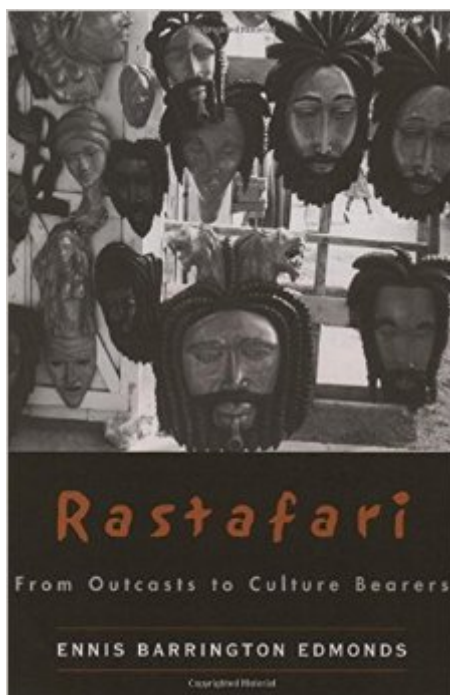


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Rastafari: From Outcasts To Cultural Bearers



Synopsis

Once an obscure group of outcasts from the ghettos of West Kingston, Jamaica, the Rastafarians have transformed themselves into a vibrant movement, firmly grounded in Jamaican society and beyond. In *Rastafari*, Ennis Barrington Edmonds provides a compelling portrait of the Rastafarian phenomenon and chronicles how this group, much maligned and persecuted, became a dominant cultural force in the world today. Edmonds charts the evolution of the relationship between Rastafari and the wider Jamaican society, from confrontation and repression to grudging tolerance and eventually to cultural integration. Edmonds focuses in particular on the internal development of Rastafarianism as a social movement, with its network of "houses" (small, informal groups that form around leading Rastas) and "mansions" (larger, more communal associations), to track the process of this strikingly successful integration. He further demonstrates how Rastafarian artistic creativity, especially in fashioning the music and message of reggae, was a significant factor in the transition of Rastas from the status of outcasts to the position of cultural bearers.

Book Information

Paperback: 212 pages

Publisher: Oxford University Press; 1 edition (March 1, 2008)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0195340485

ISBN-13: 978-0195340488

Product Dimensions: 8.9 x 0.4 x 6 inches

Shipping Weight: 8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (2 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #1,684,142 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) [#58 in Books > Religion & Spirituality > Other Religions, Practices & Sacred Texts > Tribal & Ethnic > Rastafari Movement](#) [#76 in Books > History > Americas > Caribbean & West Indies > Jamaica](#) [#541 in Books > History > World > Religious > Ethnic & Tribal](#)

Customer Reviews

The publication of *Rastafari* represents the author's maturing views on the birth and development of a powerful religious movement from the Majority World—a movement regarded by some as the only major religion having its genesis in the 20th century. Here we learn of the humble beginning of the movement in the 1930s, its consolidation in the following two decades, its flowering in the 70s and 80s and of its global impact particularly in the final decade of the last century. In seven chapters,

Edmonds successfully argues his thesis that the entrenchment of Rastafari was made possible by (1) the internal development of the movement, (2) the gradual rapprochement between the movement and the wider society, and (3) the impact of Rastafari on the evolution of Jamaica's indigenous popular culture' (p.4). The appendix, "A Review of the Literature on Rastafari," significantly updates the material found in the dissertation. One notices too that the writer has carried out his sociological analysis so rigorously that there is little or no evaluation of the theological and historical claims of Rastafari. For example, whereas others have pointed out the lack of documentary evidence for the Garvey prophecy concerning the crowning of Ras Tafari, Edmonds appears prepared to defend the prediction by invoking the reliability of the oral tradition that bears it (p. 147 n.34). Edmonds is also optimistic that the movement has a bright future but also observes that "during the decade of the 1990s several notable Rastas, including Tommy Cowan and Judy Mowatt (of the I/Threes [sic]), converted to evangelical Christianity. This defection raises further questions about the possible demise of Rastafari." In fact, Ms.

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