Judging by the style of her writing, it is apparent that Velma Pollard is not only a proficient linguist but also a talented writer and poet. This book should appeal to anyone—from a sociolinguist, a historian, an anthropologist, a liberal arts student, a religious scholar, and even Bob and Betty next door who wish to learn more about the development and influence of Dread Talk (DT). Pollard has embarked on a worthwhile task by pooling together material about DT, also known as Rasta Talk, in a concise manner. It is, as she explains, “the language that has evolved and particularly [to] the lexical items that have emerged as a result of the impact of the movement on the Jamaican speech situation” (3).

I found my experience while reading this book to be enjoyable because Pollard demonstrated her wealth of knowledge about the subject. She clearly speaks of the social history of DT and its link to protest—whether considered rooted in politics, poverty, or revival. The evidence is in the language change—from Jamaican Creole (JC) to DT—that challenges society by “stepping up” the expressions of protest.

After finishing her book, one aspect of much importance that I gathered was music. Moreover, I realized that words and lyrics are held in high regard. In Jamaica, renowned musicians such as Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, Jimmy Cliff, and others communicated their protest message most effectively through words and rhythms. This was accepted with great fervor while DT became saturated in music and dance. Similar to these art forms, this language is heard in poetic expressions as well. Some examples of words that have been modified include: “down press” for oppress and “apprecilove” for appreciate. I think this is both creative and thought provoking. I became quite engaged after learning about the evolution of the language. Furthermore, I was able to formulate a bit of understanding as to how they invent the words they use in their common speech.
Pollard credits the language and its modifications to “reflect the religious, political, and philosophical positions of the believers of the Rastafari” (18). Those studying, researching or curious about these beliefs might wish to visit G.E. Simpson’s 1970 book titled Religious Cults of the Caribbean. Pollard references this publication to describe the convictions of the Rastafari faith that are in the form of six doctrines. Firstly, black men are reincarnations of the ancient Israelites and were exiled to the West Indies because of their transgressions. Secondly, the black man is superior to the white man. Thirdly, the Jamaican circumstance is a hopeless Hell. Conversely, Ethiopia is Heaven. The next doctrine states that the crowning of the Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia in 1930 proclaimed him as the Living God.

In addition to its religious influence, there has also been a global influence made-one that has spread the Rasta culture to Cuba, North America and other countries. The sixth chapter, devoted to “Globalization and the Language of Rastafari,” mentions the enormous diffusion of DT in the world. There are two Rasta Patois dictionaries available on the internet. There is a Caribbean version and to my surprise, a Russian version. In terms of Cuba, Rasta music (reggae, hip-hop, etc.) is making great strides among youth. Pollard calls this process “transculturacion” (108). This is a vivid example of the far-reaching extension of the Rastafarian movement. The book exemplifies the profound influence and importance of DT.