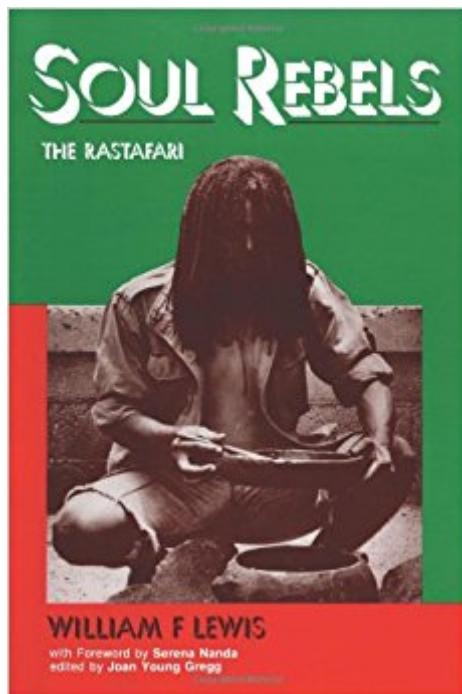


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# Soul Rebels: The Rastafari



## **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 ganga-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 crosscultural and comparative framework central to anthropological analysis.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

"This inexpensive paperback is appropriate for introductory and advanced classes in anthropology,

religion, social movements, and ethnic relations. Recommended." --Choice

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.

Great read to increase your awareness about different cultures and beliefs that may be misunderstood by stereotype and discriminatory misinformation.

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.

I knew a little bit about Rastafarianism before reading this book. Primarily, I knew about some of the

religious underpinnings and of course, the use of ganja in religious practice. What I didn't know about Rastafarianism, however, was Rastafarianism as a political and economic policy, one which renounces much of the governmental and economic structure that is such a part of our modern, globalized world. The author, a Jesuit priest, definitely brings an interesting perspective to the book, which my anthropology professor suggested is why the women of Rastafarianism seem to have such a minor role in this book. While this is definitely a valid criticism, the book is actually one of the more interesting and least sensational books I have read on the subject. Indeed, it makes me want to be a Rasta!

Book was exactly as described.

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