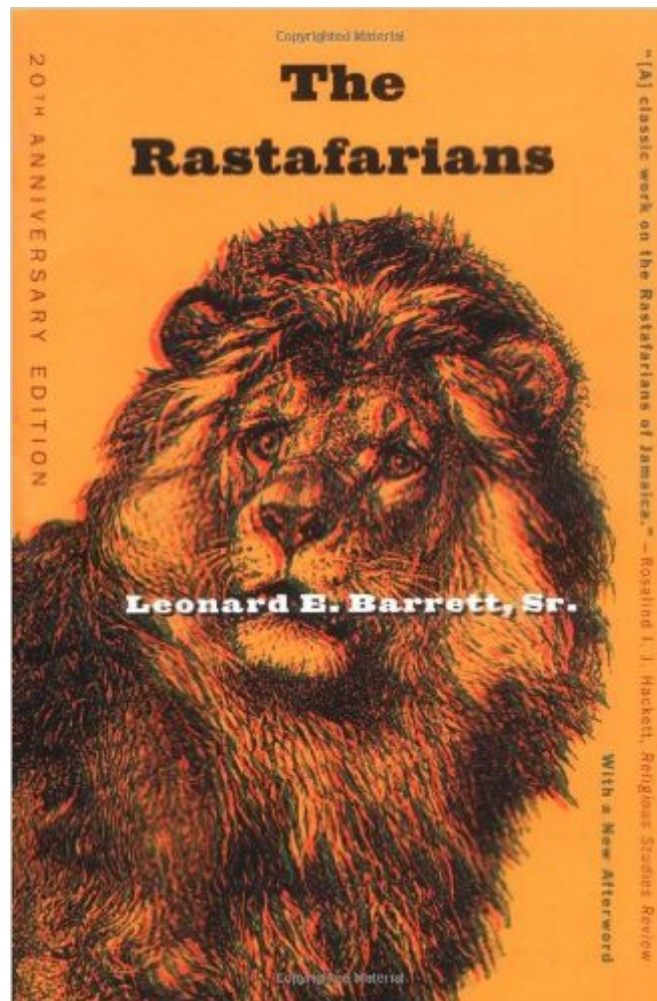


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# The Rastafarians: Twentieth Anniversary Edition



## Synopsis

The classic work on the history and beliefs of the Rastafarians, whose roots of protest go back to the seventeenth-century maroon societies of escaped slaves in Jamaica. Based on an extensive study of the Rastafarians, their history, their ideology, and their influence in Jamaica, *The Rastafarians* is an important contribution to the sociology of religion and to our knowledge of the variety of religious expressions that have grown up during the West African Diaspora in the Western Hemisphere.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Being somewhat familiar with the Rastafari movement already and being somewhat fascinated by the culture I decided to read this book. The book starts out by tracing the history of slavery in Jamaica and outlining the conditions that precipitated a movement such as Rastafarianism which seeks a more equitable and just society. A decent amount is dedicated to Ethiopia and the idea of Ethiopianism where Rastafarians basically view this country in the same way as Zion is viewed by the Jews. Later elaboration explains mythical elements of the religion as well as the symbols, beliefs and rituals of the group such as smoking herb for a deeper understanding of a cosmic consciousness. I especially enjoyed the parts in the book where the author expounded upon the artistic improvements Rastas have made not only in Jamaica but the world over with things such as reggae music. Also kudos to him for talking about Bob Marley because he is a good reason the

religion has gained popularity the world over. I won't give this book a 5 of 5 though because I did find the last chapter to be somewhat rambling and some of the ideas in the book are repeated a little bit too much for my taste. I think some people who aren't as interested in the movement as I am would have a little trouble keeping interested the whole way through. All-in-all though I think this is a pretty good read and does a good job explaining the basics of the Rastafarian beliefs and also gives detail about the socio-economic factors that contributed to this voice against colonialism and oppression.

As I have an interest in studying various sects, and had not yet spent much time learning about Rastafarianism, I bought this book for an introduction to that faith. I will say that there is much valuable content in it regarding the history of Jamaica and Jamaican slavery and the beliefs and rituals of various Rastafarian groups, and even an interesting though slim aside on the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. On the other hand, the writing is amateurish and repetitive. Perhaps each chapter began life initially as an individual paper and Barrett later compiled separate papers into his book, without removing repetitive, overlapping information. However, this does not explain the overall fair, and sometimes poor, quality of the writing in general. Additionally, while often bending over backward to apologize for questionable aspects of Rastafarian history, he seems to treat other religious traditions on the island with an attitude of judgmental disdain. Though I learned a good deal of history, I did not feel that I was reading a scholarly work.

A very good overview of Rastafarianism Leonard E. Barrett, Sr., is graduate professor of religion at Temple University and the current printing of "The Rastafarians" is the twentieth anniversary edition of an important study of the society, culture, religion, history, ideology, and influence of the Rastafarians of Jamaica. Professor Barrett has written a most comprehensive study of the Rastafarians, one perhaps deserving to be called a definitive study, spanning as it does the several decades of the movement's history. Professor Barrett is not a Rastaman, but is sympathetic to the movement and broadly if critically supportive of its aims. I purchased this book for an introduction to Rastafarianism, having been only very superficially acquainted with it. This is an ideal work for a reader to whom Rastafarianism is new as it provides a detailed yet brief history of Jamaica and the institution of slavery, the social cleavages that arose out of slavery, the lasting effects of colonialism and racial discrimination, and the history, doctrine, polity and ritual of the several Rastafarian groupings. The book covers all the major doctrines of the religion, a history of its important personages, its social and political aims and contributions, and the various denominations within the

tradition that have developed over the decades. I especially enjoyed the author's providing of some personal accounts of his interactions with Rastafarians in Jamaica. Professor Barrett has made the Rastafarian religion and culture an object of fascination for me, and a subject of which I want to learn a great deal more. I highly recommend this book.

This is the first book I read on Rastafarianism. I chose it because the author is not a Rastafarian, but he is sympathetic to the religion. Consequently, as I had hoped the book was both objective and lacked any persuasive intent. The author situates the Rastafarian religion in the history, culture and politics of Jamaica. I appreciated the author providing these connections because it gave the religion a rootedness in time and place that a work which only covered the doctrines of the religion would not afford. The book covers all the major doctrines of the religion, a history of its principal religious figures, its hopes and aspirations, its cultural contributions, and the various "schools" or "denominations" within the religion that have developed over the years. I particularly enjoyed the author's ability to speak objectively about the religion as well as provide some personal accounts of his interactions with Rastafarians in Jamaica. He made the religion fascinating to me, something I want to study more. I highly recommend this book.

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