destined for Bob, whose chest was grazed as the last bullet entered his left arm. But on the night of the show, Bob was wheeled into National Heroes Park, where a crowd of 80,000, including Manley and a large PNP entourage, had gathered. Marley played a triumphant concert, then left for the Bahamas in a self-imposed exile.

Rumors spread that the JLP, perhaps even the CIA, was behind the hit. The point had been made: violence was striking dangerously near the heart of the people.

The Dub Side

And so they sang of clashes, of war. From imagining distant and free African skies in songs like The Abyssinians' "Satta Massa Gana," The Mighty Diamonds' "Africa," Junior Byles's "A Place Called Africa," or Bunny Wailer's "Dreamland," they moved to plead for relief from the violence borne of "isms and schisms."

Leroy Smart's "Ballistic Affair" was a tragic dispatch from the fire-scarred danger zone of Seventh Street, the militarized border between Rema and Concrete Jungle, a PNP yard whose Junglist gang was thought to be behind much of the violence:

We used to lick chalice, cook ital stew together
Play football and cricket as one brother
Now through you rest a Jungle
A you might block a Rema
You a go fight 'gainst your brother.

Max Romeo and Lee "Scratch" Perry captured the moment's treacherous flux. As Romeo told David Katz: "I had this song 'War In A Babylon' where me say, 'It wicked out there, it dread out there.' I took it to [Perry], said, 'You like it?' He said 'Yeah!' with excitement, 'but no dread and no wicked, it *sipple* out

deh!' So I said, 'Yeah that have a ring to it', because *sipple* mean slippery, it's slidey out there."¹⁷ In his new chorus, Romeo asked "So wha fi do?" and the answer came, "Mek we *slide* out deh." As the song climaxed, Romeo retreated high up to the Rasta hills as Kingston exploded under the burning sun:

I man satta on the mountaintop
Watching Babylon burning red hot
Red hot!

Here was *The Harder They Come*'s Ivan, a reef fish battling the ocean current, a flash of color in the tidal surge, pursued by police and enemies, making a last run through the ghetto, leaving graffiti tags on the concrete walls that mocked, "I was here but I disappear (sic)"—laughing mirthily, knowing that he'd already become indelible in the public imagination, that even politics could not erase him—and, like a premonitory smoke above the shanty roofs: "I AM EVERYWHERE." Celebrating survival itself was the point.

While singers and DJs offered words of mourning or escape for the sufferers, dub reggae—the mostly wordless music of dread—ran directly into the heart of the darkness. In Perry's "Revelation Dub," time was creakily kept by a distended, phasing hi-hat and Romeo's vocal was either reduced to the low hum of some distant street protest or chopped into sudden nonsensical stabs—"Warinna!" "Balwarin!"—as if all words, even warnings, could not be trusted. The riddim—which Marley would later version for "Three Little Birds," with its bright chorus, "Don't worry about a thing, 'cause every little thing's gonna be alright"—was swung off its moorings, the textual integrity and authority was undermined. Perry's sound was the epitome of *sipple*. Dub answered the question: what kind of mirror is it that reflects everything but the person looking into it?

Dub had a compelling circularity. It exploded in the dancehall at the moment the tenement yards exploded in violence. Dub was the "B-side" to the soaring visions of the democratic socialist dreamers or the apocalyptic warnings of the Rasta prophets. As reggae historian Steve Barrow says, "The music of dub represents literally and figuratively '*the other side*.' There's an up

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and a down, there's an A-side and a B-side. It's a dialectical world."

As the two sevens clashed, dub peaked with album sets from Perry (*Super Ape*), Keith Hudson (*Brand*), Niney the Observer (*Sledgehammer Dub*), the Mighty Two—Joe Gibbs and Errol Thompson (Prince Far I's *Under Heavy Manners*, Joe Gibbs' *State of Emergency*, *African Dub All-Mighty* series), Philip Smart (Tapper Zukie's *Tapper Zukie In Dub*), Harry Mudie (the *Dub Conference* series), and the most influential dubmaster of all, King Tubby.

Born Osborne Ruddock in 1941, Tubby had collaborated with Perry to demonstrate the possibilities of dub on the 1973 album, *Blackboard Jungle Dub*. With *King Tubby's Meets Rockers Uptown*, an album-length collection of sides with melodica player Augustus Pablo dating to the beginning of Manley's first term, musical innovation and political disintegration seemed to stoke each other.

On the title track, a version of Jacob Miller's "Baby I Love You So," Tubby left Pablo's melodica, Carly Barrett's drums, and Chinna Smith's guitar in shards. Miller had sung, "Night and day, I pray that love will come my way." But Tubby clipped his lines—"Baby I-I-I-I," "night and day," "that love," "And I-I-I-I"—transforming Miller's longing into a prison. On the original, Miller had scatted loosely, then chuckled, perhaps at having missed an essential cue. Tubby added a ghostly echo, leaving the laugh to hang like a haunting, the smoke of Rhygin's trail. At the end, Miller's cry dissolved in a barrage of oscillations, a plunge through a trapdoor.

The last track, inexplicably left unannounced on the original album sleeve and label, was a dub of the Abyssinians' 1969 single, "Satta Massa Gana," colloquially known as the Rastafarian national anthem. In mistranslated Amharic, its title meant to "give thanks and praise" to Haile Selassie, while its harmonies yearned for "a land far far away."¹⁸ Tubby gutted the song to a bass pulse and drum accent. The song's basic chords were twisted out of shape and pitch. Drums dropped like thunderclaps. Tubby's mirror world was the sound of the dreamland alliance of Rastas and democratic socialists disintegrating, its utopia looted by thugs and left to the whipping hurricane winds of global change.

It was music of the crossfire lifted out of the progression of time, politics,

and meaning. Dub embraced contingency. Everything was up for grabs. Dub declaimed, distorted, or dropped out at the razor's edge of a moment. It gave a clipped, fragmented voice to horrors the nation could not yet adequately articulate.

One Love Peace Music

When 1978 arrived, another round of election-year violence seemed imminent. But then the unexpected happened. Somehow in early January, Bucky Marshall, a gunman from the PNP-backed Spanglers Posse, ended up in the same General Penitentiary cell as some JLP gangsters and they got to talking.

They spoke of the event that had ended 1977. Renegade soldiers from the Jamaican Defense Force had set up and ambushed an unarmed posse of JLP roughnecks, killing five. But five more got away, and they told the story of the extra-legal set-up to *The Gleaner*. The resulting scandal potentially incriminated both PNP and JLP politicians, and many felt that a coup or a civil war was imminent. Certainly, the rival gunmen in that jail-cell reasoned, no political affiliations could save anyone from the army if something that serious was afoot.

When Marshall stepped out of jail, he went to meet with Claudio Massop, Seaga's man in Tivoli Gardens, who had come up through The Phoenix and was now the area don. The next morning, at a spot straddling the border of JLP and PNP territories in central Kingston, they announced a peace treaty. Marshall and Massop took photos together, and spoke to the press. "This is not political," said Marshall. "This is from we who have felt the pangs of jail."¹⁹ Massop added, "The youths have been fighting among themselves for too long and is only them get dead. Everybody I grow up with is dead."²⁰ Amidst the spreading truce, elated youths left their yards and began to gather in parks and dances that had formerly been in enemy territory.

With the help of the Rasta sect, the Twelve Tribes of Israel, Marshall, Massop, and the ranking PNP don from Concrete Jungle, "Red Tony" Welch, went to London to see the man who had first brought them together, Bob Marley. Welch and Massop had been frequent guests when Marley was

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holding court on Hope Road. Now they asked him to return to Jamaica and headline a "One Love Peace Concert." The benefit would raise money for the most suffering PNP and JLP ghettos, to be distributed by the newly formed Central Peace Council, but more importantly, it could curtail the possibility of civil war or a military coup. Marley agreed, and flew home. In the days leading to the concert, Marley toured through the yards to talk up the peace treaty. At the Black Ark, he and Perry recorded "Blackman Redemption" and "Rastaman Live Up" as Massop and Marshall vibed together in the listening room.²¹

On April 22, thousands packed Kingston's National Stadium to hear the island's top musicians, including Dennis Brown, Culture, the Mighty Diamonds, Big Youth, Beres Hammond, Ras Michael and the Sons of Negus, Dillinger and Jacob Miller, who, with his band Inner Circle, had the most popular tune in the country in "Peace Treaty Special," a rockers-style tribute to Marshall, Massop and the tribes set to a version of the American Civil War-era song, "When Johnny Comes Marching Home Again."²² "Man can walk the street again, hurrah-ah-e-ah hurrah," Miller sang joyously. "From Tivoli to Jungle, Lizard Town to Rema—hurrah!" Peter Tosh played a scorching set, laced with withering criticisms of the politicians in attendance. Then Marley took the stage, and the crowd swelled to a roar.

As the Wailers gave an inspired performance of "Jamming," Marley called the political leaders onstage. His long dreads cut arcs through the night air, and he danced as if possessed, singing, "Show the people that you love 'em right, show the people you gonna unite." Manley stood to the left of Marley, Seaga to the right, and they tentatively gave each other a handshake. Marley clasped their hands, put them in a power grip and lifted them over his head, holding them high for all to see. The crowd was stunned. "Love, prosperity be with us all," Marley said. "Jah Rastafari. Selassie I."

Through music, Marley had brought together a trinity of power, and restored unity to the young nation. Culture, it seemed, had transcended politics.

The Pressure Drop

But there were other signs as well. Five days before the concert, army soldiers

fired on a peaceful ghetto march for better sanitation, killing three demonstrators. The leader of the Central Peace Council, who had called for an end to police corruption, fled the island in fear for his life. Police stopped and searched a taxi Claudie Massop was riding in, then coldly executed him in a hail of fifty bullets.²³ The peace treaty was over. So was Manley's democratic socialist experiment. In 1980, Seaga and the JLP would be overwhelmingly victorious at the polls, stepping up just in time to be courted by the new Reagan administration in Washington. Almost nine hundred people would die in election-year violence.

The reggae industry, too, felt the pressure drop. During the heady independence years of the sixties, Coxsone Dodd's Studio One and Duke Reid's Treasure Isle had been built from local sound system profits. But the Black Ark studio had been financed by the globalization of the reggae industry. Perry's dubs had been partly an answer to the growing international demand for reggae. Reggae music was not only a socially stabilizing force, it had become an important commodity.

The pressures fell disproportionately on the slender shoulders of musicians. Uptown, Bob Marley's Hope Road residence had become a magnet for Twelve Tribes Rastas, a sect that openly and controversially courted the wealthy, whites and browns. But many more displaced sufferers also frequented the Hope Road yard. Marley archivist Roger Steffens believes that by the late '70s, Marley was directly responsible for the economic fortunes of six thousand people. By 1979, the Marley camp had also become aware of CIA operatives tailing them. And yet, despite being diagnosed with cancer, Marley maintained a hectic touring schedule through the end of 1980, perhaps because of such obligations. "It took its toll," Steffens says. "He really wanted out." On May 11, 1981, he was dead.

At the beginning of 1978, Perry's Black Ark had become a center for the Boboshanti, an orthodox Rasta sect led by Prince Emmanuel Edwards that adhered to the ideal of Black Supremacy. Perry biographer David Katz notes that the Bobos hoped Perry and his Ark could help disseminate their message, much the same way Marley did for the Twelve Tribes, and that hundreds of people materially depended upon Perry's riddim factory. By the end of the

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year, Perry had ejected the Bobos, shaved his budding dreads, and turned away Rasta groups and visitors. He began dismantling the studio. He covered the Ark with brown paint and graffiti tags, crossing out words and pictures with Xs. In the summer of 1983, the Black Ark burned to the ground. Perry said he did it himself.

Years later, Perry dictated an extraordinary statement to Katz, a peripatetic freestyle. He began, "The First World and the Second World live, but the Third World is finished because I, Lee 'Scratch' Perry, knows the head of the IMF —the IMF big boss, the Bank of England big boss, the Midland big boss, the International Giro Bank big boss . . .

"The Third World drawn in," he continued. "The game blocked; the road block, the lane block, and the street block, so who can't see good better see them eye specialist and take a good look upon the road. The road blocked; all the roads are blocked . . .

"Reggae music is a curse, the ultimate destruction", he said. "Logical Fox, solid-state logic."²⁴

Fevered dreams of progress had brought fires to the Bronx and Kingston. The hip-hop generation, it might be said, was born in these fires.



On the block in the South Bronx with the Ghetto Brothers and the Roman Kings.

Benjy Melendez (center), Victor Melendez (right, on drums).
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