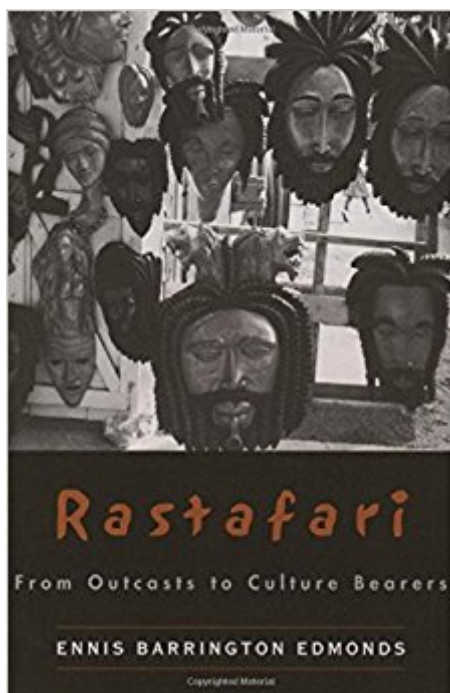


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Rastafari: From Outcasts To Cultural Bearers



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.

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Customer Reviews

"Ennis Edmonds provides a lucid and thought-provoking argument for how Rastafari has become established as a mainstay in Jamaican culture. Modifying Weberian notions of routinization and charisma, Edmonds demonstrates how Rastafari symbols have permeated Jamaican society, ensuring the continued existence of the movement despite its minimal formal structure. Rastafari is important not only to scholars of Caribbean religions, but to anyone interested in how new religions

find a stable place in society."--Richard C. Salter, Department of Religious Studies, Hobart and William Smith Colleges

"Not only does Edmonds' work provide an engaging introduction to the history, cosmology, structure and ritual of Rastafari, it also presents a strong framework for understanding how this religious movement grew from its roots among a group of "denigrated outcasts" to a world religion without developing the institutional forms that scholars generally associate with religions. With a sophisticated reworking of Max Weber's theory of charisma and routinization, Edmonds sheds light on the development of this particular movement but also poses challenging questions about the histories of religious movements more broadly. Edmonds' work is essential reading for anyone interested in Rastafari and in theoretical approaches to religious movements."--Judith Weisenfeld, Department of Religion, Vassar College

"Edmonds's work sounds a new depth in the maturing of the scholarship on Rastafari. Not simply another general introduction, this book adapts Weber's theory of charisma and routinization to analyze Rastafari, thereby breaking new scholarly ground and yielding many intriguing insights to our collective knowledge of this globally-impacting two-thirds world identity movement. As such, this study is a welcome contribution."--William David Spencer, author of *Dread Jesus* and co-editor of *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader*

"Ennis Edmonds's Rastafari is cogently written and persuasive. I am undecided as to which is more valuable, its contribution to the literature on charisma and routinization or its contribution to the literature on Rastafari. In truth it is a fine introduction to Weber's thesis on the institution of religion and at the same time an excellent explanation to anyone trying to understand how it is that after seven decades Rastafari is such an integral part of the Jamaican mindscape but must still fight for its legitimacy."--Barry Chevannes, author of *Rastafari: Roots and Ideology*

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Ennis Barrington Edmonds is an Assistant Professor at Kenyon College.

Very informative and engaging.

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. Mowatt, in an interview on Jamaica's CVM TV, even claims that the late Robert Nesta Marley made a deathbed profession of faith. A similar testimony is to be found in Hannah's book (p. 62). Interestingly, Marley's mother, turned

biographer (Bob Marley: An Intimate Portrait), was a Christian before she was converted to the Rastafari by her famous 'Jam-icon' son. I have noticed just a single typo, something looking like an e-mail address on page 49: 'the lying. Preacher.' All in all, Rastafari is recommended as one of the most up-to-date and balanced treatments by a non-Rasta. For the student and scholar in particular, it should be read alongside Dr. Ikael Tafari's monograph, Rastafari in Transition, also from a sociological perspective.

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