

Trench Town Rock: The Creation of Jamaica's Music Industry*

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Abstract: The story of how reggae music came into being provides a case study of how an industrial cluster fosters innovation in a developing economy. The key to the success of the Jamaican music business was the rapid spread of musical innovations among the many small firms.

THE MUSIC OF THE THIRD WORLD

From Jamaica, reggae music has swept the world. You can hear reggae played in clubs and bars from Senegal to Samoa. Reggae songs invoke racial injustice (Peter Tosh's "Arise Black Man"), politics (Bunny Wailer on apartheid South Africa's prime minister, "Botha the Mosquito"), the Rastafarian religion (the Melodians' "Rivers of Babylon"), and romance (Jimmy Cliff's "Higher and Deeper Love"). The lyrics range from bravado (Tosh's "I'm the toughest, I'm the toughest") to tenderness (Bob Marley's "Three little birds pitch by my doorstep, singing sweet songs of melodies pure and true").

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Reggae was part of the growth of so-called world music, which also includes music from Africa, the Arab world, Latin America, and Asia. When you get into a taxi in Lagos or Lima, the driver is less likely to be playing a CD by Britney Spears or Madonna than one by a local singer like Femi Kuti or Susana Baca.

Not only has reggae flourished but new musical forms, descendants of reggae like dub, ragga, and dancehall, have continued to be born. In a reversal of cultural imperialism, American rap music owes something to reggae. Many of the early rap practitioners were Caribbean-Americans who brought their techniques from Jamaica.

Reggae represents third-world business success. Jamaica, a small nation of two million people, between the mid-1950s and 2000 produced over 100,000 recordings (Barrow and Dalton, 2001, p. ix). With more than one new recording each year per thousand people, Jamaica could be, per capita, the world's most prolific generator of recorded music.

Worldwide annual sales of reggae recordings in the late 1990s were an estimated US\$1.2 billion; of this, Jamaican musicians, producers, and songwriters earned perhaps US\$300 million. Jamaicans' earnings from live performances and sales of ancillary products were approximately a further US\$50 million (Nourse, 2000, p. 5; Kozul-Wright and Stanbury, 1998, p. 24). These rough numbers suggest that the music industry accounts for about 4 percent of Jamaica's GDP, but the impact on the economy is still larger because reggae promotes the tourist industry, the source of nearly a half of the nation's foreign earnings.

Bob Marley's recordings are perpetual big sellers. The compilation album "Legend," released posthumously in 1984, had sold 12 million copies by 2003 in the

United States and the United Kingdom alone. Two decades after his death in 1981 from cancer at the age of 36, Marley's estate was earning about US\$10 million a year. On the list of top-earning dead celebrities compiled by *Forbes* magazine in 2002, Marley ranked fourth among musicians, behind Elvis Presley, John Lennon, and George Harrison. In 1999, the BBC chose his "One Love" as the millennium song, and *Time* magazine, describing his 1977 album "Exodus" as "a political and cultural nexus, drawing inspiration from the Third World and then giving voice to it the world over," named it the best album of the century.¹

While Marley is the dominant figure in Jamaican music, he is only a part of the story. He was not the inventor of reggae. No individual originated reggae music. It was the collective, and largely unanticipated, creation of many. In what follows is related the story of how Jamaica's music industry came into being. This is a case study with a number of broad lessons, going beyond music, on the role of an industrial cluster in fostering innovation in a developing economy. The musical innovations that gave rise to reggae generated a global market for Jamaica's music.

The "creative city," a term due to the geographer Peter Hall, is evoked by Kingston, Jamaica. Creativity occurs in "a special kind of city, a city in economic and social flux." Innovation rests on information transmission among likeminded innovators, which requires "a certain density of communication" (Hall, 2000, pp. 644, 648). Jamaica's music business exemplifies Hall's thesis that the key to creativity is the social context.

¹ *Guinness World Records*, <http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/index.asp?id=54263>; Betsy Schiffman, "Top-Earning Dead Celebrities," *Forbes* August 12, 2002, <http://www.forbes.com/2002/08/12/0812deadintro.html>; *Time*, "The Best of the Century," December 31, 1999, p. 35.

REGGAE'S MUSICAL ORIGINS

Jamaican music has a convoluted history, with its branching into genres and subgenres. (See Figure 1, which is the work of Michael Garnice, who maintains the web site www.mentomusic.com.) A simplified summary is this. Mento, an old Jamaican folk music, gave rise to the electrified music ska, which later gave rise to the more intricate reggae. Numerous other styles subsequently grew out of reggae, but they go beyond the scope of our story.

Mento arose in the nineteenth century, growing out of both the traditional African music of the slaves and the British folk music of the slave owners and their employees. The rhythms of mento form the basis for ska and reggae.

In the late 1950s, Jamaican musicians developed ska by marrying mento to American rhythm and blues. A musical innovation by the producer Clement “Coxsone” Dodd was key to ska. Guitarist Ernie Ranglin, who was there at the time, recalls that Dodd “moved the stress to the afterbeat—the second and fourth beats—to such a degree that it turned the arrangement around. Then the guitar came in to stress it even more, and this off-beat became the focus of all Jamaican music that followed on after it” (Bradley, 2000, p. 52). Compared with rhythm and blues, ska is “more to the African touch,” singer Toots Hibbert says (Hebdige, 1990, p. 65); “more relevant to the drums”.

A decade later, ska transmuted into reggae. Compared with ska, reggae tends to be slower in tempo, more complex in its musical arrangements, and more political and Rastafarian religious in its lyrics.

Several musicians and record producers, it appears, invented reggae simultaneously. “Do the Reggay” was a 1968 hit by Toots and the Maytals. “I recorded ‘Do the Reggay,’ so I was the inventor of that word,” says Toots Hibbert. “The music changed. They used to call reggae ‘bluebeat’ and ‘boogiebeat’ until I say, ‘Let’s do the reggay.’”² Jimmy Cliff’s “Hard Road to Travel” was another early reggae song, among others.

The Wailers, while not the first to record reggae, experimented with it early and pushed it the furthest. Starting out as a ska group, their talent initially was raw. “The Wailers weren’t singers until I taught them,” their mentor Joe Higgs recalled. “It took me years to teach Bob Marley what sound consciousness was about” (Barrow and Dalton, 2001, p. 40). All three of them—Peter Tosh and Bunny Wailer, along with Marley—had grown up in Trench Town, the “concrete jungle, where the living is harder” of the Marley song. In Trench Town, people “built shacks and huts out of cardboard and plywood and rusty old iron, and the place spread like a disease till now it’s teeming,” reports Thomas (1977, pp. 25-26). It was “a bombsite landscape of live garbage and boxwood and unlikely tropical greenery.” With lyrics like “Get up, stand up: stand up for your rights!” and “Slave driver, the table is turned” the Wailers had a message that appealed to marginalized young Jamaicans just like themselves.

According to Marley, “But it’s the rhythm now, that is reggae. Proud rhythm, man, that rhythm can’t end. It have a different touch” (McCann, 1993, p. 29). In reggae’s “one drop” rhythm, the bass drum comes in on the third beat in the bar, as

² Buddy Seigal, “Hibbert Invented Reggae,” *Orange County Weekly*, July 27, 2001, <http://www.ocweekly.com/ink/01/47/music-seigal.php>.

Marley's song "One Drop" describes: "So feel this drumbeat; I tell you what: it's beating within, feel your heart playing a rhythm."

"The first thing you hear when listening to reggae," says music writer Dick Hebdige (1990, p. 45), "is the jagged, 'chikka-chikka' guitar rhythm (sometimes called the chicken-scratch) which seems to cut against the hypnotic, grumbling bass." The producer Lee "Scratch" Perry is given credit for the reggae rhythm. Perry says what is distinctive about reggae is its "waxy beat" and its "rebel bass" (Hebdige, 1990, p. 75), which he devised to "catch the vibration of the people".

Reggae began "in a period of extraordinary experiment," according to music historians Steve Barrow and Peter Dalton (2001, p. 93), "in which almost all later styles were prefigured and all previous styles absorbed."

REGGAE'S BUSINESS ORIGINS

The Jamaican music industry started with the "sound systems" of the 1950s. Recorded music was played in open-air venues for people to dance to, at a volume heard blocks away. The disc jockeys initially used rhythm-and-blues records imported from the United States, but gradually they introduced domestically produced records.

The switch to Jamaican music arose from the intense competition among the various proprietors of the sound systems. Delroy Wilson, the singer, likened it to war. "In days like that you have a sound war. It was like Prince Buster against Coxsone against Duke Reid against King Edwards" (Barrow and Dalton, 2001, p. 39). To attract paying customers, the disk jockeys had to play what the people wanted to dance to, which was faster and more bass-driven than the tamer American product.

To meet the demand for the Jamaican sound, the sound-system owners started making recordings of their own. To begin with they intended the recordings to be played only in their own sound systems, but by the end of the 1950s they were pressing vinyl disks for sale to the public.

The systems for distributing records, formerly haphazard, became better organized at this time (Bradley, *op. cit.*, p. 209). Earlier, records had been sold as a sideline in barber shops and bars. By the mid-1960s, just before reggae's arrival, many small specialist record shops had opened around the country. To meet the shops' demands for records, entrepreneurs started distribution firms. As a result, record producers no longer needed to operate their own sound systems to create a demand for their product, but could simply sell their records via the new wholesalers and retailers.

Around this time, also, the means of payment became more professional. In the early days, producers on occasion neglected to pay the musicians. The English-Jamaican entrepreneur Chris Blackwell and others cleaned things up. Blackwell "ran his affairs much more like a business and used to pay higher rates to artists and musicians," according to the singer Jimmy Cliff (Bradley, 2000, pp. 104, 107). "That's how people got to hear about Chris Blackwell. They'd say, 'Go to the white man, him pay better money!'"

Respect for intellectual property was not part of the reason for the music business's growth: quite the contrary. Writing credits were casually assigned; a given song might at different times be credited to different writers. The rights to royalties were fuzzy. The ownership of the music was "a music publisher's nightmare" (Bradley, 2000, p. 41). Jamaica did not apply its copyright laws to music until the 1990s.

In 1968, ska gave birth to reggae. A new wave of musicians, including Desmond Dekker, the Melodians, Desmond Dekker, the Ethiopians, Burning Spear, and of course the Wailers, had arrived in the mid-1960s. Along with the new musicians came a new generation of record producers. Some had learned their trade working for the established producers with whom they now competed. Others had switched to producing after starting out as musicians. The new producers were more sophisticated musically than their predecessors. “Now, with all the little studios springing up all around the place, musicians and artists were turning producer and they truly understood what could be done with a tune,” recalls Derrick Harriott, himself a musician turned producer. “It was loose. We tried things, so reggae took off in all kinds of directions, and musician-producers understood it enough to go with it” (Bradley, 2000, p. 230).

In 1972, the movie “The Harder They Come” was released. Starring Jimmy Cliff, it depicts a country boy who goes to Kingston to try to make it as a singer but becomes an outlaw. The film introduced Jamaican music, the Jamaican music business, and Jamaica itself to an international audience. Its soundtrack became one of the best-selling of all reggae records.

Also in 1972, the Wailers traveled to London and signed with a UK company, Island Records, owned by Chris Blackwell. The 1973 success of their album “Catch a Fire” helped make reggae popular worldwide. Where earlier reggae had been aimed at Jamaican tastes, “Catch a Fire” was produced with a guitar sound deliberately designed to appeal to an audience attuned to rock music. The album was recorded in Kingston, but additional guitar and organ accompaniment was added to the tracks in London. Astutely

packaged and marketed, and backed by live Wailers performances in the United Kingdom and the United States, “Catch a Fire” became a global hit.

After separating from the other two Wailers, Bob Marley continued to adapt his music to broaden its international appeal, slowing the songs’ tempo, enriching his band’s sound, and adding three female backup singers. At the same time, he continually returned to the musical styles and themes he started out with. “We come from Trench Town,” he sang at the height of his success. And: “I remember when we used to sit, in the government yard in Trench Town, observing the hypocrites.”³

Responsiveness to foreign tastes characterized not only Marley but reggae generally. “To release reggae music in Jamaica is a waste of money. People need the money to buy food, not records,” said studio manager Roy Francis (Kurlansky, 1992, p. 117), with some hyperbole, for Jamaicans did buy records. Part of the reason for Marley’s global success is that his songs are melodic. “The music always sounds sweet, even when the lyrics include scathing attacks on the colonial system,” notes Hebdige (1990, p. 81). “In effect, Marley was making the Western world dance to the prophecies of its own destruction.”

THE STRUCTURE OF THE INDUSTRY TODAY

The music business today is one of the world’s most concentrated industries. In the global market for recorded music, four huge companies have come to dominate, holding an extraordinary 75 percent market share worldwide. As of 2003, there were five majors: Universal with 24 percent of world sales, Sony, EMI, and Warner with 13 percent each, and BMG with 12 percent. In 2004, a merger between Sony and BMG was

³ From “Trench Town” and “No Woman No Cry.”

approved by US and EU regulators, reducing the number of majors to four. The top two firms now have a half of the world market.⁴ Vertically integrated, the major labels produce, manufacture, and distribute recordings and license music rights, and are part of entertainment conglomerates that in addition are in the business of broadcast, video, books, and film.

Why is the recorded-music industry so dominated by a few firms? It seems unlikely that any economies of scale in manufacturing are large enough to account for such extreme concentration, so there must be entry barriers on the demand side, in promotion and distribution. An example of a demand-side entry barrier—though it can be only part of the explanation for the industry’s concentration—is a spillover between albums identified by Hendricks and Sorensen (2004): the release of a new album causes a significant increase in sales of the artist’s earlier albums. This spillover makes it hard to bid established artists away from their current recording companies, creating an entry barrier for new recording companies.

In Kingston, by contrast, the music scene still consists of a large number of small, specialized companies. The tasks involved in making a recording continue to be divided among different firms. Deals that in the United States and Europe would be done inside a vertically integrated firm in Jamaica take place across independent firms. Contracts are sometimes merely oral, with contractual assurance resting on the parties’ ongoing business and social interactions (Bourne and Allgrove, 1995).

⁴ Market-share data from IFPI, “IFPI publishes definitive statistics yearbook on global recorded music market,” September 14, 2004, <http://www.ifpi.org/site-content/press/20040914.html>. On the merger: *BBC News*, “Sony-BMG Deal Gets the US Go-Ahead,” July 29, 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/3934987.stm>.

Clustered in central Kingston in the late 1990s were at least 25 recording studios, by one estimate, or 50, by another (Bourne and Allgrove, 1995, p. 158; Kozul-Wright and Stanbury, 1998, p. 17), though exact numbers are hard to come by because of the industry's fluidity and informality. Tuff Gong, owned by Bob Marley's widow Rita Marley, is the best-known studio; others include Dynamics, Sonic Sounds, Mixing Lab, Scorcher Music, and Groove. An estimated 2,000 singers and groups have Kingston as their base (Power and Hallencreutz, 2002). The record producers hire from this almost endless supply of artists.

New musical ideas are copied and diffuse rapidly, just as in the 1950s and 1960s. The fierce competition among the producers, and the sophisticated and demanding Jamaican consumers, ensure that new products very quickly arrive on the market.

Successful as the Jamaican music industry has been, it has fallen short in one respect. Jamaica's fragmented industry has found it hard to sell to the global market. The export earnings of recordings made in Jamaica have been low. Jamaican artists have become international successes only after switching to non-Jamaican record labels. "Recently, the issue of the apparent inability of Jamaican music to secure robust international sales has been the subject of much comment in the media," noted the *Jamaica Gleaner* newspaper in 2000. "What is clear is as long as we do not control the means of promoting and distributing our music internationally we will never be able to maximize the economic potential of our music."⁵

In the early 2000s, electronic commerce was being heralded as offering the chance of a new burst of life for Jamaican music (UNCTAD, 2002). Distribution over

⁵ Clyde McKenzie, "Jamaican Music Lacks Mainstream Support," *Jamaica Gleaner* November 5, 2000, <http://www.jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20001105/ent/ent3.html>

the internet was seen as a way for Jamaica's small music labels to compete in the global marketplace with the giant multinationals. A small company could deal directly with the final customer, in principle, avoiding the need for an expensive distribution network, and perhaps cutting into the entry barriers that have allowed the four major companies to dominate the global market. As yet, however, the promise of substantial online music exports remains unrealized.

It is possible to exaggerate the significance of earnings from recordings, however. Nowadays, many musicians in various genres of popular music earn far more from live concerts than from recordings, the price of concert tickets having grown rapidly since the late 1990s (Connolly and Krueger, 2005). If reggae is following the same trend as popular music generally, concert tours may come to overshadow recordings.

THE GAINS FROM INDUSTRIAL CLUSTERING

The story of Jamaican music contains lessons for other developing countries on how to build an industry of any kind from scratch.

Industrial clusters are a feature of third world business. In China, for example, buttons are made by over 600 firms in the town of Qiaotou in Zhejiang province, accounting for 70 percent of China's button output; low-voltage electrical equipment is manufactured by 1,400 firms in the town of Liushi in Zhejiang province; and furniture is produced for export by 6,000 factories in the town of Lecong in Guangdong province.⁶ In Mexico, automotive-parts firms cluster in the small state of Aguascalientes and furniture makers in Chipilo in the state of Puebla, while shoemakers in two cities, León and Guadalajara, produce 75 percent of the country's shoe output (Woodruff, 1998). In

⁶ Chris Buckley, "China's Furniture Boom Festers in US," *New York Times*, January 29, 2004.

Peru, the city of Trujillo houses 1,000 shoemakers, and the Gamarra district of Lima has 3,000 firms—subcontractors, input suppliers, final producers, and trading firms—making and selling garments (Albaladejo, 2002). In many lines of manufacturing, evidently, firms benefit from being located close to a large number of other firms just like themselves. The industry is more than the sum of its parts, the firms.

Clusters are not unique to developing countries, of course. California's Silicon Valley is an archetypical cluster. But the reason for the cluster's existence is quite different. High-tech clusters exist because for certain stages of the production chain, especially at the innovative end, it is desirable that firms stay small so as to be nimble and flexible. In a developing economy, firms stay small not because smallness is optimal but because they are unable to grow. Firms with less than ten employees employ 35 percent of the industrial workforce in Jamaica, compared with just 4 percent in the United States. Conversely, firms with more than fifty employees employ 49 percent of the workforce in Jamaica and 81 percent in the United States (Tybout, 2000). Small firms are much more plentiful in poor countries than in rich ones, in part because financial-market imperfections prevent the small firms from growing: an underdeveloped financial market tends to exclude entrepreneurs from both bank loans and equity financing.

The inability of firms to grow could mean economies of scale would go unrealized in developing countries. An industrial cluster, however, allows small firms to benefit from at least some forms of economy of scale: those that are external to the firm because, for instance, they arise from cumulative innovation (Meade, 1952). The high concentration in the global music industry suggests the existence of economies of scale.

By virtue of the industrial clustering, Jamaica's music industry has been able to realize scale economies while the firms in it have remained small.

The Jamaican music industry is a very tight cluster. In its early days, the recording studios were concentrated on a single street, Orange Street in central Kingston. "Like Bourbon Street in New Orleans, Beale Street in Memphis, 42nd Street in New York or Music Row in Nashville, Orange Street ... is the prototypical 'Music Street,'" notes Barrow (1998). In the 1960s, many producers set up studios there, "including Bunny Lee at number 101, Sir J.J. Johnson at number 133, and perhaps most celebrated, Prince Buster's legendary Record Shack at number 127. Sonia Pottinger's pressing plant was also in Orange Street, at the bottom; just around the corner was Randy's Studio." Together, the studios were "shaking up Orange Street," according to "Earthquake," a song by Prince Buster. "You see, Orange Street is the music street, and that's the street that sells the beat."

What is the mechanism by which a firm benefits from being part of a cluster? According to a survey of the theory of agglomeration by Duranton and Puga (2004) there are three distinct sources of agglomeration economies: (a) *Sharing*: Being part of a larger industry means firms share the gains from a wider variety of input suppliers and a finer division of labor. (b) *Matching*: Clustering means markets are thick; the large number of buyers and sellers results in efficient matches being realized and limits the holdup problems that arise in a thin market. (c) *Learning*: The firms' proximity to each other helps with the generation, accumulation, and diffusion of knowledge.

Each of these three sources of agglomeration economies is illustrated by the Jamaican music industry. Proximity lowered transaction costs. The thousands of

musicians and dozens of recording studios meant that ideal matches, between a specific musician and a specific record producer, could be realized, and that the musicians and record producers could specialize narrowly.

The wide choice of recording companies and the openness of the system to new companies may have made musicians less susceptible to being exploited than had there been, as now is the case in the global recorded-music industry, only a few large vertically integrated companies. (If musicians fear being exploited by record companies, they may be reluctant to consummate deals, causing mutually beneficial arrangements to be lost.) “If you are the big tree, we are the small axe, sharpened to cut you down,” proclaimed Bob Marley’s 1969 song “Small Axe,” co-written with record producer Lee Perry. The song was a salvo fired at the “big t’ree,” Jamaica’s three then-dominant record producers (White, 1998, pp. 23, 224), and what transpired bore out the song’s threat, as Lee Perry’s Upsetter Records quickly grew into a major player itself, providing a new outlet for musicians.

The main source of gains from the Kingston music cluster, arguably, has been in fostering innovation. Musicians moved freely amongst the recording companies. In the 1960s, the music industry “was genuinely a village, as in spite of the well-publicized competition between producers and session-sponsors, their apparently exclusive, sound-shaping studio bands were unique in name only,” according to Bradley (2000, pp. 50-51). “Among the top two or three dozen musicians—i.e., the ones who were getting the work—everybody played with everybody else on just about everybody’s sessions.” As a result, new musical ideas spread rapidly. “There could be no secrets, because they all had

a hand in how everything was done, making contributions, jointly thrashing out ideas or helping to interpret a colleague's innovation.”

Innovations spread also as former employees started their own companies. Prince Buster, for example, worked for Clement Dodd before leaving to start his own studio, which became one of the most successful of the period and a major rival for Dodd's. Lee Perry also worked for Dodd as a singer, talent scout, and producer before setting up his own studio.

The rapid spread of innovations in the Kingston music cluster, driven by the free movement of personnel, is similar to that observed in Silicon Valley, which traces its success, according to Saxenian (1994), to its mobility and sharing. Silicon Valley developed a culture of open relationships between employees of competing firms, and ideas were freely exchanged. Firms were motivated to invest in innovations, nevertheless, by the rewards from being first to the new idea.

INITIATING INNOVATION

What causes a new musical style like reggae to suddenly emerge and flourish? Given that the new style is the collective, uncoordinated, and largely unforeseen invention of many, what enables the innovation process to get started?

The Kingston music industry is characterized, arguably, by strategic complementarities, which means that any one firm's return from innovating is increasing in the amount of innovation being done by the other firms (Saint-Paul, 2003; Vives, 2005). The innovation process is cumulative; each firm builds on and adds to the stock that is the total of all earlier contributions. As in any system with strategic

complementarities, there can be multiple equilibria. The system may be stuck in a low-innovation equilibrium, where no one innovates because no one else is innovating; or it may reach a high-innovation equilibrium, where each firm is pushed to innovate by the speed of the others' innovations.

An element of serendipity is introduced by the multiplicity of equilibria. The system may stay put, with little or no innovation, or it may take off into rapid cumulative innovation. If the system is not already in the high-innovation equilibrium, no single player, alone, can shift the system into it. A coordinated change of strategy by all or most of the players is needed to move from one equilibrium to another. What was the instigating shift that induced the Jamaican music business to take off into the innovative equilibrium?

Reggae's growth was largely market-driven, as record producers, fiercely competing with each other, responded to the profit opportunities arising from Jamaicans' entertainment demands. But the government, as well, played a small role. In the 1950s, as Jamaica's independence from Britain approached, nationalist feeling had built up, reinforcing the taste for home-grown music. A government-owned radio station, the Jamaican Broadcasting Corporation, was set up in 1959 with the explicit goal of promoting Jamaican arts. Featuring the local music, the radio broadcasts helped expand ska's popularity from downtown Kingston to the whole country (Bradley, 2000, pp. 88-90). At around the same time, a government program was launched to promote Jamaicans' cultural self-awareness, perhaps in an attempt to co-opt the burgeoning black-pride movement for party-political advantage. Traditional Jamaican folklore and music began to be taught in the schools. A national song contest was run (Bradley, 2000, pp.

207-209). These government culture-promotion programs, coming slightly before reggae's arrival, might perhaps have helped shift the Jamaican music industry into the innovative equilibrium by in effect pushing a coordinated change in the players' strategies.

The policy implication on building an innovation-promoting cluster is that, while the primary need is that underlying market conditions be conducive, the government can help break the inertia of a low-innovation equilibrium.

CONCLUSION

With reggae, Jamaica spawned a new musical style that was to become wildly popular worldwide. Reggae originated in the 1960s when Jamaica's existing rich base of indigenous musical styles was fertilized with American ones. Reggae grew in Jamaica because it was tailored to local tastes. Reggae grew worldwide because the Jamaican sound, and the message of the lyrics, turned out to have wide appeal, but also because its performers were responsive to international tastes.

Kingston is a creative city because its dense network of musicians, agents, songwriters, and recording studios has generated both intense competition and productively cooperative interactions. The tight clustering of a large number of studios around Orange Street promoted a fine division of labor and effective matching between musicians and producers. Most important, the clustering allowed musical innovations to spread rapidly among the performers and the recording studios. The innovations that gave rise to reggae generated a global market for Jamaica's music.

The success of the Kingston music-industry cluster holds lessons for developing countries in general, where small firms are hindered from growing because financial markets are underdeveloped. Industrial clusters allow economies of scale to be realized even when firms remain small.

While musical styles and the technology of music distribution have changed since the days of Bob Marley, the essence of the music remains. In 2004, dancehall star Sean Paul said, “Music is the voice of the Jamaican people. We think about it hour to hour, year to year. The speed of it changes, the voice changes. But it always depends on what is happening in our society.”⁷

⁷ Steve Garbarino, “The Other Side of Paradise,” *New York Times Magazine*, May 30, 2004

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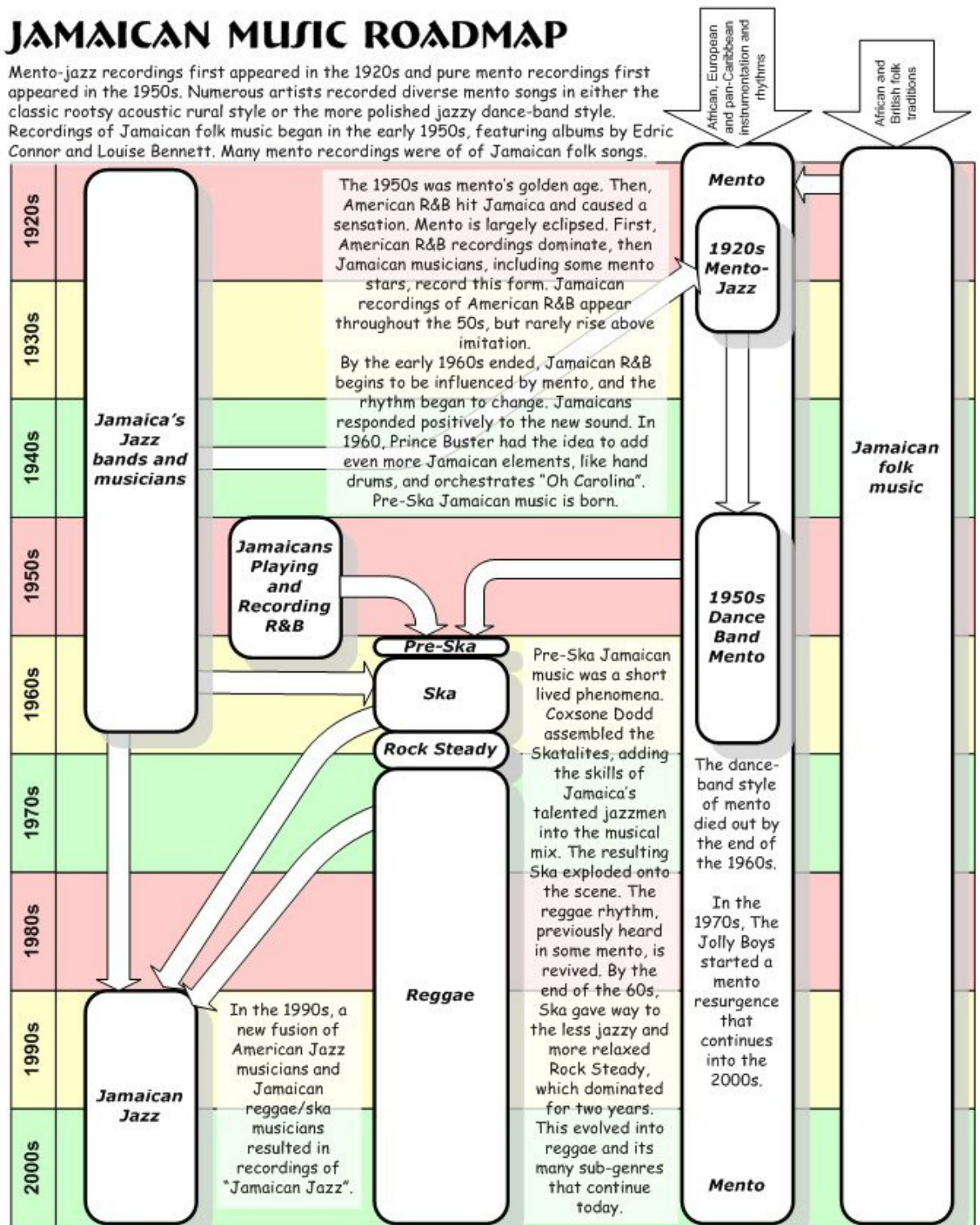
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Figure 1

JAMAICAN MUSIC ROADMAP

Mento-jazz recordings first appeared in the 1920s and pure mento recordings first appeared in the 1950s. Numerous artists recorded diverse mento songs in either the classic rootsy acoustic rural style or the more polished jazzy dance-band style. Recordings of Jamaican folk music began in the early 1950s, featuring albums by Edric Connor and Louise Bennett. Many mento recordings were of Jamaican folk songs.



Source: Compiled by Michael Garnice for his web site mentomusic.com (used with permission). <http://www.mentomusic.com/roadmap.htm>.