

## **Uptown-Downtown Kingston: The Embodiment of Class in Jamaican Dancehall**

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The Uptown (upper-class) and Downtown (lower-class) divide is reified in Jamaica in a myriad of ways. Class inequalities, shaped by colonial legacies, pervade myriad aspects of Jamaica's political and cultural life. Dancehall is a crucial way through which these colonial inequalities can be understood due to the tensions, divisions and inherent contradictions present within the contemporary dancehall space. Dancehall, known for its inherent lewdness, is at the center of Kingston's urban sociocultural life. However, the appeal of dancehall and its romantic, exoticized and commodified nature fails to exist in the very spaces from which it originates – Kingston's inner city. In Uptown Jamaica, dancehall has taken on a different form, emerging as a stylized element of embodying "the other." Though inherently characterized by 'downtownness,' dancehall spaces are capitalized upon and made trendy or sexy by Uptown Jamaica while its Downtown version remains demeaned and criminalized. Dancehall events themselves operate on this spectrum and thus, they emerge political spaces where class identities and socioeconomic anxieties are navigated.

The overarching aim of my project was to understand how the characterization of dancehall spaces act as a means through which Jamaica's class dynamics are reproduced and perpetuated. With this, I aimed to understand how class divisions inherited from colonial legacies are reified through Uptown-Downtown contentions within dancehall. Through participant/observation at dancehall events, as well as semi-