



## Dub: Soundscapes and Shattered Songs in Jamaican Reggae by Michael E. Veal

Reviewed by Whitney Jesse Slaten

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(xxxii). She provides a useful outline of some of the important ethical elements embedded in the project, which include the way practitioners strive to be non-ideological, communitarian, spiritualized, and anti-oppressionist. It is also important to note that womanism is vernacular and identifies with the everyday. As Phillips expresses so convincingly, womanists “just act in the course of everyday life, and the nature of these actions varies widely from person to person” (xxv).

The volume is organized historically and thematically, and even includes a section on womanist critics. Phillips acknowledges that various authors contributed in different ways and in different forms, but adds that what quickly emerged was a “collective basis for an interpolated field of theory and praxis used by a host of people to follow” (xx). She is clear, however, that:

[N]one of these [early] authors created something new; rather each named something that had been in existence for some time, functioning below the academic and activist radar and outside dominant histories of consciousness. What is significant is that the time had come to name, and ultimately elaborate, this thing. (xx)

Both Evans’s and Wilson’s work demonstrate that Black women have been producing knowledge in the academy right alongside men, but Black women have also been producing knowledge outside the academy and have often been motivated by similar ethics and values that have been recently elaborated as womanism.

By giving voice to these scholars and properly contextualizing this scholarship, these three authors subtly shift the way we understand the place of academic knowledge in Black history, and we can begin to place it among other kinds of knowledge employed to transform, heal, fight, and provide succor in uncertain times. These authors demonstrate that academic knowledge should stay in the

ivory tower, but that it can also be taken out of the sterile, pompous, and limiting realm of intellectual history and learned men and placed alongside spirituality, music, prayer, magic, conjuring, poetry, folklore, and the polyphonic and polymorphic ways of knowing that have always been employed by diasporic communities—often with women in leadership roles.

Reviewed by Lee D. Baker  
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### *Dub: Soundscapes and Shattered Songs in Jamaican Reggae*

**Michael E. Veal**

**Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press (2007)  
338 pp., Paperback, \$27.95**

The task of documenting and conveying the significance of a genre’s intramusical, musical, and extramusical qualities represents a primary site of inquiry for ethnomusicologists working in the realm of sound, music, and technology. Michael Veal’s *Dub: Soundscapes and Shattered Songs in Jamaican Reggae* provides a much needed contribution to these efforts. Veal uncovers the influence of dub in Jamaica and abroad through his historical, analytical, and interpretive study. Through his description, readers are left with an understanding of the role of engineers, studios, technology, ideology, and aesthetics in the production of dub.

*Dub* music is a subgenre of Jamaican reggae and was a phenomenon that first developed during the roots reggae era between the late 1960s and early 1980s. Osbourne “King Tubby” Ruddock, Lee “Scratch” Perry, and Errol “Errol T.” Thompson pioneered the music that is characterized by a confluence of sounds that create the feeling of real and virtual

spaces. Sound engineers created this aural nebula using audiotape editing techniques, reverberation and delay technology, and other audio signal processors. Listeners typically hear these efforts as a mix of edited prerecorded instruments and voices with heavy echo and other electronic sound effects that all combine to make interesting moods, textures, and soundscapes. Unique practices in the production of dub were responsible for the music's distinction and were a result of Jamaica's dynamic historical and sociopolitical milieu surrounding the leadership of Michael Manley. In short time, the music became an international sensation. While many audiences were captivated by dub's lyrical messages that proclaim Rastafarian, Ethiopian, repatriation, and ganja sensibilities, recording studio engineers, particularly in England and the United States, began adopting many of dub's production practices for other types of popular music.

Veal enters his discussion in chapter 1 by both providing a brief history of Jamaican music that preceded dub and explaining electronic music through this frame. This necessary chapter properly fashions an understanding of the musical environment in which dub emerged. Veal's historicization of Jamaican music, in conjunction with this contextualized examination of electronic music makes the first chapter a very pointed and appropriate introduction to his work.

Chapter 2 continues the work of the first chapter by addressing more closely the economic, stylistic, and technological foundations of the genre. In particular, Veal asserts that the studio mix engineer is a composer who consciously incorporates texture and soundspace into the conceptual mix of Western musical terminology such as melody, rhythm, and harmony. For this reason, the author makes great strides in using an all-encompassing language that fully accommodates a discussion of the work of these mixers in the production of the music.

Veal dedicates much of the body of the book, from chapters 3–6, to an analysis of particular recording studios and sound engineers. While much of this writing reveals more history and equipment, the chapters prioritize the divergent styles of producing dub between different studios and sound engineers. Since no audio CD is attached to the book, the author provides a discography for the reader to obtain pertinent recordings in order to further an understanding of the intricate aesthetic choices that were made in these recording studios.

The seventh chapter explains the changes in dub at the end of the roots reggae era and how dub moved toward the digital age in the 1980s. Following this chapter, the author moves beyond the foundational considerations of the histories and for the production practices within dub toward a theorization of dub through the lens of particular postcolonial Caribbean and African diasporic tropes of exile, nostalgia, and Afrofuturism. Veal accomplishes this through his treatment of the dub mix as a microcosm for activities within Black culture. In the coda, through a comparison between dub and hip-hop, Veal demonstrates the dissemination of dub's many production practices throughout the international popular music scene. These last few chapters collectively symbolize the music's practical and theoretical movement out of its localized position in Jamaica.

The author's rigorous immersion into the world of dub—filled with detailed histories, people, technology, and politics—makes this book required reading for anyone interested in any or all of the topics he discusses. Arguably, one of the most powerful messages this work provides is yet another well-needed plea for the de-essentialization of the seemingly inextricable ties between Black music, rhythm, and primitivism within antiquated music discourse. From this perspective, not only does Veal present a music of high sophistication from Black people but one that has played an active role in setting new

standards for popular music production around the world.

Michael Veal's *Dub: Soundscapes and Shattered Songs in Jamaican Reggae* is a wonderful testament of the birth, life, and transcendence of a musical subgenre

as a dynamic cultural practice that has both influenced and been influenced by its local and global contexts.

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