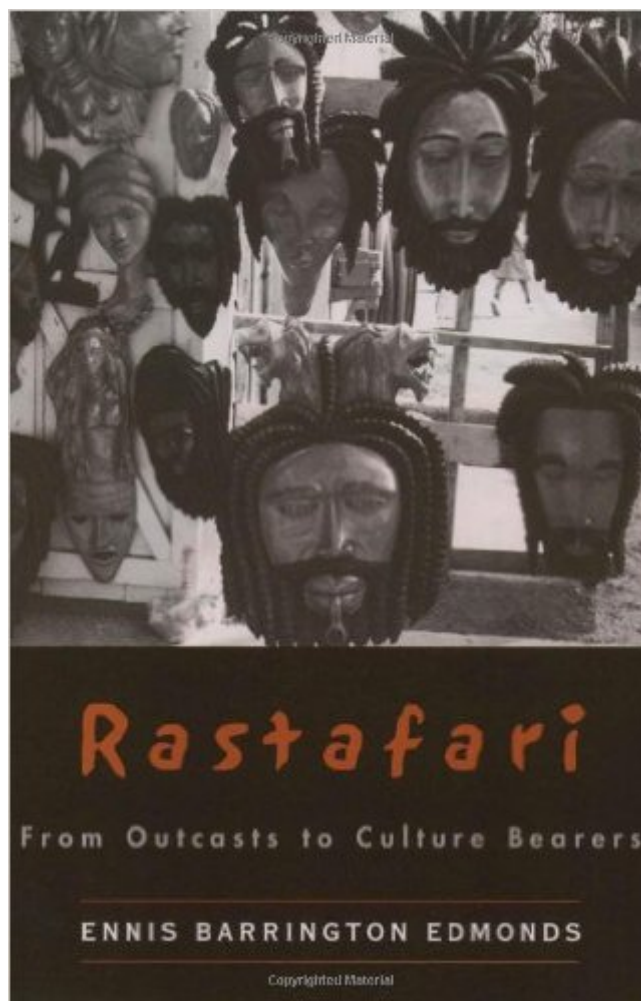


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Rastafari: From Outcasts To Culture Bearers



Synopsis

Since its emergence from the ghettos of West Kingston, Jamaica in the 1930s, the Rastafarian Movement has been transformed from an obscure group of outcasts to a vibrant movement that has not only become firmly entrenched in Jamaican society, but has successfully expanded beyond the Caribbean to North America, the British Isles, and Africa. Ennis Barrington Edmonds provides a compelling portrait of the Rastafarian phenomenon and chronicles how a once-obscure 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. In the early years of the movement, there was outright confrontation and repression, as Rastas were seen as a threat to Jamaican society. This evolved into a grudging tolerance and eventually an aggressive appropriation of Rastafarian symbols in the 1970s and 1980s--as evidenced by the veritable coronation of reggae artist Bob Marley--resulting in the "culture tourism" of the late twentieth century. 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 culture bearers. Rastafari presents an intimate account of a unique movement, which over the course of several decades had entrenched itself in Jamaican society and has become the international cultural and political force it is today.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Rastafari: From Outcasts to Culture Bearers. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. (Pp. x -194). By Ennis Barrington Edmonds. 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 of 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.

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