

Reggae Infusions

The Power of **AND**

University of Wisconsin
Eau Claire

CATALOGING MAINSTREAM WESTERN ROCK APPROPRIATIONS OF JAMAICAN POPULAR MUSIC

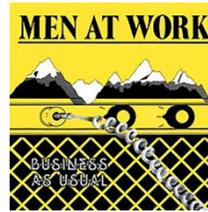
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PROJECT GOALS

Through a detailed evaluation of source materials, this research project sought to document mainstream pop tunes that featured a reggae influence between the years of 1970-1990. Using The Police (band) as a model, this process attempted to identify other artists that used reggae characteristics during this time period to increase popularity of their songs and albums and capitalize upon this style. In order to create this discography, it was essential to measure the popularity of the songs in question. Most sources were found through a focused search of Billboard chart archives in categories such as: Pop, Adult Contemporary, and Rock. After reviewing the Billboard chart archives, an assessment was made based on general reggae characteristics. Potential sources were cataloged into a final discography of additional artists using significant reggae characteristics at this time.

DEFINING REGGAE TRAITS

Reggae as a musical style draws roots from Jamaican traditions and features several defining characteristics. Musically, reggae generally includes a strong, driving baseline, anticipatory off beats, and generally slow tempo. When searching for these characteristics, observations included the type and frequency of reggae characteristics. Most songs added to this discography included at least three of the above mentioned characteristics.



Men at Work – *Business as Usual* (1981)



I Just Can't Stop It – *The Beat* (1980)



Panorama – *The Cars* (1980)

billboard

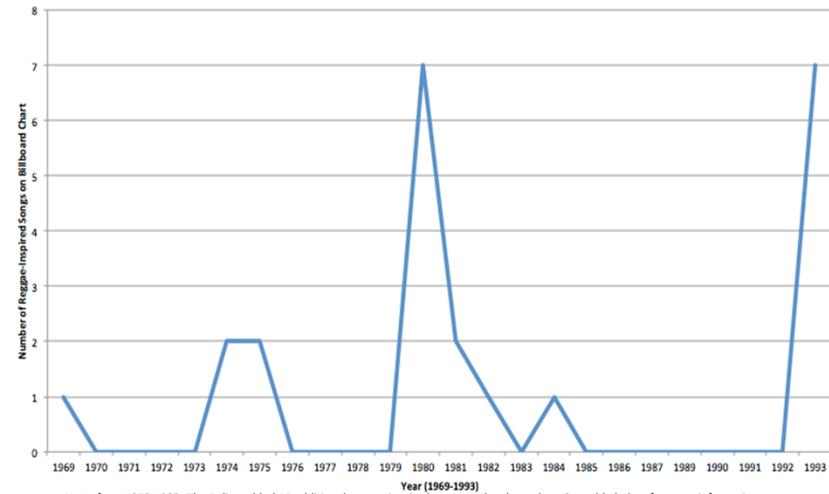
VALIDITY OF BILLBOARD CHARTS

The Billboard association started publishing its "Hot 100" weekly since early August 1958. This chart chronicles the most popular 100 songs in the US during any given week. Data was collected from all radio stations playing current music, compiling a list of the 100 most popular songs in the US each week (calculated by factoring most-played and most-purchased tracks). The list is postdated to the following Saturday. Musical trends collected in this list are often reflected in the most popular songs for the following weeks or months. The Hot 100 archives were chosen as a primary research source for this project due to their far-reaching data pool and extensive archives.

THE POLICE

As a mainstream pop group, The Police were active from 1977-1986. This group was the inspiration for this research because they were arguably the most popular and commercially successful group using reggae-inspired characteristics in their music. Police songs featuring reggae traits include 'Roxanne,' which reached #32 on Billboard's Hot 100 in 1978, and 'Don't Stand So Close to Me,' which reached #10 on Billboard's Hot 100 in 1981.

Police Album	Reggae-Inspired Songs
<i>Outlandos d'Amour</i> (1978)	5
<i>Regatta de Blanc</i> (1979)	4
<i>Zenyatta Mondatta</i> (1980)	4
<i>Ghost in the Machine</i> (1981)	2
<i>Synchronicity</i> (1982)	0



Note: from 1979-1983, The Police added 15 additional reggae-inspired songs to the above data. See table below for more information.

FINDINGS

GENERAL TRENDS

Numerous additional sources assisted in the compilation of this discography. Detailed research showed that trends pointed toward a dramatic increase of reggae-inspired songs landing on the Billboard chart in the year 1980. Before and after this time, artists using the above mentioned technique showed increased popularity. Some did place on charts as early as 1969, however others did not place at all. Over time this trend once disappeared, only to resurface with additional tracks in 1993. Additional artists at this time continued to use reggae characteristics in their released music, but these songs did not register on Billboard's charts. From research findings it is apparent that artists outside of The Police were using reggae characteristics to increase popularity of their songs as albums and songs featuring reggae-influenced songs charted generally well (example: Men At Work's reggae-influenced tracks on *Business as Usual* charted at or near #1).

IMPLICATIONS OF POPULARITY

The fact that numerous artists were using reggae traits to make their music more commercially successful suggests telling trends of cultural appropriation. This research demonstrates that none of the successful bands actively marketed themselves as reggae bands, or had any direct ties to Jamaica. These conclusions also raise ethical concerns about ownership of musical style (or characteristics), and the authenticity of reggae-inspired tracks. Often, artists even chose to add additional reggae tracks to non-reggae albums to increase the popularity of an album – and ultimately to make more money. The use of a non-dominant culture's musical style by a dominant culture for financial gain lies at the core of any investigation into musical style and its uses in mainstream Western pop music.

