

*Dub in Babylon: Understanding the Evolution and Significance of Dub Reggae in Jamaica and Britain from King Tubby to Post-punk.* Christopher Partridge. London: Equinox, 2010. xiv + 319 pp. (Paper US\$ 28.95)

Joining the small yet growing body of scholarly work on Jamaican popular music, *Dub in Babylon* is a valuable contribution to the historiography of the global dispersion of Afro-diasporic cultural forms in the twentieth century. In what might be read as a response to Paul Gilroy's recent call for a detailed history of "the special period in which black Atlantic music . . . turned into a planetary force" (2010:121), Christopher Partridge's book provides an incisive account of the extension of Jamaican cultural production through transnational networks in postimperial Britain. Deploying a multidisciplinary approach that draws upon popular music studies, cultural criticism, and religious studies, it examines the larger cultural meanings associated with dub, a genre of electronic music that emerged during the early 1970s in Jamaica and spread to the United Kingdom shortly after. It is Partridge's elucidation of dub's "outernational" impact and its socio-political, cultural, and religious significance for 1970s Britain, which he views as "a particularly fertile period for the genre and the principal country within which it was initially developed outside of Jamaica" (p. xi), that distinguishes this book from Michael E. Veal's pioneering study *Dub: Soundscapes and Shattered Songs in Jamaican Reggae*.

*Dub in Babylon* is organized into two distinctive, yet intertwined, narratives. The first part centers on the history and core politico-religious ideas of Rastafarianism and its interconnectedness with reggae and dub. Moreover, it examines the reception of the Rastafari movement and its culture in postwar Britain as well as the emergence of both musical genres in Jamaica. The second part, which comprises the bulk of the study and represents Partridge's main contribution to the field, examines dub's musical reception as well as its wider cultural and political impact in both black British and white subcultural settings in the multiracial United Kingdom of the 1970s and early 1980s. Interspersing his narrative with case studies of important dub practitioners such as King Tubby, Lee "Scratch" Perry, and Adrian Sherwood, Partridge deploys what he denotes as a "dub methodology." Whereas the first part is concerned with the creation of dub's sound and its attendant ideas, the second part illuminates the "reflection of the sound, its reception by listeners who are hearing it after a period of delay

and the consequences of that delay on the sound and the ideas with which it was originally invested" (p. xii). Mirroring this homologous methodology, Partridge's central claim is that the spread and reception of dub in the United Kingdom led to a significant shift in the music's meaning, which brought about a gradual dilution of the original Jamaican liberationist discourse.

Chapter 1 traces the confluence of socio-cultural, political, and religious ideas derived from various streams of Afro-Christianity, which spawned the emergence of Rastafarianism in the early 1930s as well as the movement's impact after it spread to the United Kingdom in the 1950s. Chapter 2 illuminates the advent of dub as an explicitly religious and "occultural" art, which simultaneously has been invested with political and liberationist signification. Chapter 3 situates the music's production, circulation, and reception in a "second Babylon" in which the postwar United Kingdom underwent a socio-cultural reshaping in the wake of its African Caribbean mass migration. The next chapter explores U.K. subcultural exchange of the mid-1970s between punk, reggae, and dub as well as the work of the U.K.'s foremost dub poet Linton Kwesi Johnson. This exchange became an important medium of socio-political change, which influenced the world-views of white urban youths, thereby contributing significantly to the rise of an antiracism movement. Focusing on the work of Adrian Sherwood and important artists associated with his On-U Sound record label, the final chapter locates British 1980s postpunk dub within the discursive matrix of postmodernism in which sonic signifiers became free-floating and increasingly detached from their original context, thereby undermining the music's religio-political signification.

Cutting across lines of race, nation, and class, *Dub in Babylon* offers a much-needed desegregation of music historiography and an insightful account of the complex dynamics surrounding the transcultural diffusion of black musical knowledge. Given the significance of the foregrounding of technological mediation and electronic sound processing in dub, the book would have benefited from a greater engagement with recent scholarship on the interface between race and technology beyond the conceptual confines of Afrofuturism. At times Partridge's discussion of the mid-1970s alliance between reggae/dub and punk musicians tends to skim over questions concerning the nexus between power and cultural mobility pertinent to a dynamic that he conceives of in terms of an "appropriation of the signs

and meanings produced within black culture" (p. 189). Key figure and deejay Don Letts's quote that "a lot of young people during the mid-seventies were taking what they needed from Rastafari and left what they didn't" (p. 247) seems to suggest that this alliance was not without its discontents. Aside from these minor quibbles, *Dub in Babylon* is a valuable contribution to the opening of a critical space, which is concerned with transpositions, adaptations, and representations of Afro-diasporic cultural knowledge in the black Atlantic continuum.

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