JAH CUBAN AND ITS MIAMI AUDIENCE:
A CASE STUDY OF MUSIC AS A CULTURAL BRIDGE

By

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To my mother, my father and my sisters; with love and appreciation
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The purpose of this study is to understand how a group of five white Cuban-Americans disc jockeys, known as Jah Cuban, have bridged the gap between the Jamaican-American and the Cuban-American community in South Florida using a form of Jamaican popular music known as dancehall. There has been little research in Cuban-American and Jamaican-American relationships in South Florida. For the most part, the two cultures live separately. I was interested in finding out why these Cuban-Americans played Jamaican music and what it meant to the two communities in South Florida.

Generally defined as “interactions among underrepresented and dominant group members,” Co-Cultural Theory provides a useful perspective for understanding the interactions between Cuban-American disc jockeys playing dancehall music and the Jamaican-American community. Using this perspective, I looked at the songs that Jah Cuban played and escorted them to two events where they played. I also interviewed fans of Jah Cuban and promoters they work with. I observed that the songs that Jah Cuban plays often generate nostalgia for their fans, as well as uplifting and empowering them. The songs Jah Cuban plays also highlight the similarities between the Jamaican-American and Cuban-American immigrant struggle to gain acceptance and be seen as equals by the dominant white sector in the United States. Through the
music of dancehall, Jah-Cuban and its audience find a way to express their common struggle against the cultural, social, economic, and political forces that oppress them in the Miami metropolitan area.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Description of South Florida

South Florida consists of Palm Beach, Broward and Miami-Dade counties, and, at times, includes Monroe County commonly referred to as the Keys. Miami is in Miami-Dade County and Ft. Lauderdale is in Broward County. In this thesis, I looked at mainly Broward and Miami-Dade counties where the disc jockeys for Jah Cuban live and primarily work. Being from Jamaica and living in South Florida, I was able to observe Jah Cuban closely in a setting that was familiar to me.

Unlike Texas and California, which have regions with diverse populations, the South Florida region is unique in that the majority of the Hispanic populations in the region are primarily of Cuban descent. According to the Demographic Profile of Miami-Dade County, Florida, 1960 - 2000 Planning Research section for the Department of Planning and Zoning, the total Caribbean immigrant population (those who were born in the Caribbean) accounted for 30 percent of the population of Miami-Dade County. The Cuban population consists of 525,841 inhabitants (which made up 76 percent of the total Caribbean population). Jamaican-Americans accounted for 34,450 people (which is 5 percent of the total Caribbean population).

According to the same profile, between the 1960s and 1980s, over 500,000 Cubans migrated to Miami, making them the largest Hispanic population there. In Broward County, however, the majority of the population is of West Indian\(^1\) descent, with Jamaicans and Haitians at the forefront. According to the census, West Indians account for 10 percent of the population, with over 150,000 individuals. The Cuban population consists of over 50,000 people in Broward County.

\(^1\) West Indian refers to individuals of African heritage from the Caribbean. The term is usually used by the English-speaking Caribbean islands.
County. The number of West Indians more than doubled from 1990 to 2000. This describes the influence of the Cuban-American and West Indian immigrants to Florida. It is interesting to also note that the neighboring counties have completely different demographics, with Miami-Dade County having a large Hispanic population, while Broward County has a large Afro-Caribbean population.

Cuban-Americans and Jamaican-Americans share a similar history. Both their islands were originally colonized by the Spaniards, although England obtained control of Jamaica in 1655. Cuba and Jamaica are neighbors with only 93 miles separating the tips of each island. Both produced sugar using African slaves (Rogozinski, 1999, 50-54). The nationalized musical culture of both islands was born primarily out of the mixing of African culture with that of European colonizers and the native Tainos² culture. Producers of colonial blending, mento music from Jamaica is similar to that of son from Cuba as well as calypso from Trinidad and Tobago (Manuel, 2006, 16). Racial identity may be defined differently due to the history of the Caribbean. Manuel (2006) states, “the West Indies black people may historically have internalized colonial prejudices, but because they generally constitute demographics majorities, unlike many North American blacks, they are less likely to regard themselves as members of an alienated and marginalized minority,” (Manuel, 2006, 274). In terms of the Spanish Caribbean, Manuel notes that there is a difference when looking at the English Caribbean and North America in terms of race. He states, “North American and English racial ideology, which traditionally recognizes only black or white, is relatively unusual in the Spanish and French Caribbean, especially since so many people are of mixed ancestry” (Manuel, 2006, 274).

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² Tainos are the now-extinct native Indians of the Caribbean region.
Roots of Music in Jamaica, Cuba, and Miami

Jamaican popular music has been a voice of resistance with the emergence of ska in the 1960s and reggae in the 1970s. Reggae music is tied to the Rastafarian religious movement in Jamaica. According to Barrow and Dalton (2004, 144), Rastafarianism, which they identify as a cult, came into being in the 1930s in Jamaica. The birth of the religion coincides with the crowning of Emperor Haile Selassie I. Barrow and Dalton (2004) state that all Rastafarians share the belief that “Africa is the black race’s spiritual home,” to which they are destined to return one day; the Western world is the current day version of “Babylon” in reference to the biblical story of the Israelites enslavement; and Haile Selassie I is a direct descendant of the biblical King David, (Barrow and Dalton, 2004). But Jamaican music has evolved over the years into what is termed “Dancehall.” This music is often resisted by the American “elites,” as well as the Cuban population who have “made Miami,” as it speaks primarily of the black struggle and the issues faced by the “have-nots” at the hands of these two groups (Stepick, 2003).

Cuban-American’s musical tradition has roots in Miami and New York, where the majority of the Cuban population resides. According to Levine and Asis (2000), before the 1970s, Cuban music in Miami consisted of music of the late 1950s by artists who remained in Cuba. The music was a form of “resistance music” that consisted of nostalgic music about the island (Levine and Asis, 2000). Singers such as Willy Chirino and the Windjammers (1974) and Gloria Estefan and the Miami Sound Machine (1977) gained popularity in Miami and placed Cuban singers on the map (Levine and Asis, 2000). The message in the music changed from one of nostalgia to a celebration of being Cuban in America. Miami radio stations, such as Super Q (WQBA), played the local Cuban music that appealed to a younger Cuban-American demographic (Levine and Asis, 2000). In contrast, AM radio stations played traditional Cuban music.
Holger Henke, in his 2001 book, *The West Indian Americans*, addresses Jamaican immigrants and their children in the United States. Henke states that by far one of the greatest contributions made by West Indians is that of their musical culture. He concludes that Bob Marley has made a significant impact on American society, as even Universal Studios in Florida has a bar named after the Jamaican musician (Henke 2001).

The impact of Jamaican music on American culture cannot go unnoticed. South Florida is home to several Jamaican music festivals, such as the Bob Marley Festival, the Miami Caribbean Carnival, the International Caribbean Music Festival, the Best of the Best Music Festival, and the Jamaican Jerk Festival. Jamaican-Americans are always able to find an event where their music will be heard. South Florida has been infiltrated by other immigrants from the English-speaking Caribbean islands including Trinidad and Tobago, Grenada, Barbados, Guyana, and St. Vincent; the French-Creole-speaking country of Haiti; other Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America such as Columbia, Venezuela, Argentina, and the Dominican Republic, and the Dutch-speaking country of Surinam. In addition, there is a sizable population of Puerto Ricans.

According to Adriana Mendez’s (1994) book, *Cubans In America*, the first wave of Cuban immigrants arrived in Miami in the 1960s. They consisted of a white elite class of successful business owners (1994, 37). By the 1980s however, Cuban immigrants arrived by means of the Mariel exodus which consisted of the working class, prisoners and the mentally ill among others (Mendez, 1994, 47). Many of the immigrants who came to the United States on the Mariel were of African descent (Mendez, 1994, 48). The parents of the Jah Cuban disc jockeys in addition to some of the disc jockeys themselves were part of the Mariel immigration to the United States. Mendez states that the Mariel refugees faced racial and political discrimination. She states that the media also painted negative portrayals of the Mariel refugees as criminals and homosexuals.
With the increase in the Cuban population, the political scene in Miami has also changed. The ascent of Cuban Hispanics to economic as well as political power led to a dynamic in Miami that makes it different from other cities in the United States. In the context of the United States’ disdain for Communism, the Cuban “success story” is seen as a victory of free Capitalism over Communism. The American political system lauds the success of Cuban immigrants in Miami (Croucher, 1997), even though the rest of the United States often still lumps them together as part of the broader Hispanic population. Jah Cuban disc jockeys, being Cuban, fall under the ethnic umbrella of Hispanic, although the Cuban/Cuban-American experience is different from other Hispanics from other countries such as Mexico, and Columbia, as well as Puerto Rico, who are American citizens. In the same instance, Jamaican-Americans are under the ethnic umbrella of African-Americans, although the Jamaican/Jamaican-American experience is different from other Afro-cultures, such as African immigrants, Afro-Cuban-Americans, and other Afro-immigrants from the other islands in the Caribbean.

According to Stepick (1998), Cuban immigrants arriving in Miami were welcomed and supported by politically powerful Cuban-Americans already settled there. Race also played a factor, as the Cuban immigrants were predominantly white, while, like Jamaican immigrants, the Haitian immigrants were black\(^3\) (Stepick, 1998). The Cuban-American community in South Florida shows public disdain for the individuals of African descent. According to Mendez (1994), “since many Marielitos were black, they faced racial discrimination, as well as political prejudices of their fellow Cuban-Americans (1994, 48). The Jah Cuban disc jockeys, a popular Miami “sound system\(^4\)” however, identify with Jamaican immigrants who are of African

\(^3\) Black refers to all people of African descent and who identify themselves as such. This includes African-Americans, Jamaican-Americans, Haitian-Americans, other Caribbean-Americans and Nigerian-Americans.

\(^4\) A sound system consists of a group of disc
descent. This is unusual since the white in appearance and culturally Hispanic Jah Cuban disc jockeys could easily identify with the dominant group in Miami. However, the Jah Cuban disc jockeys have instead chosen to identify with the struggles of black immigrants and African-Americans in the United States. Authors use the words African-American and black interchangeably. In this paper, I will use the word black to refer to all people of African descent and who identify themselves as such. Race may be defined based on ancestry, phenotype or cultural identity; in this paper, I will deal with race based on cultural identity.

**Purpose of the Study**

Given this scenario, how is it that dancehall music has been adopted and adapted by an all white Cuban-American group? My goal is to determine how the Jah Cuban Sound System was able to represent the Jamaican cultural world of South Florida and how they have used this music to serve as a bridge between Cuban-Americans and Jamaican-Americans. What is it about dancehall that attracted Jah Cuban to the music? What made them decide to develop a career based in dancehall? What made Jah Cuban become part of this Jamaican culture? Why are Jamaican-Americans accepting of these white Cuban-Americans? What does this relationship mean to South Florida and society as a whole? Are Jah Cuban ambassadors for cultural change in South Florida?

In this thesis, I examine how Jah Cuban has used dancehall music to bridge the cultural divide between Jamaican-Americans and Cuban-Americans in South Florida. I research the emergence of Jah Cuban looking at critical events that lead to its formation. I also consider the social, economic, and political structures in Miami at the time of the group’s formation. I interview each member of Jah Cuban to gain knowledge of their political, social, economic and

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5 African-Americans refers to individuals who are descendants of slaves brought to the United States. African-Americans can also be referred to as Black-Americans or people of color.
cultural perspectives, in addition to their individual perspectives, and to gain an understanding of the driving forces behind the creation of Jah Cuban. I also interview fans of Jah Cuban and event promoters to gain an understanding of their perception of the music, as well as the disc jockeys. Finally, I explain Jah Cuban’s emergence in the context of the Miami social, political, and cultural environment.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Jamaican and Cuban Immigrants in the United States

Both Cuban and Jamaican immigrants to the United States brought their cuisine, music, cultural ideals, and dreams, all of which have enabled them to maintain their cultural identity while living in this country. In such areas as New York and South Florida, Jamaican and Cuban immigrants’ contribution to the distinct flavor of the area has made them the topic of many scholars’ research.

In her 2005 book, In a New Land: A Comparative View of Immigration, Nancy Foner looks at the Caribbean\textsuperscript{6} immigrant population in New York. She states that, at that time, over 524,000, (>25%) of New York’s black population are “Afro-Caribbean\textsuperscript{7}” (Foner, 2005). She also states that these West Indian immigrants are seen as an ethnic group within America’s black population and marginal status resistance from the white community (Foner, 2005). As a result, West Indian immigrants are susceptible to housing and job discrimination in the New York area (Foner, 2005). In Part II of her book, Foner compares Caribbean immigrants in New York and London. She states that West Indian immigrants have created new images of themselves as West Indians and blacks in their new lands (Foner, 2005).

In terms of nationality, when looking at West Indian immigrants in New York and London, Jamaicans are the largest population (Foner, 2005). She also states that in the West Indies the definition of “blackness” is different from that in the United States and Britain. Unlike in the United States and Britain, where the term black is tied to the one drop rule, in the West Indies,

\textsuperscript{6} The terms Caribbean and West Indian can be used interchangeably for the purpose of this paper. Caribbean or West Indian refers to individuals who are from the islands touched by the Caribbean Sea but also includes The Bahamas, Turks and Caicos, and Bermuda. The emphasis is placed on cultural similarities. The Caribbean or West Indies were colonized by the British, the French, the Spanish, and the Dutch.

\textsuperscript{7} Afro-Caribbean refers to immigrants who are of African descent from the Caribbean region.
the definition of “black” takes on not just skin color or ancestry, but other phenotypes, such as hair texture, facial features, and socio-economic status. This plays into the class construct in Jamaica and other West Indian countries. Foner compares life in New York and London and states the differences of living in these two cities. She states that Jamaicans and/or West Indians in London suffer the same negative stereotypes as African-Americans in the United States. In New York, however, West Indians set themselves apart from poor segments of the African-Americans community (Foner, 2005).

Foner also looks at the relations between African-Americans and Cuban-Americans in the Miami area. She states that African-Americans in Miami now find themselves in a city dominated by Latinos\(^8\). Latinos in Miami give preferential treatment to other Hispanics and often disregard the African-American community. The Hispanic leaders have little regard for the historical significance of the Civil Rights Movement or the suffering that African-Americans went through (Foner, 2005). African-Americans and Cuban-Americans differ in terms of class, ideology, political outlook, and language, as well as space (Foner, 2005). She refers to Miami as a city that has undergone “Latinization” (Foner 2005, 203).

Conflicts between Jamaican immigrants and African-Americans [individuals who are of African descent but born in the United States] in South Florida have arisen from time to time, as Jamaican immigrants see themselves as separate and apart from their African-American counterparts. In his 2000 dissertation, “Clash of Identities in South Florida: An Examination of the Complexity of Racial and National Identity and Their Impact on Ethnic Solidarity between Black Americans and Jamaicans,” Bennie Osborne examines the racial and national identity of

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\(^8\) The term Latinos refer to individuals who are from Latin America and the Latin-based Caribbean. Latin America includes Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and Central and South America. The emphasis is placed on language and culture and not race. Latin American countries were colonized by the Spanish and the Portuguese.
African-Americans and Jamaican-Americans. He states that Jamaican-Americans often do not identify themselves by color, but rather by nationality, while their African-American counterparts identify themselves based on color. This identity divide may cause friction between the two cultures.

According to Osborne, African-Americans tend to see race as something that cannot be escaped, while Jamaican-Americans are able to escape their “blackness” by attaining financial power (Osborne, 2000). He states that national or cultural identity may play a key part in the success of black immigrants. Jamaican-Americans identify themselves as such, while African-Americans identify themselves as black. Osborne states that working-class Jamaican-Americans in the United States see African-Americans in the abstract as lazy or worthless and want to distance themselves from them. Middle class Jamaican-Americans, however, do not place African-Americans in this category based on their interactions with them in the work environment (Osborne, 2000).

In her 1997 book, Imagining Miami: Ethnic Politics in a Postmodern World, Sheila Croucher looks at ethnic relations in Miami, namely the relationship between African-Americans and Cubans or Cuban-Americans. (Jamaican-Americans and other Caribbean nationalities may often get conflated with African-American due to race and not ethnicity). She states that the conflict between Miami’s black population (which consists primarily of Haitians, Jamaicans, and other Afro-Caribbean immigrants) and Hispanic populations dates back a number of years. From as early as the 1920s, the increase in Miami’s black population was due to the immigration of blacks from the West Indies, mainly The Bahamas. Croucher states that racial tension and Hurricane Andrew in 1992 changed the demographics of Miami by shifting much of its white non-Hispanic population north, but it did not “blow over” the racial tension in the county by any
means. Post-Andrew, African-Americans complained about unfair treatment in terms of rebuilding funds.

According to Croucher (1997), Haitian immigrants entered Miami-Dade County in larger numbers beginning in 1963 which added to the number of “blacks” in the county. According to Croucher further racial tension between Miami’s Cuban and black populations was taken to new heights when elected Cuban-American officials “snubbed” Nelson Mandela on his visit to Miami. The Cuban population did not like Mandela’s “friendly” relations with Fidel Castro (53-54). Croucher concludes that ethnicity or nationality and not just race plays an important role in one’s identity, and states that Miami continuously reinvents itself socially, culturally, and economically.

In Grenier and Stepick’s 1992 book, Miami Now! Immigration, Ethnicity and Social Change, the authors discuss the topics of ethnicity and social change in terms of the creation of contemporary Miami. In 1896, when Miami incorporated, of the 368 persons who participated in the incorporation process, 162 of were black. At the beginning of the century, the majority of Miami’s black population comprised of Bahamian immigrants, who outnumbered Miami’s African-Americans from North Florida and Georgia. Miami was a segregated city, Miami’s black population at the time had very marginal say politically or economically. Cubans began to arrive after the ascent of Fidel Castro in 1959. The influx increased after the failed Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961 because, at that time, Miami was the preferred destination for fleeing Cuban immigrants who, because Cuba was declared a Communist state, were given special immigration status. At the same time, the white population had decreased in the city. Haitians constituted the largest Afro–Caribbean immigrant population in the Miami area, although a significant number of Bahamian and Jamaican immigrants also entered Miami at this time. During the Civil Rights
Movement of the 1960s, the Cuban population in Miami nonetheless became the focus of concern rather than Miami’s black population. Cubans, Haitians, and Jamaicans all wanted to be recognized by their country of origin rather than by the term “Latin or Hispanic” or “African-American” (pp. 7-8). Some of the Cubans who entered Miami were middle class, resembling much of America’s white population. With a growing Cuban and Latin American population, Miami became the most important United States city in terms of economic and cultural ties with Latin America thereby enabling the Spanish-speaking population to gain economic status. Miami’s Haitian population had to face several obstacles, including even being allowed in the country despite coming from a country with a history of dictatorships, violence, and corruption. Instead of African-Americans reaping the benefits of their toil as the builders of the city, the white Cuban immigrant population minority capitalized on the Civil Rights Movement to the disadvantage of Miami’s “Afro” population (p. 15).

According to Stepick (2003), the Cuban immigrant population’s ideal is to return to Cuba once Fidel Castro, Cuba’s long-standing dictator, dies. With this logic, Cuban-Americans place great emphasis on the maintenance of a distinct Cuban culture mixed with American education and ideals and therefore resist changes to their musical traditions and culture. In contrast, the Jamaican-Americans living in South Florida have been able to maintain a transient Diaspora lifestyle, as Jamaica is very close to the South Florida region. Some Jamaican-Americans have an interest in returning to the island, others enjoy the hour-long flight to and from the island. Cuban-Americans however, have to deal with strict travel restrictions put in place by the United States government. It is because of this reason, I believe, that the Jamaican culture in the United States is able to remain current with the activities on the island.
Immigrant Music and the Politics of Resistance

Hall (1996) highlights the fact that “resistance to subordination is a primary function of localized popular culture; but that ‘resistance’ often is undermined by complicity with the countervailing economic imperatives of the global market” (as quoted in Cooper, 2004, 252). In other words, the music, as a cultural import of oppressed immigrant groups, may often deliberately offend or question the very same system that has internationalized it. Music is able to be consumed not only by the culture that created it, but by other oppressed and immigrant cultures in the United States as well because those cultures can identify with the message of resistance in the music.

The relationship between Jah Cuban, a group of disc jockeys in Miami, and the Jamaican community can be understood in the context of Co-Cultural Theory. Although Jah Cuban consists of young white Cuban-Americans in their twenties who are able to enjoy being part of the majority in Miami, they still may identify with Jamaican-Americans as co-immigrants to the United States. Although the Jah Cuban disc jockeys belong to the cultural majority in Miami, they believe they are not seen as equal to whites in America, which allows them to sympathize with Jamaican-Americans.

In looking at Jah Cuban as a cultural bridge, Co-Cultural Theory can be used to further explain this phenomenon. Put forward by Mark P. Orbe (as quoted in Gudykunst, 2005), Co-Cultural Theory is derived from Orbe’s study of “the lived experiences of a variety of ‘non-dominant’ or co-cultural groups, which include people of color, women, persons with disabilities, gays/lesbians/bisexuals, and those from a lower socio-economic background” (as quoted in Gudykunst, 2005, p. 174).

According to Orbe (as quoted in Gudykunst, 2005), Co-Cultural Theory is generally defined as “interactions among underrepresented and dominant group members” (p. 173). The
notion is that these cultural groups come together among cultures that are “non-dominant,” forming a cultural bridge. The five main assumptions of Co-Cultural Theory are:

1. Dominant group members have varying levels of privilege. They have positions of power, and use this power to create and maintain communication systems that reflect, promote, and reinforce their field of experience.

2. Co-cultural group members’ experiences vary but they share similar positions in society, which render them underrepresented and marginalized within dominant structures in that society.

3. A hierarchy exists that gives privilege to particular groups in society. In the United States, these groups include heterosexuals, men, the middle and upper classes, the able-bodied, and European Americans.

4. Dominant communication structures impede the progress of persons whose lived experiences, directly or indirectly, are not reflected in the public communicative systems.

5. Co-cultural group members strategically adopt certain communication behaviors to negotiate oppressive dominant structures (p. 174).

In Frantz Fanon’s 1967 book, Black Skin White Masks, Fanon states that those whites who sympathize with blacks are often looked down upon (Fanon, 1967). In this study, the members of Jah Cuban come from working class Cuban families. Jamaican immigrants, being of African origin, are categorized as African-Americans. Both Cubans and Jamaican-Americans are less advantaged when compared to the status of whites in Florida. Many immigrants come to South Florida to work and belong to the working class. The members of Jah Cuban experience alienation based on their socio-economic level.

This alienation can be connected with the struggle of black people for equality and recognition for centuries. Fanon (1967) states that this alienation is due to the “myth of the Negro” (p.110). That is, the assumption by whites that the Negro is inferior and therefore has to prove himself. Jamaican music is the unifying factor bringing these two groups together. The selection of songs by the Jah Cuban disc jockeys offers a message to the Jamaican Diaspora in South Florida who are in the struggle to prove themselves equal to whites.
Most of the song lyrics Jah Cuban play fall under the theme of social commentary and speaking truth to the dominant culture. These songs reiterate the assumption of co-cultural group members strategically adopting communication behaviors to negotiate oppressive dominant structures. Both Jamaican and Cuban immigrants can identify with the theme of social commentary and speaking truth to the dominant culture. The social commentary in Jah Cuban’s music speaks out against the dominant white group that holds power and groups that have privileges over the underrepresented groups who do not have cultural or political representation.

Similar to the themes found in Jamaican music, Haitians also have music that deals with social commentary. In his 1992 book, *Music and Black Ethnicity: The Caribbean and South America*, Gerard H. Behague gathers a collection of articles written on various subjects that have to do with music and black ethnicity. In the chapter, “‘Se Kreyol Nou Ye/ We’re Creole’: Musical Discourse on Haitian Identities,” the author Gage Averill looks at the milestones occurring in Haiti during political and social unrest in the country. The messages in the songs change with the passing of the time, from songs that deal with criticizing the government to songs that have “Afro-centric” themes (pp. 178-179). Similarly to Haitian music, Jamaican dancehall music includes social commentary on issues taking place in the island as a dominant theme in its songs, as stated by Cooper (2004). These forms of music are popular among the Haitian Diaspora as is Jamaican dancehall music in the Jamaican Diaspora. This theme in the music is a unifying force, as most immigrants in the United States are able to identify with music that addresses their concerns, as Co-Cultural Theory predicts.

In the book, *Sound Clash: Jamaican Dancehall Culture at Large*, Cooper (2004) examines the way reggae and dancehall music have crossed bridges within the African Diaspora. Cooper, a native of Jamaica, examines dancehall and its lyrical content. An English literature professor at
the University of the West Indies, Cooper goes into great detail in terms of the lyrical content of
the songs. She identifies five major themes in Dancehall music. These themes include:

1. Songs celebrating Dee Jaying,
2. Songs of social commentary on various issues from hunger to violence,
3. Dance songs,
4. Songs that speak to slackness/culture opposition, and
5. Songs focused on sexual/gender relations (p.3).

Cooper states in her book that Bob Marley, who is seen as an idol in the Jamaican music
industry, wrote and sang lyrics that were criticizing the social, political and economical
structures in Jamaica. Marley called for peace and an end to all the injustice taking place in the
world.

In reviewing the literature on Jamaican-American, Cuban-American, and Caribbean
immigrants in the United States, books have been written on the music and immigrant
“experience” of Jamaican and Cuban immigrants but little emphasis has been placed on the
interactions between Cuban-Americans and Jamaican-Americans. In an area like South Florida,
the interaction between these two groups is undeniable, as Miami and Broward counties have
transient residents who may work in a county not their own. Based on books written by Stepick
in Pride against Prejudice: Haitians in the United States (1998) and This Land is Our Land:
Immigrants and Power in Miami (2003); Foner (2005) in In a New Land: A Comparative View
on Immigration; and, Henke (2001) in The West Indian Americans, it is evident that most
immigrants from the Caribbean have similar reasons for coming to the United States. These
reasons can be summed up as political and economic hardships in their native countries.
Culturally, however, these immigrants are distinct and try to recreate their unique cultures in the
United States. With the climatic and geographic closeness of the Caribbean to South Florida, it
has been easy to maintain ties and one’s culture while living in a foreign land.
Although Cuban-Americans have enjoyed success in Miami especially, they are still seen as immigrants outside the “dominant” heterosexuals, men, middle and upper classes, the able-bodied European Americans (Orbe as quoted in Gudykunst, 2005). In addition to cultural differences, there are also linguistic differences, as Cuban-Americans continue to speak Spanish and Jamaican-Americans speak their Jamaican dialect, which is hard for Americans to comprehend. The influx of immigrants into the more populous states in the United States such as New York, Texas, California, and Florida, has changed the racial and ethnic make-up of these areas. Customs and languages that are different from what the dominant group deems, “normal or American,” are then looked down upon. In addition, these current immigrants may be of the working class looking for economic opportunity in the United States. This sheds some light onto why the Jah Cuban disc jockeys may be intrigued by the messages of Jamaican music and can therefore identify with Jamaican-American immigrants in South Florida. The Jah Cuban disc jockeys and their families belong to the working class in South Florida.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

Following the tenets of Co-Cultural Theory, this study asked the following research questions:

1. What motivates Jah Cubans members to play dancehall?
2. How does Jah Cuban use dancehall music to bridge the cultural divide between Jamaican-Americans and Cuban-Americans in South Florida?
3. How do audiences in South Florida consume dancehall?
4. What do audiences in South Florida get from their consumption of dancehall?
5. What is the future for dancehall?

To answer these research questions, I employed case study, field observation, lyrical analysis, and in-depth interviews. I interviewed all the disc jockeys from Jah Cuban. During the course of several months I interviewed and accompanied Jah Cuban to bookings at two different venues. I consulted Jamaican and South Florida newspapers and magazines, as well as interviewing patrons and event promoters of these bookings in South Florida.

As defined by Wimmer and Dominick (2000) in Mass Media Research: An Introduction (2000) case study is ideal in this situation. Wimmer and Dominick define a case study as “using as many data sources as possible to systematically investigate individuals, groups, organizations, or events” (Wimmer and Dominick 2000, 124). Case studies are conducted in an attempt to find new relationships as opposed to examining “verified existing hypotheses” (Wimmer and Dominick 2000, 125).

A case study is conducted “when a researcher needs to understand or explain a phenomenon” (Wimmer and Dominick 2000, 124). It allows the researcher to go into great detail when describing a phenomenon. Case studies are useful in terms of describing and explaining the
data. Another advantage to the case study is that, when used with theory, it is able to explain why something has occurred. They also are advantageous when seeking ideas for further research. According to Wimmer and Dominick, “a case study is able to reveal all the possible reasons behind a phenomenon,” (p. 125). The case study method is also advantageous in that it allows the researcher to deal with a wide variety of evidence. The more data sources looked at in a case, the more likely that the findings will be valid.

There are three main disadvantages of case studies. The first deals with the lack of scientific methodology. It is easy to conduct a case study with little emphasis on specifics. Another disadvantage is that these studies are often time consuming, producing an extensive amount of data that may be difficult to analyze. Case studies are often difficult to generalize, as the researcher is trying to formulate statements about the frequency of the phenomenon within a specific population. At times, other methods including in-depth interviews and content analysis may be useful (Wimmer and Dominick 2000). Wimmer and Dominick state that there are five distinct stages of a case study. These stages are: design, pilot study, data collection, data analysis, and report writing (p. 125). In terms of design, the researcher needs to know what to ask and what to research.

Wimmer and Dominick (2000) state four essential characteristics of a case study. These are: descriptive, inductive, particularistic, and heuristic. The descriptive characteristic is the end product of the research, as it is a detailed description of the topic under investigation. Inductive characteristics refer to the generalizations and principles that emerge from examining the data. A case study is an ideal method to determine whether or not Jah Cuban serves as a cultural bridge between Jamaican-Americans and Cuban-Americans in South Florida. Case studies include interviews, observations and descriptions, which are helpful when researching Jah Cuban.
Particularistic characteristics indicate that the focus of the study is on a particular event, situation, program, or phenomenon. Jah Cuban can be described as a phenomenon, as it is the first Cuban sound system that plays Jamaican music in South Florida. Researching the interactions and relationships between Cuban-Americans and Jamaican-Americans in South Florida will satisfy the heuristic characteristic of the case study method by helping people to understand what is being studied. In this study, I will be looking at Jah Cuban and how it is experienced in Miami. This research is an empirical inquiry using multiple sources to observe a contemporary phenomenon in a real life context. When conducting field observations, Wimmer and Dominick (2000) state there are five stages to take into consideration:

1. **Choosing the research site.** It is important to choose a site where the researched behavior or phenomenon occurs frequently to make the observation worthwhile (p. 114).

2. **Gaining access.** Dominick and Wimmer state that once the site is chosen, establishing contact is the next step. There is the difficulty of being allowed access to the subjects in the natural settings or how public the natural setting is referenced from Williamson, Karp, and Dalphin (1977). To avoid this situation it is ideal to conduct the research in a setting open to the public, which allows subjects to be open with their behavior. Once contact is made, the researcher needs to build rapport with the subjects (Dominick and Wimmer, 2000, 114-115).

3. **Sampling.** When collecting a sample, the issue of the size of the sample is important when generalizing behavior. There are several strategies discussed by Dominick and Wimmer, but, in the case of this thesis, I will employ snowball sampling, in which a participant refers the researcher to a subject who is able to provide information (Wimmer and Dominick, 2000, 115-116). The Jah Cuban disc jockeys referred fans and promoters of the sound system for me to interview. In addition, I attended their events.

4. **Collecting data.** The next step is to collect data. Dominick and Wimmer (2000) suggest observing and asking questions first then writing notes after to avoid attracting attention to the data collection. Field notes that reflect what was said, done, felt, and interpreted by the researcher are vital to a successful study (p. 116 - 118). Exiting – This is the final process of field observation where the researcher departs from the group being studied. It is important to note how exiting the group or individuals being studied could affect the group or individuals physically, psychologically, and emotionally. The researcher should do everything in his or her power to ensure that exiting causes the least stress for the involved parties (p. 118).
5. Analyzing data. After collecting the data, the next step is to then analyze what was collected which “consists of filing the information and analyzing its content.” The main purpose of analyzing the data is to gain “a general understanding of the phenomenon under study” (p. 118).

The form of field observation being used in this thesis is that of the intensive interviews. There are two types of interviews, according to Dominick and Wimmer (2000), the structured interviews where questions are asked in a sequence providing little room for the interviewer to include alternative questions; and unstructured interviews where broader questions are asked, leaving room for the interviewer to ask further questions in order to obtain the information. Unstructured interviews allow for a collection of more in-depth information, while structured interviews are easier to analyze (p. 181). Steps include: selecting a sample, constructing the questionnaire, collecting the data, making the necessary callbacks, verifying the results, and tabulating the data (p. 182). Structured interviews were used when interviewing Jah Cuban disc jockeys, their fans and event promoters.

There are advantages and disadvantages to conducting this form of research. Advantages include: ease to conduct more in-depth questioning, more flexibility when obtaining information, and developing a rapport with the interviewees. Disadvantages include: time, and interviewer bias (pp. 182 – 183).

In studying Jah Cuban, it is also important to analyze the music they play. The 1995 book, *Interpreting Popular Music*, by David Brackett has several essays that deal with popular music and its performance. Brackett’s essay, “James Brown’s ‘Superbad’ and the Double-Voiced Utterance,” looks at African-American music and its performance. Brackett states that often African slaves would create “music as something presented in an orderly fashion that represents something else” (p. 110). Often, the performances of the slaves for their masters was interpreted as “playful mockery by white folk, but were often directed towards them” (p. 113). Brackett also
states that in the American south, before the Civil Rights Movement, the economy relied heavily on non-white populations, such as African-Americans, East Indians, and Egyptians. “The resistance of African-Americans therefore occurred in a space in which it functioned as part of a larger apparatus and remained invisible for the most part (except for actual physical revolts) to European observers” (pp. 114-115). By using the criteria put forward by Brackett, I am able to look at the songs that the Jah Cuban Sound System play and the lyrical content of those songs as Brackett did when looking at “Superbad.” Brackett looked at the music in terms of the use and role of language and the way lyrics were sung (pp. 123-127). Brackett stated that the use and role of language in “Superbad” emphasizes the difference between “African-American” and “Euro-American” cultures, especially in rhetorical styles and performances. Brackett refers to black English and Standard English in terms of delivery of the words (p. 125). The rhyme scheme of the words can also be analyzed when looking at the words of the songs, just as a poem can be analyzed in several different formats.

Performance is another criterion to look at when doing an analysis. How the song was performed gives additional meeting to the content of the lyrics. The words of the songs can evoke specific emotions in its audience depending on what is going on at the time. In “Superbad,” James Brown’s songs reflected what was going on with the Civil Rights movement (Middleton, 2000, 128). Another way to look at the performance of the music is to look at the development of musical forms that followed. James Brown’s musical style gave way to other musical forms, such as Funk (p. 136).

By using these categories, I looked at the lyrical content of the songs that the Jah Cuban disc jockeys played at the events I attended and tried to make links similar to Brackett with James Brown’s “Superbad.” I believe that Brackett’s analysis of Brown’s lyrics deals with
similar ideologies in songs played by Jah Cuban. Brown’s lyrics deal with issues faced by the black population in the United States at the time of the Civil Rights Movement. The songs played by Jah Cuban address the civil rights of immigrants and other non-dominant groups in the United States.

In interviewing Jah Cuban and its followers, I observed and made notes on what the event goers were doing while engaged in the music at bookings in South Florida, specifically Miami or Fort Lauderdale.

In my structured interviews with audience members for Jah Cuban bookings, I asked the following questions:

1. What do you like most about this music?
2. How do you use dancehall music to define yourself?
3. What is your favorite dancehall song and why?
4. Can you recall the first time you heard dancehall? What was occurring in your life then?
5. Do you reminisce when listening to this music?
6. When do you listen to this music?
7. With whom do you listen to this music?
8. Do some of the songs make you feel empowered? Can you name them?
9. What ways do you feel empowered by Jah Cuban and why?
10. What do you remember when listening to this music?
11. Can you recite the lyrics to this song? How do they relate to you?
12. Did you know about Jah Cuban Sound System? What do you know?
13. When was the first time you heard Jah Cuban play?
14. How do you feel about Cuban-Americans playing Jamaican music?
15. What do you think of Jah Cuban as a sound system?
16. Which other sound systems do you follow?
17. Who else listens to this form of music?
18. Who do you socialize with when listening to this music?
19. How do you think this music has affected your way of life here in South Florida?
20. How often do you listen to dancehall music?

Questions for Jah Cuban disc jockeys:

1. When was the first time you heard Jamaican music? How old were you?
2. What was happening in your life at that time?
3. What did you like about Jamaican music?
In interviewing the promoters of the events I asked them several questions in reference to working with Jah Cuban in the South Florida region. In my structured interview with the promoters, I asked them the following questions:

1. How did you find out about Jah Cuban?
2. When was the first time you worked with Jah Cuban?
3. Why did you decide to work with them?
4. What do you like about Jah Cuban?
5. How do you feel about Cuban-Americans playing Jamaican music?
6. How often have you worked with Jah Cuban?
7. Did your supporters like Jah Cuban?
8. Why do you think that is?
9. What impact do you think Jah Cuban has had on the Jamaican community in South Florida and on society as a whole?

10. What have your supporters said about Jah Cuban?

11. What is the energy of the crowd when Jah Cuban plays?

12. What is the ethnicity of crowd?

I recorded the commentary on the music and the demographics of persons present at the event and being interviewed. I noted the types of people present when Jah Cuban was playing. That is, the class structure that the person is perceived to identify with. In observing when and where Jah Cuban plays, I determined the demographics of the audience noting whether there were more men than women and the racial identities.

Data gathering instruments included notes and recordings of events where possible. A pilot study was conducted to assist in refining the design and procedures of the study to ensure that the necessary questions were answered. In collecting the data, one must begin with reading previous research on the topic or discussing it with someone who is familiar with it. As such, I spoke to Dean Wagstaffe, a doctoral recipient from Florida International University. Wagstaffe reiterated that interviews critical to this form of study. Based on this advice, while accompanying Jah Cuban, I asked informal questions in the form of conversation. A third component to case studies is observation and participation. Because having several sources improves the reliability and validity of a study, I accompanied Jah Cuban Sound System to several bookings and observed the disc jockeys as well as the attendees of these events.

Data Analysis

There are three likely analytic strategies according to Wimmer and Dominick (2000). These include pattern matching, where actual patterns are compared to predicted patterns; explanation building, where the researcher explains the causes of the phenomenon under study;
and time series analysis, where the researcher compares theoretic trends to those predicted before the research was conducted (p. 127). For the Jah Cuban observations, I used the explanation building analytical strategy. The final stage of a case study is that of report writing. This takes the format of research question, methods, findings, and discussion.
CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS

Description of Jah Cuban

Formed in 1999, Jah Cuban consists of five white Cuban-American disc jockeys who gained an appreciation for Jamaican dancehall music heard on commercial radio. These five Cuban-American males are: Rey Munoz, Louis Sanchez, Felix Deleon, Michael Esquivel, and Eric Munoz (no relation to Rey). Although Jah Cuban’s website states that they play reggae, hip hop and soul, they are mostly known for playing reggae (http://www.myspace.com/jahcuban). The ages of the disc jockeys range from 24 to 29. Two of Jah Cuban’s disc jockeys, Rey Munoz and Michael Esquivel, were born in Cuba and moved to Florida in the 1980s. Eric Munoz, Felix DeLeon, and Louis Sanchez were born in Miami to Cuban parents. All of the Jah Cuban disc jockeys were raised in Miami. All of the disc jockeys parents are Cuban, except for Eric Munoz, whose mother is of Italian decent. They all speak fluent Spanish and identify themselves as white Cuban-Americans.

After researching dancehall music, Jah Cuban entered into waters unchartered by the Cuban community in South Florida. Rey Munoz, also known as Rey Cuban, and Eric Munoz, known as Scarhead, are the dominant characters of Jah Cuban. Rey Cuban buys the dub plates\(^9\), plays the music, and is usually the “go-to” person for the sound system. He is in charge of the branding, image, and reputation of Jah Cuban. Rey Cuban practices playing music and makes important connections for the sound system to gain popularity in the Jamaican Diaspora in South Florida.

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\(^9\) A dub plate is a record or LP used on a turn table by disc jockeys. The dub plate usually consists of an artist giving tribute to the disc jockeys’ sound system. It is a personalized song for the sound system.
Michael Esquivel also known as Greens or Mr. Green assists with the financial backing for the sound system. Felix DeLeon or Jah Felix plays hip hop and other forms of music at bookings. Louis Sanchez, known as Louis Rockaz, specializes in music with a religious theme.

The Jah Cuban Interviews

All the Jah Cuban disc jockeys were interviewed by phone for preliminary questioning and then at the home of R. Munoz in Miami. I conducted follow up interviews with Eric Munoz at his house in Pembroke Pines, with Rey Munoz and Michael Esquivel at a mall in Miami on separate occasions, and interviewed Louis Sanchez at my home in Pembroke Pines as well. I did the follow up interview with Felix DeLeon on the phone. I spent an additional 12 hours with all the Jah Cuban disc jockeys and each disc jockey over the span of the next several months.

The Setting for the Rey Munoz Interview

I interviewed Rey Munoz (here in referred to as Rey Cuban) at his house where I met his wife, who is Jamaican. Eric Munoz was living with them at the time. In the living room Rey kept his turn-tables, speakers, and record collection and it was here that he did most of his practising. In Eric’s room was a computer where he worked on promoting the sound system. The area in which Rey lived was a predominantly black and bordered the Miami Gardens neighborhood (which is mostly black) and Miami Lakes (which is primarily Hispanic). Rey’s house is located in north-western Miami-Dade County near the border of Broward County.

Interview with Rey Cuban

Rey Cuban was born in Havana, Cuba, on 29 October 1982 and came to the United States at the age of eight. In his first experiences with dancehall, Cuban did not know that he was listening to Jamaican music. “I was 10 years old when I first heard Jamaican music on the radio, but I didn’t truly begin to listen to the music until I was 16,” said Cuban. Some of the earliest songs he recalls on commercial radio includes Shabba Ranks, “Ting a Ling” and Nadine
Sutherland and Terror Fabulous’s “Action.” As Cuban got older, he gained a greater appreciation for the music. “I like the fact that Jamaican music is a mixture of all different types of music from Middle Eastern, African, to Latin,” he said. His interest in the music led to him to do more research, buy records and place the album covers on his wall. He and his friends, Eric Munoz and Michael Esquivel, would compete to see who knew more about the music. Rey Cuban recalls the excitement of learning about the music as he and his friends were not supposed to be listening to Jamaican music. The three learned how to speak Patois, the Jamaican dialect, from listening to Jamaican music and imitating what they heard. They would ask their Jamaican friends what words meant and in what context they would use them. Upon hearing the young Cuban-Americans speak Patois, a friend asked if they were Jamaican or Cuban or Ja-Cuban, similar to the term “Jamerican.” This is how the name Jah Cuban came about. Rey Cuban’s family does not support his “alternative lifestyle” as a disc jockey, although he has been playing music for the past ten years. Cuban is married to a Jamaican and surrounds himself with mostly Jamaican friends. He enjoys eating Cuban food, however, and speaks fluent Spanish, especially when conversing with his mother. He often reiterates the fact that he is Cuban and not Jamaican. He openly states that he hates Fidel Castro. Cuban has visited Jamaica eight times and while there, he usually visits friends he has made over the years. His outlook for Jah Cuban’s future is bleak, as the other disc jockeys no longer see the sound system as the main emphasis in their lives. “If the Jah Cuban disc jockeys become more mature in their dealing with having the sound system grow, I see nothing but big things, but as long as the members are focusing on other things and do not have the sound system at the forefront, then the group may disperse,” said Cuban. In order to take the sound system to the next level, Cuban decided to spend some time in Jamaica.
The Setting for the Louis Rockaz Interview

I interviewed Louis Sanchez (hereafter referred to as Louis Rockaz) at my house in Pembroke Pines. Rockaz had just gotten off work and was on his way home. After some small talk and offering Rockaz something to drink, we sat down at the dining table for the interview. He started to ask me questions about myself. After answering his questions I began to interview him.

The Louis Rockaz Interview

Rockaz was born 23 August 1980 in Miami Beach to Cuban parents who came to the United States as children. Rockaz played the guitar as a child. In addition to singing, his mother’s family played several instruments. Rockaz was first introduced to Jamaican artists, such as Buju Banton, Beenie Man and Bounty Killa on the radio in 1995 at the age of 15. Rockaz listened to Jamaican music while he attended Coral Park-Miami High school in south-west Miami. “When I was growing up, I wanted to rebel against my parents and get spiritual guidance. I could identify with the messages and the meanings in the songs. I like Rastafarian messages and I practice most of the Rastafarian teachings,” he said. He began to play at the Florida International University (FIU) college radio station in 2001. In 2003, while Louis was working at VP Records, a young Cuban man walked into the store and the two formed a friendship through their mutual love for Jamaican music. “I thought it was interesting to find other Cuban-Americans that liked the music as much as I did,” he said. The two wanted to have a sound system that represented Cuba. He decided to balance Jah Cuban by focusing on conscious dancehall, which is closely intertwined with Rastafarian teachings and philosophies. Rockaz started playing on the underground radio station Riddims 94.5. He plays on Saturday nights from 9 to 11 p.m. and Sundays from 3 to 5 p.m. Unlike his other Jah Cuban counterparts, Rockaz has never visited Jamaica, although he works for one of Jamaica’s leading record label companies,
VP Records. According to Rockaz, his parents do not support or recognize his “alternative lifestyle.” “My parents don’t really understand my love for Jamaican music, they believe it is a phase I’m going through,” he said. Rockaz speaks with a Jamaican accent. He got his alias by going through a process to find out what name he wanted to give himself as a disc jockey. Luciano, a Jamaican reggae artist, gave him the name. It is through Rockaz that Jah Cuban is able to get the connections to music artists in Jamaica. Rockaz is also able to assist the sound system to get dub plates, while the other disc jockeys come up with the money and make contact with the artists. He has personal relationships with many of Jamaica’s top dee jays. Rockaz wants to build a career as a disc jockey and sees a positive outlook for Jah Cuban. “I see Jah Cuban as a recognized name in the Jamaican music industry in the next ten years. I see it as an enterprise in terms of doing production and being forefathers in the music and culture,” he said. Rockaz is currently married to a Barbadian woman and they have a child together.

Setting for the Jah Felix Interview

I interviewed Felix DeLeon, hereafter referred to as Jah Felix, on two separate occasions. The first was a phone interview during which Felix was eager to answer questions. The second interview took place at Cuban’s house the night of the Sound Clash event. He was sitting at Cuban’s dining table eating a hamburger and fries from McDonalds. “Don’t worry about me eating,” he said, “ask me whatever you want.” And so, I proceeded with my interview.

Interview with Jah Felix

Felix was born in Miami on 26 March 1985 to Cuban parents. In the early 1990s, he listened to Inner Circle and Snow. Felix remembers getting his first reggae compact disc, Inner Circle, at the age of 11. Dancehall was a different type of music to the young Felix. During his years in middle school, Felix was a Hip Hop disc jockey, but began to get into reggae music. At the age of 14, Felix began playing Jamaican music after his Hip Hop start. “I likes the rhythm
and lyrics in Jamaican music,” he said. He’s been playing music for 10 years. He is inspired by other sound systems, such as Killamanjaro from Jamaica and Mighty Crown from Japan. Felix loves the musical competition of the sound clash\(^\text{10}\) or as he terms it the ‘musical war.’ His parents are surprised by his love for Jamaican music. “My parents love the music, but they didn’t think that I would be so passionate about it,” he said. He currently plays at several clubs in Miami Beach. He loves all kinds of music, especially the music before the computer age. “I see myself doing music all my life, from being a disc jockey to producing,” he said. He’s visited Jamaica ten times and keeps in touch with the people he has met there. “Yeah, I’ve been to Jamaica several times. I love the people. Everyone shows me love down there. The people make me feel at home.” At age 23, Felix is the youngest member of the Jah Cuban Sound System. He likes the cultural impact Jah Cuban has made. “I see Jah Cuban as an icon for other cultures that break out and do something different,” he said.

### Setting for the Interview with Mr. Green

I interviewed Michael Esquivel on the phone for a preliminary interview and then again at the Dolphin Mall in Miami. We met on a Sunday afternoon by the outdoor bar. The Dolphin Mall is located in the city of Doral which has a large Venezuelan population. The location was close to his house and easily accessible for both of us. We were the only mixed couple at the bar. The crowd was mostly Hispanic, with a small number of people of other ethnicities. After ordering drinks, we began the interview.

\(^{10}\) A sound clash is a competition between two or more disc jockeys or sound systems to see who has the better musical skill. Disc jockeys get “dub plates” (special tracks by recorded artists that mention the sound system or disc jockeys personally) from various artists in the industry and try to out do each other with a clever selection of songs.
Interview with Mr. Green

Michael Esquivel, herein referred to as Mr. Green, was born in Cuba on 11 November 1981 and came to Florida as a young child. As a young boy he listened to artists such as Bounty Killa and Chuck Fender. Although he could not understand the lyrics of the songs, he liked the beat or rhythms. As he listened to the songs, he began to like the music more and more. A young woman loaned him a Buju Banton compact disc from which he read the lyrics to his favorite songs. “I always heard Bob Marley from I was a child growing up, but the music first caught my attention while I was in middle school at the age of 13. A friend loan me Buju Banton’s ‘Voice of Jamaica’ CD. The lyrics to the songs were written in the booklet and I would read along with the songs,” he said. Now residing in Southwest Miami, Esquivel met both Rey Munoz (Rey Cuban) and Eric Munoz (Scarhead) through a mutual friend. Mr. Green recalls the formation of Jah Cuban:

Well, Jah Cuban was formed out of similar interests between friends. I met Rey Cuban and Scarhead while in middle school. They would call in to a party line and speak Patois (a Jamaican dialect) and play Jamaican music. We had several things in common from the love of Jamaican music to the fact that we all fall under the same zodiac sign. We are all Scorpios. While in high school, we met Jah Felix, who attended the same high school as Scarhead. It was in 1999 after listening to “World Clash” sound clash cassette tape that we decided to become a sound ourselves. A sound system from Japan, Mighty Crown, was on the cassette tape. We decided if the Japanese could do it, so could we.

The three then decided to form a sound system. Esquivel called himself “Mr. Green” because it is his favorite color. Green works at Unique Vacations, Inc. owners and operators of the Sandals and Beaches resorts in the Caribbean. Unique Vacations is run by Mr. Gordon “Butch” Stewart, a white-Jamaican self-proclaimed “self-made” millionaire. Green often visits Jamaica and the Caribbean as part of his work at Unique Vacations. He provides funding for the equipment and dub plates bought by Jah Cuban. He also uses his time in Jamaica to learn about the latest songs and artists. He has several friends in Jamaica that aid him in learning more about
the music and the culture. Green speaks fluent Spanish, especially when speaking to family and
friends. He has mostly Cuban or Hispanic friends. He is closest to Felix, while Cuban is close to
Scarhead. Green states that his family does not understand or appreciate his love of Jamaican
music or Jamaican culture. “They [his family] are indifferent to it, they do not involve
themselves in Jah Cuban,” he said. Both Green and Cuban believe that one day there will be a
“true revolution” in Cuba where Castro will no longer be in power and a new “liberated”
democratic Cuba will arise. Mr. Green does not see himself as being a full-time disc jockey. “I
have a responsibility to my family and I have other priorities at this moment. It was what I
wanted to do when I didn’t have to work, but I have to help support my family,” he said. He does
not know what the future of Jah Cuban will be. “I am uncertain about the future of Jah Cuban, I
hope to see the sound system doing big things in the next ten years,” he said. Mr. Green lives
with his mother and brother.

Setting for the Scarhead Interview

My first preliminary interview with Eric Munoz (referred to as Scarhead herein), took
place at the home of Cuban. At the time, Scarhead lived with Cuban and his family in their
Miami Gardens home. For the second, more in-depth interview, however, Eric had moved to
Pembroke Pines, which has mixture of immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean. There
is a large number of Jamaican immigrants who live there. Eric shared a town house with a white
American male and a Jamaican-American male.

Interview with Scarhead

Scarhead, who got the name because of the scar across his bald head, was born in Miami at
Jackson Memorial Hospital on 2 November 1982 to an Italian-American mother and a Cuban-
American father. He first heard Jamaican music at the age of 13 through a friend. “My friend,
Eddie, who was Columbian, introduced me to the music. I realized Jamaican music was being
played on the radio stations such as Power 96,” he said. Scarhead met Mr. Green and then Cuban
at a club in Key Biscayne through mutual friends. Scarhead recalls Cuban singing Soca\textsuperscript{11} songs
by Machel Montano. In 1999, Scarhead gave Cuban a mixed compact disc (CD) which he had
made titled “Knock Out.” Scarhead had CDs from such Jamaican sound systems as Renaissance
and Soul Syndicate. He was attracted to the rhythm and beat in Jamaican music. “I was into
Booty music and I liked the beat of Jamaican music,” he said. His first CD was Bounty Killa’s
first album, “My Experience.” Scarhead would listen to underground radio stations such as Mixx
96. He would go online and research the music and ask questions. He learned about dub plates
from his Renaissance CD. He read about sound systems and dubs online. Cuban, Mr. Green, and
Scarhead continued to exchange information and formed a friendship. Cuban was more
interested in the original or “foundation” music of the older artists. Mr. Green had “sound clash”
CD that they would listen to. The three decided to become disc jockeys after attending a sound
clash. “One night me, Rey Cuban, and Green went to a Jamaican sound clash with Tony
Matterhorn, Bass Odyssey, and Killamanjaro sound systems in 2000. It was after that experience
that we decided to become disc jockeys,” he said. Mr. Green went to Jamaica and returned with
45 records. The trio would play at house parties under the name “The Cubans.”

Scarhead is the “MC” or “mic man\textsuperscript{12}” for the sound system and has a heavy Jamaican
accent. He speaks fluent Spanish when speaking with his parents. He has a mixture of Cuban and
Jamaican friends whom he interacts with daily. He is the most distant from his family, as they
live in other states at this time. “My mother does not like the music, but my father likes it. My
mother didn’t like the loud music and me bringing people in and out of the house all the time,”

\textsuperscript{11} Soca is a form of music from Trinidad and Tobago. This is the music that is played during the islands’ cultural
festival of Carnival, second only to Rio’s.

\textsuperscript{12} MC or mic man refers to the person who speaks on the microphone while the disc jockey is playing.
he said. Although he loves Jamaican music, he adores Salsa music and listens to it during his
down time. Scarhead currently plays on one of South Florida’s underground stations, Riddims
94.5, on Mondays, Tuesdays and Saturdays. “My mother has never heard me play until recently
and now she listens to my show on Riddims, but she is not happy about me doing the disc jockey
thing as a career. She would rather I finish school,” he said. Scarhead does not see himself
pursuing a career as a disc jockey. “There’s too much politics involved in being a disc jockey. I
would rather get involved in the business side of things,” he said. He is not sure of the future of
Jah Cuban, but would like them to be remembered in a positive manner. “I would like to see Jah
Cuban become huge and a movement known around the world. I would like to be seen as an
historical icon or Jah Cuban as a label group,” he said.

Summary

The length of which members have been a part of the group ranges from six to nine years.
All the disc jockeys have been to Jamaica, except for Rockaz. Rockaz is also the only member of
the group who works with a company that has to do with the Jamaican music industry. Mr.
Green also works for a Jamaican business with its headquarters in Miami. Rockaz is the only
member who identifies himself as being a Rastafarian, although the other members of the group
believe in some of the ideals of the faith. Rockaz, Scarhead, and Felix are the only members who
are disc jockeys on a weekly basis. Cuban plays with the sound system, but not on his own,
unlike Rockaz who plays at venues under the Jah Cuban name. Mr. Green does not play, but
assists with maintaining connections with friends in Jamaica. Some of the disc jockeys families
support the fact that they like Jamaican music, while others do not understand it. Rockaz and
Felix would like to continue in the music industry doing everything from being disc jockeys to
producers. Scarhead sees himself working more in the business side of the industry, while Mr.
Green and Cuban have other responsibilities and have put the disc jockeying to the side. Most of
the Jah Cuban disc jockeys hope to see the sound system as either an icon or a production label, but some are not certain if that can be a reality with the present economy or the potential loss of vision of the members. There seems to be mixed views on whether Jah Cuban will be around in the next ten years.

**The Jah Cuban Performance Sites and Their Audiences**

Observations were made at two events with the Jah Cuban Sound System. The first was a sound clash in which Jah Cuban represented Miami and the other was an event put on by Rey Cuban himself. The sound clash was located in Hallandale, Florida, at the Millennium Ballroom, known for having held several Jamaican dancehall events. The clash was held on Saturday, June 30, 2007. The event, titled “New York vs. Florida Sound Clash,” highlighted the four competing sound systems. Representing Florida was Jah Cuban from Miami and Poison Dart from Tampa. Representing New York was Tek 9 Movements from Brooklyn and King Agony from Queens.

**Sound Clash**

As we entered the ballroom, the event before the sound clash was coming to an end as salsa and disco music played. The disc jockeys all greeted each other and set up their equipment on the stage. Bob Marley’s voice filled the room as the sound systems did their sound checks to make sure all the wiring was done properly and the equipment worked. The Millennium Ballroom is a large rectangular room with a square wooden dance floor in the middle. The ceiling and the walls are black with red and white curtains at the windows to prevent anyone from seeing in or out of the room. A disco ball hangs over-head with lighting from the ceiling reflecting on the dance floor. The room was relatively dark, not lit enough for someone to read, but good enough for someone to see another person’s face. The age and race of the crowd transitioned from predominantly middle class, white and Hispanic men and women in their 40s to 60s to mostly working-class African-Americans and a few Hispanics, mostly men, ranging
from 18 years old to 30 plus. The crowd was small at first, but got bigger as the night progressed. The event commenced with Papa Keith coming on the stage. Keith is a local disc jockey on one of the commercial radio stations, who was born in New York, but relocated to South Florida. He is of Caribbean decent. He established the rules of the clash, stating that each sound system goes twice. In the third and final round, each sound system plays one song to offset the previous song played by the previous sound.

Jah Cuban started the clash. Next was Tek 9 followed by Poison Dart and finally King Agony to close the first round of the clash. The order then changed with Tek 9 starting, followed by Poison Dart then King Agony and finally Jah Cuban closing the second round. In the final round, King Agony started with one song followed by Poison Dart then Tek 9 followed with Jah Cuban playing the last song.

The audience was casually dressed. Most of the men wore jeans, t-shirts, and sneakers. Most of the women were dressed in jeans, fitted tops, and high heeled shoes. Some of the women wore dresses. The crowd was self-segregated, with most of the women to the front of the establishment by the bar and the men toward the middle and rear of the room. The majority of the audience was in front of the stage, with most of the crowd filling three-quarter of the room. Toward the rear of the room, the crowd was thinner. Some of the attendees were smoking and drinking. The scent of smoke and paraphernalia filled the room. The audience swayed to the music, singing along with the songs. When a song they liked was played, they would make a noise sounding like a gun and put their hands in the air as if giving a gun salute. If the song was extremely popular, the audience would start jumping or running in place, making the gesture of a gun with their hands and the sound as though the gun was going off. In between the changes of
the sounds, they would discuss the previous sound and state their opinion on whether or not the selections of songs were adequate.

At the end of the night, Papa Keith announced that Jah Cuban and Poison Dart from Florida had won the clash and gave them their trophies. The crowd made loud noises in agreement with the decision and then began to disperse shortly thereafter. Jah Cuban and Poison Dart shook hands with the in New York opponents and took photos with the trophy. Although the crowd was predominantly black, they responded to Jah Cuban as they did to the other sound systems whose disc jockeys were black.

Rey Cuban’s Event: La Playa

In order to break into the Jamaican party scene and get more clients for Jah Cuban in South Florida, Rey Cuban decided to have a party that he called “La Playa Twisted.” This event was in Dania Beach, Florida, at a restaurant, bar, and lounge on the ocean-front called the Beach Watch. The event took place on Saturday, December 15th, 2007, and highlighted the Jah Cuban Sound System. The crowd consisted of mostly Jamaican-Americans and Belizeans with some Cuban-Americans present. The restaurant had an open balcony to the back of the building that gave the appearance of dancing under the stars. The night was slightly chilly, but clear. Out on the balcony the air was fresh, while inside, the restaurant smelled slightly of food. There were attendees inside the restaurant as well, which had an open kitchen. Several Jamaican-Americans who were personal friends of the disc jockeys attended the event.

In contrast to the sound clash, the attendees of this event were nicely dressed with most of the females wearing dresses. The males were dressed in buttoned-up shirts and dress shoes. Some attendees had on sweaters and jackets. The crowd was younger, with ages ranging from 18 to late 20s. Most of the attendees were of mixed race and were of the middle class. Some of the attendees were smoking cigarettes, while most attendees were drinking. Some couples danced,
while others swayed to the music standing beside one another. Still others simply listened to the music while having a conversation. Inside the restaurant, some attendees were dancing, some were sitting down, and others were eating. When a song came on that the attendees liked, they would do the gun salute gesture and jump around like their counterparts at the sound clash. Those who were not dancing began to dance. The attendees at the party were mingling, meeting, and greeting each other. The atmosphere was more sophisticated and laid back than the sound clash. The attendees to the event were mostly Jamaican and Belizean with some Caucasians and Cuban-Americans.

Although the Jah Cuban disc jockeys were not singing the songs, the selection of music and their presence was a form of performance. Most of the disc jockeys played the music, but Scarhead also used the microphone. He spoke about the songs and individuals who may doubt whether or not Jah Cuban has what it took to be a sound system. He used words to evoke emotion in the audience members. In doing this, he got loud hollers and screams, signaling the audience’s delight in what he had said. A coarse, deep voice, Scarhead speaks in Jamaican patios when performing. He also uses Jamaican profanity, which reinforces his connection to the mostly Jamaican audiences. The dichotomy of white Cuban-Americans playing Jamaican music is not as foreign to Jamaican-Americans. In Jamaica there is also a sound system which consists of Jamaicans of Chinese descent called Black Chiney. There is also a sound system from Japan called Mighty Crown which consists of Japanese disc jockeys playing Jamaican music. Similar to the performance of hip hop and reggaeton disc jockeys, which may find these musical origin in Jamaican dancehall music, Jah Cuban disc jockeys use turntables, LPs and sound effects to create excitement in their audiences.
The Fans

Jah Cuban’s fans come from a variety of different groups in the Caribbean Diaspora in South Florida. Some of their fans have been listening to them play for several years, while others have recently started following Jah Cuban. The fans at their events range from 20-year olds to mid-forties men and women. Individuals who attend Jah Cuban performances include, but are not limited to, Cuban-Americans, Jamaican-Americans, and Belizeans.

Demographics of the interviewees: In total, there were eight fans of Jah Cuban who were interviewed. Of this eight, five were of African descent, one was white, and two were of mixed race. The average age of the group was 26. The ages ranged from 22 to 30. Six of the eight interviewed were men and two were women. Two of the eight interviewed were born in Jamaica to Jamaican parents but raised in the United States. One was born in the United States to Jamaican parents, and classifies herself as Jamaican, one was born and raised in Belize to Jamaican and Latin parents, one was born in the United States to Haitian parents, one was born in the United States to Trinidadian parents, one was born and raised in Cuba to Cuban parents, and the last was born in the United States to a Bahamian father and Cuban mother. All of those interviewed listened to Jah Cuban CDs and all of them have attended functions where the sound system has played. Some of those interviewed have worked with Jah Cuban on several occasions. All of those interviewed have known the disc jockeys for at least three years.

The Fan Interviews

Drama

One of Jah Cuban’s devoted fans is Drama, a 30-year-old male who identifies himself as working class. Drama was born in the United States to Jamaican parents and is also a disc jockey. He is originally from New York and moved to Florida in January 2005. He knows Scarhead, Rey Cuban, and Louis Rockaz on a personal level. He listens to Rockaz play on the
radio. He was first introduced to Scarhead, who gave him a CD to listen to. Drama loves the fact that Jah Cuban embraces the Jamaican culture and believes it is a very good thing. He likes the fact that Jah Cuban plays what he calls “foundation music,” music that dates back to the early beginnings of Jamaican dancehall music. Drama states that Jah Cuban plays more “uplifting music,” rather than “slackness” as defined by Cooper (2004, 3). Roots and culture or conscious reggae satisfies the themes in Jamaican music as defined by Cooper (2004). These themes consist of “songs on social commentary” on issues in Jamaica and “songs that speak to the slackness/culture opposition” (p.3). Some of Drama’s favorite Jamaican songs include John Holt’s “Sweetie,” Bob Marley’s “Forever Loving Jah,” and Ken Booth’s “Anything I Own.” He recalls the first time he heard Jamaican music, “I was three or four years old and living in New York. My father would listen to Bob Marley when he had company over…” Specific songs remind Drama of specific times in his life and people he was with while growing up. Recalling moments in his life, he stated that the song “Forever loving Jah” by Bob Marley makes him feel empowered and brings back memories of his father.

Drama appreciates the fact that Jah Cuban never “step away” from the foundation, “They play from where the music started and they educate the people.” Some other disc jockeys that Drama likes to listen to include Chip Lee from Lee’s Unlimited and Bass Odyssey. Jamaican dancehall music has been an avenue for him to educate people here in South Florida and is also the way he makes his money. Drama’s ability to identify with Jah Cuban and the songs they play can be explained by the Co-Cultural theory as presented by Orbe (as quoted in Gudykunst, 2005). As Drama and Jah Cuban come from the non-dominant ethnic groups who seek alternative forms of expression as the dominant group maintain control of the communication systems, which consequently reinforces their dominance. Both Drama and Jah Cuban disc
jockeys are members of the underrepresented and marginalized groups within the dominant structures of society. Drama and the Jah Cuban disc jockeys do not satisfy the requirements of being a privileged group and therefore have adopted certain communication behaviors to negotiate oppressive dominant structures. In other words Drama is able to connect not only with the songs Jah Cuban Sound System plays, but with the Jah Cuban disc jockeys as well. Drama identifies with the songs Jah Cuban plays as they reflect Fanon’s “myth of the Negro” (Fanon, 1967, 110). The lyrics of the songs Jah Cuban play have the themes of racial equality and empowerment of non-dominant groups, themes which try to dismiss the inferiority complex stated by Fanon. Drama, as a member of the Jamaican Diaspora, is in a struggle to prove himself equal to whites in the United States.

**Shauna**

Shauna, another fan of Jah Cuban, is a 20-year-old female who identifies herself as working class. She was born in Jamaica, but moved to Florida as a young child. She has known Scarhead, Louis Rockaz, Rey Cuban, and Felix for three years. Shauna likes the fact that Jah Cuban is “versatile.” “Each of the disc jockeys has his own style. When listening to them you are never bored,” she said. To Shauna, Jamaican dancehall music represents freedom to speak one’s mind, which is a trait she identifies with. “I always say what’s on my mind.” Her favorite song is Richie Spice’s “Brown Skin.” Shauna loves the lyrics and feels as though Spice is speaking to her. “I love the way he compliments women with his words,” she said. The first dancehall song that truly caught her attention was Benji Myers, “How Water Walk go a Pumpkin Belly.” She was so fascinated with the song, she performed it at her school’s class concert. Shauna reminisces when hearing Jamaican music, she often is reminded of “home [Jamaica]” and how beautiful the island is. She listens to dancehall every day on the radio when driving home from work. Bob Marley’s song “Waiting in Vain,” is her favorite song.
When asked about Jah Cuban, Shauna states that she thinks they have a love for the music. “Knowing that they are not Jamaican, they still play the music passionately. They live like they are from Jamaica; they speak Patois like Jamaican-Americans. I don’t remember that they are not from Jamaica; it sounds natural when they play.” Shauna first met Louis Rockaz and Rey Cuban, who informed her that they played on the radio. She started to listen and liked the way they selected their music by playing more “conscious reggae” or “roots and culture.” She states that she does not think of the fact that Jah Cuban is not Jamaican. “I don’t see race or culture. As long as I am listening and enjoying myself, I don’t care,” she says. Shauna believes that Jah Cuban will make a name for themselves, “the way they play the music makes you want to listen.” She believes they will do well in the future and become well known.

Other disc jockeys Shauna enjoys listening to include Junior Flex of Mega Flex Sound System. “He does his thing differently; he makes it fun. I am never bored,” she said. In South Florida, Shauna notes that her accent draws attention. “My accent is obvious and white men are always interested. They associate Jamaica with Bob Marley. Marley’s name still lives on and every Jamaican is associated with him. My life is affected because of Marley,” she says. Roots and Culture or Conscious Reggae strikes a chord with Shauna, as these songs represent Fanon’s “Myth of the Negro.” This section of Jamaican music takes Fanon’s theory one step further, however, as these songs not only tell their listeners that the listeners are equal, but that they should be proud of who they are and where they come from. It is through these songs that Jamaican-Americans are able to break through the “myth of the Negro,” and propel themselves in a society where they are seen as one mass group, African-American, rather than Jamaican. Members of the Caribbean society in the United States may assimilate, but may also maintain their identity as West Indian or people from the Caribbean. Afro-West Indians or people from the
Caribbean, such as Jamaican-Americans, may become a “sub-cultural group within a subculture.” In other words, new Jamaican immigrants to the United States are identified as African-Americans, although their experiences, culture, and outlook does not necessarily reflect that of their African-American counterparts. This sub-cultural or micro-cultural status is discussed in Neuliep’s 2003 book, Intercultural Communication: A Contextual Approach. “Afro-immigrants” from other countries are assumed to be African-American by the dominant group, but are not always accepted by their African-American counterparts as part of the group. These “Afro-immigrants” become part of the “Muted Microcultural Group” as defined by Neuliep (p.86). This falls under his Muted Group Theory, which states that “the language of the dominant cultural (or sub-cultural) group contributes to the micro-cultural group’s subordination and the speech and writing of micro-cultural groups are not valued by the dominant cultural group,” or in this case, sub-cultural group (p. 82). It could be further mentioned that the Jah Cuban disc jockeys and Jamaican-Americans are both part of this subculture within a subculture. This allows for “the Muted Group Theory” and the “Co-Cultural Theory” to go a step further in defining sub-sub-cultural or micro-micro-cultural groups.

Jah Remedy

Jah Remedy (called Remedy) is a 24-year-old man who identifies himself as working class. His father is Bahamian and his mother is Cuban, but he was born in the United States. Remedy met the Jah Cuban disc jockeys through a mutual friend and knows Louis Rockaz personally. He first heard Jah Cuban play two and a half years ago at a party. Remedy, a self defined “Rasta,” likes what he calls the “Roots and Culture” form of Jamaican music, “I like the positive message in the songs,” he said. The music gives him knowledge. His favorite song is Morgan Heritage’s “Jah Comes First,” as it reminds him to keep Jah first in his life. Remedy recalls the first time he heard Jamaican music; he was nine years old when his mother was going
through a divorce. Remedy was sent to live with his grandparents. His father would come by to visit every now and then and when he did, he would play Bob Marley. When Remedy hears Jamaican music he remembers how African-Americans were treated by Caucasians, including his own experience living in the “ghetto.” Love songs often remind him of women in his life. Remedy states that he is always listening to Jamaican music. “I listen to it with my brethrens (male friends) and while driving,” he said. He feels empowered when he hears Sizzla’s song, “Keep a Good Man Down.” When asked about Jah Cuban, Remedy is positive. “Being Cuban, I always knew about our African roots and culture. This culture is a part of them (Jah Cuban),” he said. He is happy that the music is universal. “It feels good that you don’t have to be black or Jamaican, because this music is for everyone. It is for all of Jah’s people,” he said. Remedy states that Cuban-Americans may not accept African culture, but many have African roots. He believes Jah Cuban has accepted their African roots. When attending a party, Remedy states that he realizes that the Jamaican people accept him as part of the family. He also listens to Jah Stream Sound System. Jamaican music has changed Remedy’s life in a powerful, positive way. “When I was young, I used to get in trouble and through God I wanted to change my ways. The music has helped me stay on the right path,” he said. Jah Remedy is able to identify with the Jah Cuban disc jockeys, as he is himself of Cuban decent. He is also able to identify with blacks as his father is of African descent. Jah Cuban and the songs that they play have a special meaning for him, as he looks to the music for spiritual and cultural guidance. Jah Remedy is unique also not because he is Cuban and Bahamian, but because he also represents an additional sub-culture that is often misrepresented, that of being a Rastafarian. Rastafarianism is defined by Barrow and Dalton (2004) as an Afro-religious cult that emerged in the 1930s with the coronation of Emperor Haile Selassie I. Marcus Garvey, a Jamaican philosopher and advocate of the “Back to
Africa Movement” was also said to be a father of the religion (pp. 144-145). This group experienced ostracism from their religious counterparts and Jamaican society in general (Stolzoff, 2000). Remedy can be identified as part of the non-dominant cultural group as he is of mixed race as well as part of a religious subculture. This is in line with Co-Cultural Theory put forward by Mark P. Orbe (as quoted in Gudykunst, 2005). Remedy identifies with the Afro-centric messages in the songs the disc jockeys play. Through the music, co-cultures are able to communicate behaviors in which they are able to negotiate the dominant cultural group, an assumption of the Co-Cultural Theory.

Michael

Michael, a 29-year-old male, identifies himself as black and of the middle class. Michael moved to Miami ten years ago from Belize, where he was born and raised. He met the Jah Cuban disc jockeys three years ago and hired them to play at a party after hearing them on the radio. Michael listened to Jamaican music while growing up in Belize, “black slaves came from Jamaica to Belize and mixed with the Spanish there. We [Belizeans] have always had close ties to Jamaica. I still have family there,” he said. Michael enjoys the messages in the music and the rhythm. “The issues in Belize are the same as in Jamaica in terms of socio-economics,” Michael said. Super Cat is his favorite Jamaican artist. Michael likes Super Cat because he is “bad boy” and a rebel for political change. He also likes Bob Marley and the positivity in his lyrics. Different songs remind him of different stages in his life. He often reminisces about his father. Growing up, Michael’s father, who went to school in Jamaica, would play Jamaican music. Michael listens to Jamaican music all the time and currently has a Jah Cuban CD playing in his car. He feels empowered by Jamaican songs, especially Super Cat’s “Ghetto Red Hot,” Sizzla’s “Thank You Mama,” and Bob Marley’s “One Love.” Michael sees Jah Cuban as a bridge between Hispanics and the Jamaican culture. “The Jah Cuban disc jockeys speak Patois well, but
they are Cuban,” he said. Michael thinks that the formation of Jah Cuban shows that Jamaican culture is accepted on a world scale. “I think Jah Cuban is very talented with lots of potential,” he said. Stone Love, Black Chiney, Tony Matterhorn, and Renaissance are some other Jamaican sound systems that Michael likes to listen to. “Jamaican music helps me be creative,” he said.

Michael is himself co-cultural, with both Jamaican and Belizean roots. He can identify with both the Hispanic, as well as the Jamaican, cultures and therefore identifies with the Jah Cuban disc jockeys. Michael identifies with the uplifting messages in the songs that Jah Cuban play. As an Afro-immigrant in the United States, Michael becomes part of the non-dominant culture, as are the members of Jah Cuban. The music that Jah Cuban plays not only reminds him of his time in Jamaica, but represents “the communication behaviors to negotiate oppressive dominant structures,” (Orbe as quoted in Gudykunst, 2005, 174). Playing Jamaican music, usually songs in Jamaican dialect, allows for Jah Cuban to criticize the dominant structures overtly, as the dominant structures are not familiar with the language.

Adrienne

Adrienne is a 26-year-old female of Jamaican heritage who identifies herself as middle class. She enjoys listening to Jah Cuban because they play older music, especially roots and culture. When she hears Jamaican music it makes her happy and proud to be part of the culture. Her favorite Jamaican song at this moment is by an artist called Movado, titled “Touch the Road.” Jah Cuban has a dub for this song. “I like the lyrics on the Jah Cuban dub plate,” she said. Her first time hearing Jamaican music was in 1988 when her mother’s younger brothers put a song by Supercat on her Teddy Rupskin teddy bear. She would also hear it at family functions and noticed everyone’s jovial mood when the music was being played. When hearing Jamaican music, Adrienne often reminisces about her life and her experiences. She recalls the places she was, what she was wearing, and says that she feels happy and content when hearing Jamaican
music. Adrienne enjoys listening to Jamaican music when she is driving in her car, getting dressed to go out on the town, or when she is at her house with her friends. Songs like Buju Banton’s “Not an Easy Road,” Jah Cure’s “Longing For,” and Sizzla’s “You’re So Lovely,” are among her favorite songs and uplift her, she said. Adrienne first heard Jah Cuban play on the pirate radio station Mixx 96 some three years ago. She also went out to events where they were playing. She thinks it is interesting to find Cuban-Americans who embrace Jamaican culture as their culture. Adrienne thinks that Jah Cuban as a sound system knows how to get a party going and plays to satisfy the crowd. They appeal to the crowd across class barriers. Another sound system that Adrienne enjoys listening to is a local group known as Prodigy Sound System. Adrienne points out that she is able to listen to Jah Cuban with her elite as well as her “not-so-elite” Jamaican friends. “It’s something that brings me back closer to my friends,” she said.

Adrienne identifies with the songs that Jah Cuban play, as they not only remind her of past events in her life, but allow her to identify with being a part of a non-dominant culture, being Jamaican in America. This music reiterates her “Jamaicaness,” in a society that discriminates against non-dominant groups. Being a woman and of African heritage, she does not fit the “male, upper or middle class, able-bodied European American dominant group” as described by Orbe (as quoted in Gudykunst, 2005, 174).

Vick

Vick, who goes by the name High Fire or just Fire, is a white Cuban Rastafarian and a main supporter of Jah Cuban. Fire first came to the United States when he was 11 years old, but had been returning to Cuba until 1996 when he decided to make Miami his permanent home. Fire, who is 22 years old, self-identifies as part of the working class in the United States. Fire likes the honesty in Jamaican music. He sees Jamaican music as a contemporary voice that is positive, conscious, and educational. He defines himself religiously through the music, as it
teaches him about his Rastafarian faith “It teaches about Ethiopia, truth, and Babylon,” he said. His favorite song is by an artist named Garnett Silk who passed away some years ago. The song is titled, ‘Look to the East,’ and makes Fire feel good. Fire also likes Silk’s melodious voice. Fire remembers the first time he heard Jamaican music. “I was in Cuba, around 1992, must have been seven or eight years old. I remember walking in the streets and hearing Buju Banton and Bob Marley,” he said. The drum beat in Jamaican music reminds Fire of African culture and the “oneness” of the Caribbean. He likes listening to the music when he is alone, when he is out at the club, and when he is in driving. Of music that makes Fire feel empowered, singer Luciano’s songs “Alpha and Omega” and “Royalty,” are two of his favorites. Fire is somewhat a part of Jah Cuban as he does artwork for the group. He is happy to see Cuban-Americans being able to add something to Jamaican music. He grew up with Jah Felix, whom he met in middle school.

The first time Fire heard Jah Cuban was in 2000, while he attended Coral Gables High. He believes that Cuban-Americans playing Jamaican music is a just cause. “Jah Cuban doesn’t have too many followers, but I still feel good and glad that there are others [other than Jamaican-Americans] who like Jamaican music. It’s spreading,” he said. Jah Cuban is one of his favorite sound systems in addition to Israel from Jah Stream. “Jah Cuban’s good, there is good chemistry between the disc jockeys,” he said. Fire socializes with other Hispanics, mainly Cubans or Cuban-Americans, when listening to Jamaican music. He states that the music influences him to think positively and enables him to be strong when he is feeling down. “The music lifts me up and keeps me going,” he said. “I listen to hip hop and conscious dancehall music while painting, when driving, meditating, and when falling asleep,” he said.

Like the Jah Cuban disc jockeys, Fire, who is white Cuban, identifies with Jamaican-Americans as fellow immigrants to the United States. Fire may be looked down upon not only
because of his sympathy towards Jamaican-Americans but also for his practice of Rastafarianism. Frantz Fanon refers to this in his 1967 book, *Black Skin White Masks*. Fire, like the members of Jah Cuban, faces alienation from white counterparts based on her socio-economic level. The practice of the Rastafarian faith is looked down in the Jamaican community. Fire practices this faith and is able to identify with the Jamaican immigrants.

**The Promoters**

Jah Cuban disc jockeys have worked with a wide range of promoters in the Caribbean community in South Florida. In following the disc jockeys, I attended two events put on by different promoters. They range from radio personalities to professional promoters. These promoters have worked with Jah Cuban on several occasions over the last eight years.

**Papa Keith**

The first event was the New York verses Florida Sound Clash, hosted and refereed by Papa Keith. Papa Keith is an on-air personality on a local radio station in the South Florida region. Papa Keith, 38, is African-American of Trinidadian heritage. He identifies himself as middle class and left New York, where he was born, to live in Florida several years ago. He first heard Jah Cuban on the radio and thought they were from the Caribbean. “I thought they were Jamaican, not Cuban. I was surprised when I met them and realized they were indeed Cuban,” he said. After seeing them live, he decided to work with them. “I liked their passion for the music and that they were Spanish guys speaking Patios. I also like the fact that they are able to do what they do in an industry dominated by African-Americans. To see Spanish guys was something new. They have a high excitement level like myself. They look different,” he said. Papa Keith worked with Jah Cuban when a friend asked him to be the host and referee for the sound clash event. “My friend had an idea to bring sound clashes back to Florida. Sound clashes used to be a big thing here in Florida, but they died out. I was happy to help out with bringing the clash
back,” he said. Papa Keith sees Jah Cuban as a positive movement in terms of Jamaican music and has worked with Jah Cuban more than five times. He thinks Jah Cuban is able to connect with the attendees, who are mostly black, when they play. “Jah Cuban’s passion and knowledge of the music shows when they play. The crowd thinks it’s cool to see Cuban-Americans play Jamaican music. They are excited to see Jah Cuban imitating their culture,” Papa Keith said. He thinks that Jamaican-Americans are open to other cultures taking part in Jamaican music and thinks the trend is becoming more common.

**Ralph**

Another promoter that the Jah Cuban disc jockeys have worked with is the owner of a Caribbean radio station in Miami. Ralph is a 29-year-old Haitian-American, who has worked with Jah Cuban for several years. Ralph identifies himself as middle class. Rockaz currently segments on Ralph’s radio station, Riddims 94.5. Ralph first heard about Jah Cuban five years ago through another disc jockey and heard them play on the radio. When he met Rockaz, he thought he was humble and hungry to be heard. He also thought that Rockaz was very talented. “He has a vast amount of knowledge of music that wasn’t part of his background. I was shocked! Rockaz played better than Jamaican-Americans and that’s their music,” he said. He thinks that Jah Cuban is a positive force for the music. “I am Haitian and I have a Jamaican radio station. It was an issue at first because I was not Jamaican. Eventually that changed, though, because my station is now one of the top radio stations and people started to appreciate it. Jah Cuban brings Spanish people to appreciate Reggae music. That’s great! People see talent in Rockaz, just like they saw in me,” he said. Ralph, who also hosts and promotes events, says that his listeners and event attendees like Jah Cuban. “Jah Cuban gets appreciated more than Jamaican disc jockeys because they are Cuban and doing a good job,” he said. Ralph thinks that Jah Cuban can become hugely successful if they are marketed correctly. He believes Jah Cuban has a positive impact on
society and brings different people together. “The crowd is mixed. There is a mixture of ethnicities, everything from Trinis, Jamaicans, small islands like the V.I., and the Bahamas, to African-Americans, Latin people, and white people, too,” he said about his listeners and event attendees. His listeners and event attendees like the music that Jah Cuban plays. “They play uplifting music and the people think they are good disc jockeys,” he said. When Jah Cuban plays, Ralph thinks that, the crowd’s spirit gets positive and uplifted.

Summary of fan and promoter interviews

All three of those interviewed who identified themselves as Jamaican enjoyed listening to Jah Cuban and expressed that they “love the fact that Jah Cuban embraces Jamaican culture.” They all stated that they see Jah Cuban as accepting Jamaican culture. All of those interviewed were familiar with Jamaican music and listened to other sound systems in addition to Jah Cuban. They all stated that they saw a mixture of races when attending Jah Cuban events and they believed that other cultures also listen to Jamaican music, not just Jamaican-Americans. All of those interviewed had more of an appreciation of Jamaican music of the 1980s and 1990s than that of 2000s. All of those interviewed stated that this was the time frame that they believed Jah Cuban was best at playing. The two interviewed of Cuban decent liked Jah Cuban as representing the “Afro-Cuban.” All interviewed liked the fact that Jah Cuban played songs that had to do with social commentary as stated by Cooper (2004) in her book Sound Clash: Jamaican Dancehall Culture at Large.

In interviewing the fans of Jah Cuban, assumptions made under Co-Cultural Theory are validated. These assumptions are: “co-cultural group members’ experiences vary but they share similar positions in society which renders them underrepresented and marginalized within dominant structures in society” (Orbe, as quoted in Gudykunst, 2005, p.174). Most of the fans of Jah Cuban come from a working-class background and are currently in similar positions in
society. They are all people of color who are of the working class. Fire, who was the only white fan interviewed, practices the Rastafarian faith and is of the working class, which places him in this category under Co-Cultural Theory. Most of the fans of Jah Cuban are not native to Florida. Half of those interviewed were not born in the United States, while those who were born here were first-generation Americans. Although these fans were American born, they still identify themselves as Jamaican or Cuban, etc. The ages of the fans ranged from 20 to 30 years old and included two females and six males. All of the fans of Jah Cuban see the group as something positive and enlightening. They identify with Jah Cuban, as well as the selection of songs they play. For some of the fans, the songs allow them to reminisce, while others use the songs as guidance for religious purposes.
CHAPTER 5
LYRICAL ANALYSIS OF DANCEHALL MUSIC

The songs that Jah Cuban play reflect its religious beliefs, while offering a social commentary on immigrant life in South Florida. In Black Noise, Rose (1994) discusses rap music as “hidden transcripts which critique the powerful in stories that revolve around symbolic and legitimated victories over power holders” (1994, 100). Similarly, Jamaican music critiques the “dominant cultures” and creates a counter-voice to which non-dominant groups can relate. Rose points out that not all rap music speaks out against oppression, but recognizes that it “is engaged in symbolic and ideological warfare with institutions and groups that symbolically, ideologically, and materially oppress African-Americans” (p. 101). Just as African-Americans face hardships in the United States, so too does the immigrant population. Oppressive institutions do not just oppress African-Americans: they also oppress other non-dominant groups such as women, the poor, the disabled, and other minority groups.

Jah Cuban plays differently based on its audience, but has a collection of songs it always plays that represents the beliefs and ideology of the group. These songs express self-empowerment of non-dominant groups and resistance by these non-dominant groups to dominant groups. According to Rose (1994) “poor people learn from experience when and how explicitly they can express their discontent. Under social conditions in which sustained frontal attacks on powerful groups are strategically unwise or successfully contained, oppressed people use language, dance, and music to mock those in power, express rage, and produce fantasies of subversion,” (p. 99).

The songs I will analyze here are “Redemption Song” by Bob Marley; “One Blood” by Junior Reid; “Greetings” by Half Pint; “Here I Come” by Barrington Levy; and, “Praise Ye Jah” and “Holding Firm” by Sizzla Kolanji.
Bob Marley’s “Redemption Song”

Bob Marley and the Wailers are one of the groups who the Jah Cuban Sound System always plays at events. The leader of the band, Bob Marley, was known for his rebellious lyrics and the political messages in his songs. According to Stolzoff (2000), Bob Marley and the Wailers “remained firmly rooted to local [Jamaican] musical idioms and cultural sensibilities,” (p. 82). “Redemption Song” is one of the favorites of Jah Cuban. The song has several different messages, ranging from resistance to the dominant group to empowering non-dominant groups. Marley speaks in a code to criticize the dominant group without them realizing it (Brackett 1994). Brackett states that African-American slave resistance usually went on undetected by Europeans. By replacing words, Marley is able to criticize the dominant group in the lyrics:

Old pirates yes they rob I
Sold I to the merchant ships
Minutes after they took I
From the bottomless pits

Marley calls for self-empowerment in the lyric:

Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery;
None but ourselves can free our minds.

Although speaking to the African Diaspora, Marley’s universalized message of empowerment can be motivating to any person of a non-dominant group, including women, people with disabilities, non-black immigrants, and homosexuals, among others. Jah Cuban and their supporters use the song to uplift themselves from the oppression they feel from the injustices they face. The song is able to empower a wide variety of people regardless of race or socio-economic level. Not only does it allow these groups to feel empowered, but the song also calls for resistance to dominant forces that oppress them, as stated in the line:

Have no fear for atomic energy,
Cause none of them can stop the time.
This lyric points to invincibility of immigrants and other non-dominant groups as they overcome obstacles put in place by the dominant group. In South Florida, Cuban-Americans, Jamaican-Americans as well as Haitian-Americans have risen to political power in the communities in which they live, each representing not just the community, but their ethnicity. Marley’s lyrics send a message of encouragement that compels immigrants to continue to come to the United States and become successful in their new homeland. The struggle is not easy, but can be overcome. Marley’s song reminds immigrants and other non-dominant groups not to give up.

According to Hall (1996) in his essay, “What is this ‘Black’ in ‘Black popular culture’?” a popular cultural form is defined by the group that creates it. In terms of black popular culture, “it has come to signify the black community, where these traditions are kept, and whose struggles survive in the persistence of the black experience (the historical experience of black people in the Diaspora), of the black aesthetic (the distinctive cultural repertoires out of which popular representations were made), and of the black counter-narratives we have struggled to voice,” (p. 471). Hall’s reference to black popular culture is in the context of American society, but can be used to reference Marley and Jamaican popular music too. Marley wrote the song in the 1970s, a century after the abolition of slavery. He calls for redemption in the lyric:

But my hand was made strong  
By the hand of the Almighty  
We forward in this generation triumphantly  
Won’t you help to sing, these song of freedom  
Cause all I ever have, Redemption song.

Jamaican popular music is a form of black popular culture that speaks to the experiences of both Jamaican-Americans and African-Americans. Other non-dominant groups in the United States can identify with these struggles, although they may not be of African descent. The Jah
Cuban disc jockeys are able to identify with these struggles to survive in the United States because they share the lower working class experience as immigrants.

**Junior Reid’s “One Blood”**

Junior Reid’s song, “One Blood,” is popular among sound systems, including Jah Cuban. Reid, who is also of the Rastafarian faith, has a message of unity in the song reminding listeners that no matter where one is from, everyone bleeds the same blood; one blood. Stolzoff (2000) identifies Reid as one of the “Dancehall style singers” who emerged in the 1980s and worked closely with sound systems (p. 170). Reid’s religious beliefs also correspond with the beliefs of the Jah Cuban disc jockeys, especially Rockaz who follows several of the Rastafarian ideals and philosophies. In the introduction to the song, Reid states that there are vampires who are hunting blood.

Modern Vampires of the city  
Hunting blood, blood, blood…

These modern vampires can refer to the dominant white group which is trying to “feed on the blood” of those who are a part of the non-dominant group, exploiting the poor, women, immigrants, or any other group other than privileged, white, able-bodied males.

The next lyric of this song provides some insight into why the Jah Cuban Sound System is able to be accepted by the Jamaican-American population in South Florida. Verse 3 states:

Cut my skin you see blood red blood  
Cut your skin you see blood, blood, red blood  
Blood's thicker than water  
Blood runs through everyman's vein  
Blood thicker than water yeah…

The Jah Cuban disc jockeys and the Jamaican-American population all bleed the same blood. Not only are the disc jockeys able to identify with the struggles of the Jamaican-American community, they are also able to see pass the racial differences among others and realize that...
people are just people; all people bleed the same blood. Both the Jah Cuban disc jockeys and Jamaican immigrants in the United States face discrimination based on race and socio-economic status. Reid’s song can also refer to immigrants living in another country, such as the United States. Immigrants are often looked at as “the other.” Reid reminds the listeners that they all have the same blood.

Often the media communicate negative stories about immigrants and individuals of different social groups. In van Dijk’s 1987 book, Communicating Racism: Ethnic Prejudice in Thought and Talk, he looks at the media and the role they play in forming people’s opinions of different ethnicities. Van Dijk states that in areas where there is “low contact” of personal interactions with different ethnicities, people tend to rely heavily on the media for information (p. 153). Negative media messages can create fear among these people with “low contact” and therefore create discrimination based on fear of the unknown.

Reid’s message speaks against the ignorant fear of immigrants. The Jah Cuban disc jockeys are themselves immigrants with a peaceful message: one could come from Cuba or Jamaica, but we all bleed the same blood. This song encourages the desire to bridge cultural gaps between non-dominant groups. It calls for mutual respect for all people regardless of race, ethnicity or socio-economic level.

Half Pint’s “Greetings”

Another song that is played by the Jah Cuban disc jockeys is Half Pint’s “Greetings,” which speaks about the impact that reggae music has had around the world and about the Rastafarian religion. Half Pint, who is identified by Stolzoff (2000) as a “Dancehall style singer,” (p.170), got his start as a dee jay for sound systems in the 1980s (Barrow and Dalton, 2004). He has a unique style, which has given him both local and international appeal. He has produced
albums for both Jamaican and British audiences and the song “Greetings” is one of dancehall’s anthems of the 1980s (p. 296).

Half Pint sends greetings to his people across the world and his “Reggae ambassadors” by stating:

Greetings I bring from Jah
To all ragamuffin
If them ask you name and you number
Just tell them you a ragamuffin soldier
And if further Reggae Ambassador
Rule all over
Greetings I bring from Jah.

Jah Cuban disc jockeys can be seen as “Reggae Ambassadors” that Half Pint refers to, as they are playing reggae music for their audience and showing that they are able to understand the importance of the musical form, in addition to identifying with the messages in the songs. Jah Cuban is also exposing the musical form to other cultures in the South Florida community, which establishes them as “ambassadors” of the music. The Jah Cuban disc jockeys also embody the struggles of the Jamaican-American immigrants in South Florida by playing songs that show they have an elevated level of understanding not only their struggles as immigrants, but racial barriers that they still must face. This song describes that, although there are still struggles to be faced, there is so much for Jamaican-Americans to be proud of as Half Pint sings:

I open reggae mind and assuming control
And most of all it should never grow old
It’s the only music that London sold
And most of all go make the good time roll.

Similarly to Cuban-Americans, who express their pride in their Cuban heritage, so too Jamaican-Americans should stand proud for their Jamaican roots. Jah Cuban serves as a bridge between the Jamaican-American community and the Cuban-American community, as they are able to serve as “Reggae Ambassadors” despite their being Cuban-American. This song serves as
a message of empowerment to the Jamaican-American community and other immigrants of color in the South Florida region.

**Barrington Levy’s “Here I Come”**

Barrington Levy’s “Here I Come,” is popular among Jah Cuban and other disc jockeys. Referred to as a “singing sensation” by Barrow and Dalton (2004, 251), Levy, who started his career as a teenager, created “substantial stuff and went on to make a formidable body of work right up to the 1990s,” (p. 251). Levy, who is identified as a dancehall-style singer, gained popularity during the 1980s by working with sound systems (Stolzoff, 2000). This song is reminiscent of the 1980s, the beginning of dancehall and the era in which Jah Cuban specializes.

The song, “Here I Come,” refers to a young situation of the single mother, who is represented not just in Jamaican culture, but among immigrant and working-class women in the United States, as stated by the verse:

Two months later she said come and get your son  
Cause I don’t want your baby to come tie me down  
Because you are old, and I am young  
Yes, while I’m young, yes, I want to have some fun.

The attitude of the absentee father is highlighted in this song. Unlike in the United States, there are few child support laws in Jamaica. Fathers are often able to completely ignore their children, creating hostility between the mother and the father of the child. Single mothers going through similar experiences are able to identify with Levy’s song. Levy’s lyrics show he is so removed from the situation that he did not know the gender of the child. This can be seen in the lyric:

On the intercom Rosie tell me to come  
She said she didn’t have a daughter she did have a son.

The scenario that Levy recreates in his song is familiar to the working-class Jamaicans and Jamaican-Americans who hear the song. Having a child out of wedlock may be a familiar story
to the patrons at events where Jah Cuban plays. While the lyric is playful, it underscores an understanding of what Jamaican-American immigrant women are going through.

**Sizzla Kolanji’s “Praise Ye Jah”**

A very controversial and one of the newer deejays in dancehall, Sizzla Kolanji is known for very powerful and violent lyrics. A Rastafarian himself, Kolanji’s lyrics are not typical of most of the Rastafarians who have become popular in dancehall.

By playing the song “Praise Ye Jah,” Jah Cuban shows that they not only understand the hardships of the Jamaican-American immigrants but understand the religion of the people as well. The song criticizes the Catholic Church and calls for listeners of Kolanji’s song to turn against the Church and follow the teachings of Rastafari:

> I see how yuh [you] constantly building churches  
> But a church defend di [the] slackness as usual.  
> Rasta nuh [doesn’t] mix up with homo(sexual).

While the song reiterates the anti-gay stance of the Rastafarian faith, which mirrors Jamaican cultural beliefs, it is also about the uplifting of black people and the belief in a “black” religion, Rastafarianism. Although most of the disc jockeys, except for Rockaz, are not Rastas, they still identify with the messages in the song, although it may go against their parents’ faith. Jamaican immigrants are able reinstate their “Jamaicaness” as having a separate belief system from their American counterparts. This song highlights the similarities between Hispanic and Jamaican men by reinforcing the “macho” character of Latin American and Caribbean men, the idea that real men do not sleep with other men. Kolanji’s songs are performed in Jamaican dialect, which makes them hard to understand by the dominant group, but the Jah Cuban disc jockeys are able to understand the song and the dialect, in addition to speaking the Patois themselves. This gives them validity as “ambassadors” of Jamaican music and culture, although they are not Jamaican themselves. Fanon (1967) states that whites who sympathize with blacks
are looked down on and are alienated similar to the alienation experienced by the black population and Jamaican immigrants. Kolanji states that he is opening the eyes of the youth in his lyric:

    Jesus and his disciples dey [they] were all black
    De [The] truth is real make it known to the boys and girl

The Jah Cuban disc jockeys identify with the struggles faced by the Jamaican-American community and sympathize with them. Although racially identified as white, the Jah Cuban disc jockeys, are ethnically different and therefore treated differently by white Americans descendants. The choice of this song affirms the disc jockeys’ choices to identify with Jamaican immigrants on a personal level.

**Sizzla Kolanji’s “Holding Firm”**

    But I’m Holding firm
    Every man deserves to earn
    Jah Jah come and plant with success,
    Holding firm every man deserves to earn/Every man has his turn
    You won't sink I in the mess

This song speaks directly to the dominant group. The song states that although the dominant group tries to hold down the non-dominant groups, the non-dominant groups will not be defeated. It also asserts that the non-dominant groups deserve to have access to the benefits enjoyed by the dominant group.

Although the circumstances of people of African heritage have changed, progress still has to be made in regard to overcoming obstacles in current day society. Music allows for people in the African Diaspora to express themselves openly, stating their true emotions and viewpoints creatively without being openly discriminated against by dominant structures. Similar to dancehall, Hall (as quoted in Morley and Kuan-Hsing, 1996) states that “black popular culture is
a contradictory space” (as quoted in Morley and Kuan-Hsing, p. 470). He goes on to note that no matter how black people and black culture have been represented;

We continue to see, in the figures and repertoires on which popular culture draws, the experiences that stand behind them. In its expressivity, its musicality, its orality, in its rich, deep, and varied attention to speech, in its inflections toward the vernacular and the local, in its rich production of counter-narratives, and above all, in its metaphorical use of the musical vocabulary, black popular culture has enabled the surfacing, inside the mixed and contradictory modes, even some of mainstream popular culture, of elements of a discourse that is different – other forms of life, other traditions of representation. (as quoted in Morley and Kuan-Hsing, p. 470)

These differences speak to the African experience in the New World. The messages in the songs speak directly to the struggles faced by all non-dominant groups in Jamaica, as well as the United States.

It is through these messages that Jah Cuban disc jockeys are able to identify with the Jamaican-American community in South Florida. Being part of the working class, the disc jockeys can identify with the message in Kolanji’s song telling them to “hold firm” and they, too, “deserve to earn.” Kolanji tells his listeners that greed and envy will not lead to happiness, but having Jah in one’s life is the way to happiness. This song has a message to which individuals from several groups can identify. The working class and other immigrants, not just Jamaican-Americans, can relate to the message that the struggle is not an easy one, but they should keep moving on. Good work and a giving heart are more important that monetary means. Everyone gets their turn to prosper. Life has a “higher” meaning.

**Summary**

I believe that the message in these songs has enabled non-dominant groups to remain uplifted even in times of struggle. It is this fighting power that has allowed for these groups to remain resilient and overcome obstacles faced throughout life. It is this resilience that kept Martin Luther King, Jr., marching. It is resilience that has allowed non-dominant group members
to rise above prejudices, for women to have the right to vote, for Nelson Mandela to become South Africa’s first black president, and for Barack Obama to become president of the United States. In choosing these songs, Jah Cuban is able to expose this music not only to the Jamaican Diaspora, but also to their Cuban-American counterparts. Rose states that the mass-production and easy access to these songs allows for other oppressed groups to hear the messages in the songs. According to Rose (1994), “these mass-mediated and mass-distributed alternative codes and camouflaged meanings are also made vastly more accessible to oppressed and sympathetic groups around the world and contribute to developing cultural bridges among such groups.” (p. 101).

The songs chosen by Jah Cuban have similar messages of upliftment and empowerment to which all non-dominant groups can identify. Most of these songs encourage their audience to remain strong in the face of adversity, fight for equal rights, and not give in to messages of inferiority. Women, the poor, the disabled, and non-white ethnicities can gain personal strength through these songs although they are intended for the Jamaican Diaspora. In choosing these songs, Jah Cuban shows an understanding of the Jamaican-American struggle in the United States. By showing their understanding of these struggles, they bridge the divide between Cuban-Americans and Jamaican-Americans, highlighting the fact that the two groups have similar experiences. Through playing these songs they create an interaction between the two immigrant groups. These interactions fit perfectly with the Co-Cultural Theory of Orbe (as quoted in Gudykunst, 2005), where non-dominant groups’ experiences are similar and therefore they create communication structures where they can express their shared understanding and resist the unfair treatment they receive from the dominant white group (Orbe, as quoted in Gudykunst, pp. 173-
174). The interaction between these non-dominant groups creates a cross-cultural bridge for these groups to interact and support each other.
CHAPTER 6
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The interaction between Jamaican-American and Cuban-American immigrants has become more intimate with the emergence of Jah Cuban. By bridging the two cultures, Jah Cuban has emphasized similarities between the two immigrant groups. This study highlights the individual perspectives of the Jah Cuban disc jockeys. It is not meant to generalize young Cuban-American sentiment towards other immigrants. It attempts to explain the causes for the formation of Jah Cuban and the motivations for playing Jamaican dancehall music.

The question central to my research is “What motivates Jah Cubans’ members to play Jamaican dancehall music?” The Jah Cuban disc jockeys all come from similar backgrounds in terms of race and socio-economic levels. Being young, Hispanic, and working class have caused the disc jockeys to express their dissatisfaction with their roles in society. Having faced obstacles in their lives, they seek an alternative voice to express their frustration. Dancehall music is this voice. The Jah Cuban disc jockeys want to resist negative stereotypes about themselves in addition to seeking out messages of empowerment to continue breaking down racial and socio-economic barriers in society. Being Hispanic and of the working class, Jah Cuban disc jockeys are part of the underrepresented group as identified by Orbe (as quoted in Gudykunst, 2005) in Co-Cultural Theory. The Jah Cuban disc jockeys and their families have undergone discrimination based on race and socio-economic level, as well as being culturally different from the dominant group, made up of well-to-do, able-bodied, white males of European decent.

The Jah Cuban disc jockeys represent a new generation of Cuban-Americans who want to set themselves apart from the stereotype of the traditional Cuban refugee. In Mendez’s 1994 book, Cubans in America, she highlights the generational differences between the Cuban refugee, known as the “Cuban in exile,” and what she calls “first-generation Cuban Americans”
According to Mendez, “first-generation Cuban Americans – those born in the United States – or those who came to the United States very young are far more distanced from Cuba,” (p. 65). She states that these Cuban-Americans have recreated an island paradise through stories they have heard. These stories lead to nostalgia of an island far removed from their experience or reality. She states that these Cuban-Americans feel divided in terms of identity, but see their lives as being completely in the United States (p. 65). It is within this group that Jah Cuban belongs. It is this realization that motivates the disc jockeys to speak out against injustices in the United States, as they see their lives solely in America. Unlike generations before them, the disc jockeys have no inclination to return to or reclaim Cuba.

Although the disc jockeys have varying stories on the actual formation of Jah Cuban, the ideology behind forming the sound system is the same for the three founding members, Rey Cuban, Scarhead, and Mr. Green. All three founding members were around the same age and looking for guidance. They wanted something that would set them apart from their counterparts. The music was something new and different and caught the attention of these young Cuban-American males. Jah Felix, who before joining Jah Cuban was a hip hop disc jockey, is able to play other forms of music which has diversified the group. Although they state that they play different types of music, the music mostly played by the disc jockeys is Jamaican music. By stating that they are diverse they are able to get more bookings and exposure for the sound system. As individual disc jockeys playing under the Jah Cuban name, each disc jockey shows his personal diversity. When it comes to playing as a group, the disc jockeys tend to play primarily Jamaican music.

Another question that is central to this research is “How does Jah Cuban use dancehall music to bridge the cultural divide between Jamaican-Americans and Cuban-Americans in South
Florida?” The Jah Cuban disc jockeys realize that the messages of resistance, upliftment, and empowerment in dancehall music is not just limited to the Jamaican Diaspora, but can also be a message for other minority groups as well. By playing this form of music, Jah Cuban is highlighting the similarities between Cuban-American and Jamaican-American immigrants in South Florida and throughout the United States. Highlighting these similarities makes Jah Cuban a bridge between Cuban-Americans and Jamaican-Americans. They serve as ambassadors, breaking down cultural barriers between different ethnic groups in South Florida. Orbe (as quoted in Gudykunst, 2005) states that non-dominant groups often adopt certain communication devices through which they are able to criticize the oppression of the dominant group. Through the use of Jamaican dancehall, Cuban-Americans and Jamaican-Americans are able to express this oppression. Although Jah Cuban’s disc jockeys are proud of their Cuban heritage, they also are able to become part of the Jamaican Diaspora. This shows that one is able to maintain one’s own culture, but identify similarities in other ethnicities and therefore create awareness and a co-cultural existence, as stated by Co-Cultural Theory. The interaction between Jah Cuban and Jamaican-Americans has a positive impact and cultures come together, breaking down stereotypes and uplifting each other.

This research also explains “How do audiences in South Florida consume dancehall?” Audiences in South Florida consume dancehall in several different ways. They listen to the music on CDs in their houses and cars and/or hear it on the radio. South Florida is home to several underground Jamaican radio stations that play the music consistently. Commercial radio stations also have segments in their regular programming where they play dancehall for their Jamaican and Caribbean audiences. Jamaican-Americans also consume the music at parties.
Another question that this research explains is “What do audiences in South Florida get from their consumption of dancehall?” Audiences in South Florida consume dancehall for several reasons. They use the music to empower and uplift themselves while resisting the labels placed on them by the dominant group. They also look to dancehall for spiritual guidance in terms of the Rastafarian faith. Orbe (as quoted in Gudykunst, 2005) defines non-dominant groups as “people of color, women, persons with disabilities, gays/lesbians/bisexuals, and those from a lower socio-economic background” (as quoted in Gudykunst, 2000, p. 174). I believe that people who practice religions other than Judeo-Christian should also be included in the non-dominant category. The songs played by the Jah Cuban Sound System often have some reference to Rastafarianism and the struggle of the “non-dominant group.” The audience in South Florida also uses the music to express their differences from the dominant groups and other minority groups, especially gays, which reiterates their “Jamaicaness.” Jamaican-Americans are able to remain connected to Jamaica through the consumption of dancehall. The music also creates a form of nostalgia where Jamaican-Americans are able to reminisce and recall what was happening in their lives based on the song being played.

Finally, this research explains “What is the future for dancehall?” Dancehall music will continue to evolve. By means of reinventing itself, it has a different appeal through its many branches. Jamaican music has international appeal, not just to the Jamaican Diaspora, but to regions far beyond. The members of Jah Cuban are not the only “non-Jamaican” disc jockeys that specialize in Jamaican music. A group called Mighty Crown consists of Japanese disc jockeys who also specialize in dancehall and who have created a cult following in Japan. With the global appeal of dancehall’s father, reggae, dancehall was able to gain popularity. Artists from around the world have created their own songs, some in their native languages, while
others, such as Germany’s dancehall artist Gentleman have songs in Patois, Jamaica’s language of the disadvantaged. There are hybrids of dancehall, such as reggaeton, that have also gained international followings.

Dancehall has and always will be a music of the people. It expresses the struggles of the people, serves as a form of religious guidance, and uplifts, empowers, and motivates the people who consume it. It is able to function both commercially and underground, internationally and locally. As long as there are injustices in the world, dancehall will always be. I believe it will continue to grow in terms of global acclaim, just as reggae did before it. No matter where one is from, they will be able to identify with some facet of dancehall therefore ensuring the music form’s longevity.
CHAPTER 7
SUGGESTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

By doing my thesis on Jah Cuban Sound System I am following the tradition of academics who are committed to studying and valuing popular culture. I hope that my approach to this study will lead to more qualitative research and not just quantitative studies of marginalized groups. I would like to see groups like Jah Cuban recognized for the contribution they have made to bringing cultures together. I would also like to see the Jah Cuban Sound System gain publicity for its work. Orbe (as quoted in Gudykunst, 2005) states that non-dominant groups often adopt certain communication tactics through which they are able to criticize their oppression by the dominant group. Through the use of Jamaican dancehall, Cuban-Americans and Jamaican-Americans are able to express this oppression. There are limitations to this, however, as Jamaicans and Jamaican-Americans express a disdain for the homosexual community and often exclude themselves from being compared to this group, even though they face similar discrimination. Although the message of upliftment, empowerment, and resistance can be seen to be inclusive of the homosexual community, it is rejected by some Jamaican-Americans. This creates an issue when looking at Orbe’s theory. Groups within the non-dominant group still marginalize each other. It is often easy to group people together without delving deeper into similarities and differences. I believe more research needs to be done on the “micro-groups” or groups within a group.

More research also needs be done in terms of the interactions between different minority groups within a specific region. With the continuous flow of immigrants to the United States, more research needs to be done about first-generation Americans.
My research was limited as I was only able to attend two bookings with the Jah Cuban disc jockeys. More research needs to be done in regards to attending events where the disc jockeys play.

Stepick (1998) has done research on Cuban-Americans as well as Haitian-Americans in the South Florida region. Although others have written about these immigrants in Miami, he is the only one who goes in-depth in terms of interactions between these minority groups. Other than that done by scholars and journalists, there is little in-depth research about Jamaican immigrants in the South Florida region, although they are a large percent of the Broward County’s population. This presents two limitations; the lack of diversity in terms of published research and the limited information on Jamaican immigrants in South Florida. No one has countered Stepick’s claims and assumptions. In his research Stepick does not go in-depth about the Afro-Cuban population and their treatment after arriving in Miami. Neither does he fully address the social and economic changes that took place in the 1980s with the drug wars in Miami.

In doing this research and looking at Jah Cuban, I found very little information on the Afro-Cuban population in South Florida or the United States as a whole. Other than finding information about salsa, which is stated to be an Afro-centric musical form (Mendez, 1994), and Celia Cruz who was “Afro-Cuban,” there is little research on the racial make-up and interactions among Cuban-Americans. The little information I did find was in Gonzalo Soruco’s (1996) Cubans and the Mass Media in South Florida, which had negative connotations, as it stated that all black Cuban-Americans came to the United States on the Mariel boatlift (p.10). It also stated that Fidel Castro was shedding criminals and the mentally ill through this means and that crime in Miami increased once these Cuban immigrants arrived. There is also little research on the interactions between immigrants who have lived in the United States for a number of years and
those who are newcomers to the country. I was able to find information that stated that Cuban-Americans assist newcomers socially and economically, in Stepick’s *Miami Now! Immigration, Ethnicity and Social Change* (1992), but this information was not very detailed (pp. 7-8).

The younger generation of Cuban-Americans viewpoints is changing politically as well. Although most Cuban-Americans are still Republican, the Jah Cuban disc jockeys all vote democrat and voted for Obama in the past election.

Finally, it was very difficult to recruit participants for the in-depth interviews at the events I attended. There were several distractions and the attendees seemed annoyed when I asked questions since their primary objective was to listen to the music. I believe that the young immigrants or descendants of immigrants in South Florida need to express their views and ideologies and have them recorded as they build new paths for future generations to follow.
APPENDIX
INTERVIEWS

Interview with Rey Cuban

Q1: When was the first time you heard Jamaican music? How old were you?

A: I was 10 years old when I first heard Jamaican music on the radio, but I didn’t truly begin to listen to the music until I was 16.

Q2: What was happening in your life at that time?

A: At 16 years old, I dropped out of high school and needed “good influences” in my life. I saw Jamaican music as an escape. I love Jamaican music and thought that playing the music was my destiny.

Q3: What did you like about Jamaican music?

A: I like Jamaican music because it is political and every person in gets a chance to be an artist or choose who the next great artist will be. I like the fact that Jamaican music is a mixture of all different types of music from Middle Eastern, African, to Latin.

Q4: How was Jah Cuban formed?

A: One night Scarhead, Greens, and I went to a Jamaican sound clash with Tony Matterhorn, Bass Odyssey, and Killamanjaro sound systems in 2000. It was after that experience that the three of us decided to become disc jockeys.

Q5: When was Jah Cuban formed?

A: In 2000 we decided to form a sound system and play at parties. We called ourselves “The Cubans.” We would also be online in an underground network known as MIRC. People would buy records, burn them, and give them to each other online. We created our own pirate radio station. It was through MIRC that a German producer heard us and invited us to go to Germany.
Q6: How did you get your alias?

A: Seeing that I am Cuban, I wanted that to be part of my name and my first name is Rey, so I decided to make my name Rey Cuban.

Q7: Where were you born?

A: I was born in Havana, Cuba, and came to the United States when I was 8 years old.

Q8: What does your family think about the fact that you love Jamaican music?

A: My family is proud of the fact that I can get along in different cultures.

Q9: What do they [your family] think about Jah Cuban Sound System?

A: My family is proud of the achievements that Jah Cuban has made and the fact that I have been able to travel around the world playing music.

Q10: Where has Jah Cuban played?

A: Jah Cuban has played in Berlin, Germany; Brussels, Belgium, and Paris, France, in Europe. We have also played in New York and Miami.

Q11: Have you ever been to Jamaica? If so, what was the experience like?

A: Yeah, I have been to Jamaica over seven or eight times. The first time I went was when I was working for Sandals. I was 21 years old.

Q12: Do you want to build a career as a disc jockey?

A: I’m not sure if I want to build a career as a disc jockey. I’m not able to devote as much time as I would like to fulfill this dream. I have other obligations, such as my daughter which is the center of everything I do.

Q13: Where do you see Jah Cuban in the next ten years?
A: If the Jah Cuban disc jockeys become more mature in their dealing with having the sound system grow, I see nothing but big things, but as long as all the members are focusing on other things and do not have the sound system at the forefront, then the group may disperse.

**Interview with Louis Rockaz**

Q1: When was the first time you heard Jamaican music? How old were you?
A: I first heard Jamaican music on the radio in 1995. I was 15 years old.

Q2: What was happening in your life at that time?
A: Buju Banton released “Til Shiloh,” and I was in high school, cut class and going listen to music. When I was growing up, I wanted to rebel against my parents and get spiritual guidance.

Q3: What did you like about Jamaican music?
A: I like the messages in the songs and the spiritual guidance it gave me. I could identify with the messages and the meanings in the songs. I like the Rastafarian messages and I practice most of the Rastafarian teachings.

Q4: How was Jah Cuban formed?
A: Jah Cuban was formed before I joined it. I met Rey Munoz when he came in to VP Records store to purchase some music. We became friends and Munoz told me about the sound system Jah Cuban. I thought it was interesting to find other Cuban-Americans that liked the music as much as I did.

Q5: When was Jah Cuban formed?
A: Jah Cuban was formed before I joined. I am not sure exactly when.

Q6: How did you get your alias?
A: I was changing my dee jay name. I went through a process in order to get my alias. I like the “Roots/Rock” music. I asked Luciano, a reggae artist, for guidance. My first name is Louis so we came up with the name “Louis Rockaz.”

Q7: Where were you born?
A: I was born in Miami Beach, Florida, to Cuban-American parents who came to the United States as children.

Q8: What does your family think about the fact that you love Jamaican music?
A: I come from a musical family. I learned to play the guitar when I was younger. My family respects the music. My parents don’t really understand my love for Jamaican music. They believe it is a phase I’m going through.

Q9: What do they [your family] think about Jah Cuban Sound System?
A: They thing that it’s great that we formed a Cuban sound system, but they do not support my Jah Cuban lifestyle. They do not understand the music.

Q10: Where has Jah Cuban played?
A: I personally play at several events, including on the radio, under the name of “Louis Rockaz of Jah Cuban Sound System.”

Q11: Have you ever been to Jamaica? If so, what was the experience like?
A: You know, I have never been to Jamaica, but I plan to visit some time soon.

Q12: Do you want to build a career as a disc jockey?
A: I am building my career as a disc jockey through playing at events, as well as on the radio, but I take life as it comes. I would love to produce music or manage an artist. I don’t think I will ever quit being a disc jockey.

Q13: Where do you see Jah Cuban in the next ten years?
A: I see Jah Cuban as a recognized name in the Jamaican music industry in the next ten years. I see it as an enterprise in terms of doing production and being forefathers in the music and culture.

**Interview with Jah Felix**

Q1: When was the first time you heard Jamaican music? How old were you?
A: I was in middle school when I first heard Jamaican music. I was 11 years old.

Q2: What was happening in your life at that time?
A: I was a hip hop disc jockey but then I began listening to and wanting to play Jamaican music.

Q3: What did you like about Jamaican music?
A: I likes the rhythm and lyrics in Jamaican music.

Q4: How was Jah Cuban formed?
A: I joined Jah Cuban after they were formed. For that, you would have to ask Rey, Scarhead, and Greens.

Q5: When was Jah Cuban formed?
A: Jah Cuban was formed before I became a part of it.

Q6: How did you get your alias?

Q7: Where were you born?
A: I was born in Miami to Cuban parents.

Q8: What does your family think about the fact that you love Jamaican music?
A: My family loves the music, but they didn’t think that I would be so passionate about it.

Q9: What do they [your family] think about Jah Cuban Sound System?
A: My family is proud of the things that I and the sound have done.
Q10: Where has Jah Cuban played?
A: I have played with Jah Cuban at different parties in Miami, The Bahamas, New York, New Jersey, Jamaica, and Washington, D.C.

Q11: Have you ever been to Jamaica? If so, what was the experience like?
A: Yeah, I’ve been to Jamaica several times. I love the people. Everyone shows me “love” down there. The people make me feel at home.

Q12: Do you want to build a career as a disc jockey?
A: I sees myself doing music all my life, from being a disc jockey to producing.

Q13: Where do you see Jah Cuban in the next ten years?
A: I see Jah Cuban as an icon for other cultures that break out and do something different.

**Interview with Michael “Green” Esquivel**

Q1: When was the first time you heard Jamaican music? How old were you?
A: I always heard Bob Marley from I was a child growing up, but the music first caught my attention while I was in middle school at the age of 13. A friend loaned me Buju Banton’s “Voice of Jamaica” compact disc. The lyrics to the songs were written in the booklet and I would read along with the songs.

Q2: What was happening in your life at that time?
A: While I was in middle school I was growing and maturing, becoming a teenager.

Q3: What did you like about Jamaican music?
A: I like the rhythms, the vocals, and the originality of Jamaican music.

Q4: How was Jah Cuban formed?
A: Well, Jah Cuban was formed out of similar interests between friends. I met Rey Cuban and Scarhead while in middle school. They would call in to a party line and speak Patois, and play Jamaican music. We had several things in common, from the love of Jamaican music to the
fact that we all fall under the same zodiac sign. We are all Scorpios. While in high school, we met Jah Felix, who attended the same high school as Scarhead. It was in 1999 after listening to “World Clash” sound clash cassette tape that we decided to become a sound ourselves. A sound system from Japan, Mighty Crown, was on the cassette tape. We decided if the Japanese could do it, so could we.

Q5: When was Jah Cuban formed?
A: Jah Cuban was formed in 1999.

Q6: How did you get your alias?
A: I got my name from the party-line, I would call myself “Mr. Green,” and from that point on, everyone called me “Green” or “Greens.”

Q7: Where were you born?
A: I was born in Havana, Cuba, and came to the United States as a child.

Q8: What does your family think about the fact that you love Jamaican music?
A: My mother thinks that the music and culture is different, but she does not care that I like it, although she cannot understand the words.

Q9: What do they [your family] think about Jah Cuban Sound System?
A: They are indifferent to it. They do not involve themselves in Jah Cuban.

Q10: Where has Jah Cuban played?
A: Jah Cuban has played in Belize, Germany, and New Jersey. I only went to New Jersey with the sound system, though.

Q11: Have you ever been to Jamaica? If so, what was the experience like?
A: I go to Jamaica at least three times for the last six or seven years with my job at Unique Vacations. I spend three nights there for work. I went to Jamaica for the first time when I was 16
years old. When going on my own, I spend a week in Jamaica. I love Kingston. I go to Jamaica to do work for the sound system as well, I gets dub plates, and hangs out with friends.

Q12: Do you want to build a career as a disc jockey?
A: At first I wanted to have a career as a disc jockey, but I have a responsibility to my family and I have other priorities at this moment. It was what I wanted to do when I didn’t have to work, but I have to help support my family.

Q13: Where do you see Jah Cuban in the next ten years?
A: I am uncertain about the future of Jah Cuban, I hope to see the sound system doing “big things” in the next ten years.

**Interview with Scarhead**

Q1: When was the first time you heard Jamaican music? How old were you?
A: I heard Jamaican music for the first time while in middle school. My friend, Eddie, who was Columbian, introduced me to the music. I realized Jamaican music was being played on radio stations, such as Power 96. I was around 13 years old.

Q2: What was happening in your life at that time?
A: In my life at that time, I was in middle school trying to find myself and who I was.

Q3: What did you like about Jamaican music?
A: I was into “Booty music,” and liked the beat of the music.

Q4: How was Jah Cuban formed?
A: One night me, Rey Cuban, and Greens went to a Jamaican sound clash with Tony Matterhorn, Bass Odyssey, and Killamanjaro sound systems in 2000. It was after that experience that we decided to become disc jockeys.

Q5: When was Jah Cuban formed?
A: Jah Cuban was formed in 2000.
Q6: How did you get your alias?
A: I got my alias due to a scar across my bald head.

Q7: Where were you born?
A: I was born in Miami to an Italian mother and a Cuban father.

Q8: What does your family think about the fact that you love Jamaican music?
A: My mother does not like the music, but my father likes it. My mother does not like the loud music and me bringing people in and out of the house all the time.

Q9: What do they [your family] think about Jah Cuban Sound System?
A: My mother has never heard me play until recently and now she listens to my show on Riddims, but she is not happy about doing the disc jockey thing as a career. She would rather I finish school.

Q10: Where has Jah Cuban played?
A: Jah Cuban has played all around the world from Germany to Jamaica and New York to Miami.

Q11: Have you ever been to Jamaica? If so, what was the experience like?
A: I have been to Jamaica eight times. I love Jamaica. The first time I was there I was surprised by how nice and welcoming the people were, as opposed to those in the music business. I notice a difference between Jamaicans in Jamaica and Jamaican-Americans in Miami. I was able to relax and enjoyed eating the food. I love the parties, beaches. I like the freedom I has down there.

Q12: Do you want to build a career as a disc jockey?
A: I do not see myself being a disc jockey for a career. There’s too much politics involved in being a disc jockey. I would rather get involved in the business side of things.
Q13: Where do you see Jah Cuban in the next ten years?

A: I am not sure about Jah Cuban, as the economy is bad, but I would like to see Jah Cuban become huge and a movement known around the world. I would like to be seen as an historical icon or Jah Cuban as a label group.

Interview with Papa Keith, a Promoter and Radio Celebrity

Q1: How did you find out about Jah Cuban?

A: I first heard Jah Cuban on the radio, on Mixx 96. They sounded like they were from the Caribbean. I thought they were Jamaican, not Cuban. I was surprised when I met them and realized that they were indeed Cuban.

Q2: Why did you decide to work with them?

A: The curiosity about them and then seeing them live made me want to work with them. They were different. They had passion for the music.

Q3: What do you like about Jah Cuban?

A: I liked their passion for the music and that they were Spanish guys speaking Patios. I also like the fact that they are able to do what they do in an industry dominated by African-Americans. To see Spanish guys was something new. They have a high excitement level like myself. They look different.

Q4: How did you get involved in hosting and promoting the New York verses Florida Sound Clash?

A: My friend had an idea to bring sound clashes back to Florida. Sound clashes used to be a big thing here in Florida, but they died out. He asked me to help promote it and to host it and be the referee for the event. I was happy to help out with bringing the clash back.

Q5: How do you feel about Cuban-Americans playing Jamaican music?
A: I feel like it’s a great thing! Music is international. There is no skin color. It shows how powerful music is. I love to see that!

Q6: How often have you worked with Jah Cuban?
A: I’ve worked with Jah Cuban about five times. I like working with them. They got vibes! They’re cool brothers.

Q7: Did the supporters like Jah Cuban?
A: The supporters feel the energy. They get excited when Jah Cuban plays. They dance and sing along to the songs.

Q8: Why do you think that is?
A: Jah Cuban’s passion and knowledge of the music shows when they play. Music is international and the crowd thinks it great that Cuban-Americans can appreciate the music. The crowd is very accepting of them. They think it’s cool to see Cuban-Americans play Jamaican music. They are exciting to watch. The supporters are excited to see Jah Cuban imitating their culture.

Q9: What impact do you think Jah Cuban has on the Jamaican community in South Florida and on society as a whole?
A: I think they have a positive and powerful impact in the community. They show where the music is going. People are now aware that other people are into the culture. In terms of society, it is common to see other cultures take part in Jamaican music, people like Mighty Crown from Japan… It is becoming more common.

Q10: What is the ethnicity of the crowd?
A: The crowd is mixed, a few Latins, Jah Cuban brings their followers who are Hispanic, but it’s mostly black people.
Interview with Ralph, a Promoter and Radio Station Owner

Q1: How did you find out about Jah Cuban?

A: I had heard about Jah Cuban through another disc jockey about five years ago.

Q2: When was the first time you worked with Jah Cuban?

A: It was at this same time that I heard them play on the radio.

Q3: Why did you decide to work with them?

A: When I met Louis Rockaz, I thought that he was humble, hungry to be heard, and very talented. He has a vast amount of knowledge of music that wasn’t part of his background. I was shocked! Rockaz played better than Jamaicans and that’s their music.

Q4: What do you like about Jah Cuban?

A: I like the fact that they are knowledgeable about the music. Rockaz has good vibes. He’s positive and it shows when he plays.

Q5: How do you feel about Cuban-Americans playing Jamaican music?

A: I think that Jah Cuban is good for everyone. I am Haitian and I have a Jamaican radio station. It was an issue at first, because I was not Jamaican. Eventually that changed, though, because my station is now one of the top radio stations and people started to appreciate it. Jah Cuban brings Spanish people to appreciate Reggae music. That’s great! People see talent in Rockaz, just like they saw in me.

Q6: How often have you worked with Jah Cuban?

A: I have been working with Jah Cuban continuously since I met them five years ago. Rockaz plays on my radio station.

Q7: Do your supporters like Jah Cuban?
A: Yeah, my party supporters, as well as my listeners, like Jah Cuban. They like Rockaz and the music he plays.

Q8: Why do you think that is?
A: Jah Cuban gets appreciated more than Jamaican disc jockeys because they are Cuban and doing a good job.

Q9: What impact do you think Jah Cuban has on the Jamaican community in South Florida and on society as a whole?
A: I think their impact rests heavily on how they get marketed. Black Chiney became huge after they marketed their CDs. Jah Cuban can be just as huge. They have a positive impact on society. The events they have bring lots of different people together.

Q10: What have your supporters said about Jah Cuban?
A: The people like them. They play uplifting music and the crowd enjoys each other’s company. The people think they are good disc jockeys.

Q11: What is the energy of the crowd when Jah Cuban plays?
A: Positive. The crowd has good vibes. They are in an uplifted spirit, just like the music Jah Cuban plays.

Q12: What is the ethnicity of crowd?
A: The crowd is mixed. There is a mixture of ethnicities, everything from Trinis, Jamaicans, small islands like the V.I. and the Bahamas to African-Americans, Latin people, and white people, too.
LIST OF REFERENCES


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Nicole Phillips was born in Kingston, Jamaica. After attending elementary and high school there, she then attended the University of Florida where she received her bachelor’s degree in public relations and her master’s degree in mass communication.