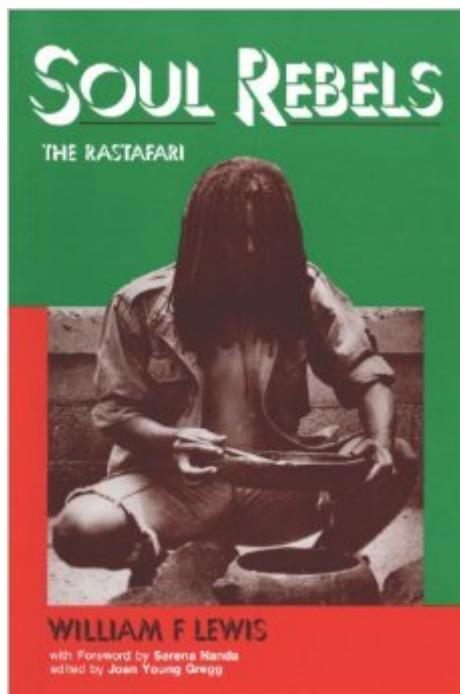


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Soul Rebels: The Rastafari



Synopsis

... a cult, a deviant subculture, a revolutionary movement . . . these descriptions have been commonly used in the past to identify the Rastafari, a group perhaps best known to North American readers for their gift of reggae music to the world. With both compassion and a sharp sense of reality, anthropologist William Lewis suggests alternative perspectives and reviews existing social theories as he reports on the diverse world of the ganja-smoking Rastafari culture. He carefully examines this culture in its confrontations with the law, its growing ambivalence about itself as well as the continued conflict between many Rasta and contemporary middle-class values.

Characterized by rich ethnographic detail, an engaging writing style, and thoughtful commentary, *Soul Rebels* uncovers the complex inner workings of the Rasta movement and offers a critical analysis of the meaning of Rastafari commitment and struggles. *Soul Rebels* offers a solid historical overview of the movement, an excellent picture of diversity within the faith, fair and accurate discussions of sexism among the Rasta, engaging life history material, and rich descriptions of what actually goes on in a "reasoning" session. Lewis's treatment of Rastafari populations in a Jamaican fishing village, an Ethiopian market town, and an urban neighborhood in the northeastern United States sets his ethnography in the cross-cultural and comparative framework central to anthropological analysis.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Although this book does not go into a large amount of detail, it is a quick and useful introduction to the Rastafarian way of life, at least on the social and economic side. William Lewis has based his work on direct interviews and observations with Rastas that he has met, so the book focuses on their social interactions, lifestyles, and viewpoints on the world around them. However, you have to wonder if those particular Rastas were being truthful because Lewis is a white Roman Catholic priest (although this does not infringe on his view of other cultures and religions). Lewis includes case studies of both urban and rural Rastas in Jamaica, a group in a large US city, and the interesting case of a "repatriated" group in Ethiopia. There is an interesting aside in the study of the US urban Rastas, as Lewis keeps the name of the city confidential to protect his subjects from prosecution, but later in the book he accidentally tells us that it was Brooklyn. This book is lacking in deeper insights into the true religious nature of Rastafari, as Lewis' historical backdrop to the development of the belief system is rather quick and sketchy, and there is little more than superficial coverage of the complicated Rasta belief system. It would have also been nice to see more on the direct influence of Haile Selassie rather than just his historical inspiration, and also how the religion adapted to his death (the Rastas literally thought he was the messiah). If you already know something about Rastafari, you probably won't learn much new here. So this book is most useful as an introduction which may inspire you to explore more in-depth studies elsewhere.

This isn't the easiest read out there, but not bad. The author does give a new viewpoint of Rastafari culture and does a good job at putting it in sociological and historical perspective. Only in a couple of places do I think that he got deep enough into the culture that he kind of lost non-judgemental perspective, but he does try to show viewpoints from various sides. I can say that I learned a fair amount about the Rastafari culture and would recommend this book.

Excellent book. Worth reading. It gives the reader a view of Rastafarianism from many different viewpoints, from the Rastafari themselves, to the law enforcement agencies view of them.

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