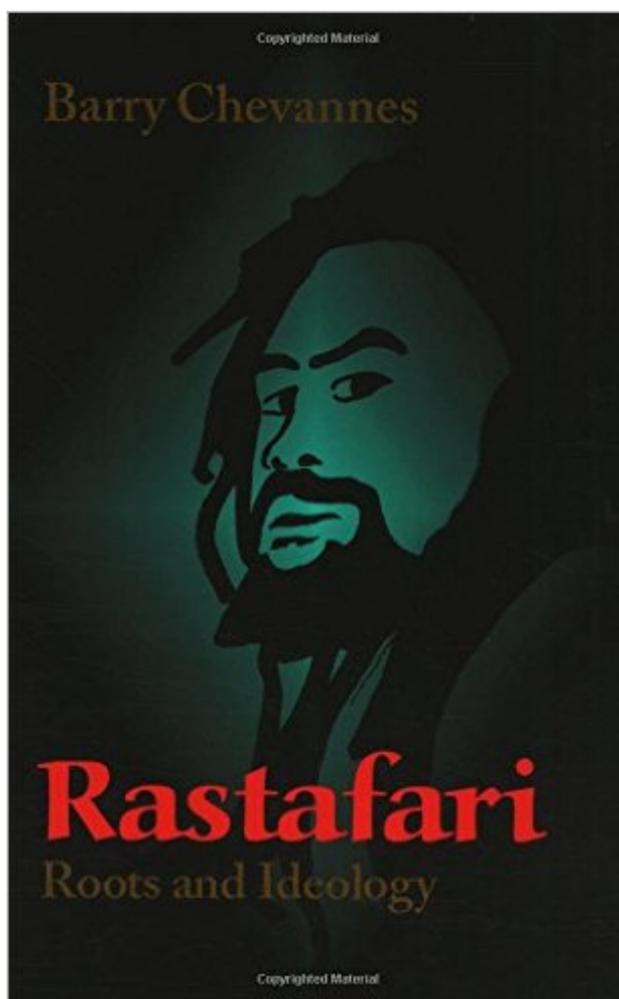


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# Rastafari: Roots And Ideology (Utopianism & Communitarianism)



## Synopsis

Interviews with 30 converts from the 1930s and 1940s are a component of Barry Chevannes's book, a look into the origins and practices of Rastafarianism. From the direct accounts of these early members, he is able to reconstruct pivotal episodes in Rastafarian history to offer a look into a subgroup of Jamaican society whose beliefs took root in the social unrest of the 1930s.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This book is highly recommended to anyone who has any questions about the religion. Chevannes discusses the history, the politics and the culture that built Rasta. Most books I found on Rastafari talked about Reggae and Bob Marley, but didn't even discuss the ideology. This book is also a must have for anyone interested in Black History and the the History of Christianity in the Caribbean I wish I could give this book 10 stars.

Chevannes is a well-known contemporary scholar of Rastafari culture. In this book, he presents several different papers and studies he has done, in the form of chapters. What must be noted is that this is not a general book for people who are just getting interested in Rastafari--but rather an advanced text for people already familiar with the basics of this religio-cultural movement---like its myths, symbols, rituals, and so on. Having said that, the book covers the history and development of Rastafari, from its roots in Myal religion and West African traditions to its development from

Revivalism, another religious movement preceding Rastafari. Chevannes also covers Marcus Garvey, early Ethiopianism, and idealizations of "Africa" that inform Rasta ideology. Religious usage of Ganja and Dreadlocks is also covered, providing a helpful correct to racist right-wing myths about the Rasta. An especially important chapter called "Word, Sound and Power" details the use of Rasta language. In-depth coverage of concepts such as "Babylon," "I-and-I," as well as the tendency of Rasta's to literalize word parts around the meaning of words is helpful. This chapter will also help explain why Rastas shy away from vocalizing oppression language in their own usage---while making it explicit in the language of those from Babylon.. Thus, "oppressor" becomes "downpressor"--conjuring up pictures of active political suppression. Certainly few understand better than the Rasta the power of language to control and direct thought and action. In addition to this volume, check out the work of Leonard Barrett, and the book "Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader" for more, informative, insightful information about this minority religio-cultural movement.

...and move on to other books or talk with someone who knows about the religion. This book was my first insight into the ideology and history of Rastafari. After reading it carefully, I don't think that I have a good understanding of what exactly the religion is, what exactly a Rastafarian believes, and how the Rastafarian practices (I don't even know the proper word to use...Rasta, Rastafari, Rastafarian?). The historical context provided by Chevannes is excellent. His writing is very academic. If you don't have a solid background understanding of Rastafari, I would look to another book. This one is good, but perhaps misses some of the real basics while focusing on particular sects and historical facts of Rastafari.

Most cultures are based around religion. In the book "Rastafari: Roots and Ideology" Barry Chevannes traces the history and beliefs of the Rastafarian religion back to the prophet Marcus Garvey and his mass coalition against racial oppression and support for a free Africa. Before Garvey, few Jamaicans had positive attitudes toward Africa, however the rise of Black Nationalism provided the movement with its momentum to organize a system of beliefs. Chevannes explores the movement from the peasants in Jamaica in 1930 to its international following today. Chevannes intends to, and does, inform the reader about the Rastafarian religion and belief system. Rastafarianism arose in the ghettos of Kingston in the early 1930's at just about the same time as Haile Selassie, a black man, was crowned emperor of Ethiopia. Rastafarians believe that Africa is their homeland and are thus exiles in "Babylon," and must return to "Zion." The holy Piby

(Rastafarian bible) says that when a black man is a king in Africa it will be the right time to migrate to "Zion." The statement shows the significance of Sellassie's coronation as king of Ethiopia. As time went on the movement grew to become the central religion in Jamaica and has many followers throughout the world. The story of the Rastafarian movement shows how with determination, hope, and persistence one can overcome huge barriers. This book is more focused for adult readers that know basic information about the movement, but anyone that is interested in this religion or in the African-American culture would find this book appealing.

Back in college, I decided that I was going to major in Ethnomusicology, concentrating specifically on Caribbean Rhythm and Culture. While trodding this enlightening path (I grew up in a small, white-bread town on the Connecticut shoreline), I came across this piece of literature. Naturally, I originally checked it out for a research project concerning Rastafari. A few years (and nearly a dozen check-outs) later I have decided that it is time for me to purchase this book. I have read it cover to cover multiple times and never fail to pick up something completely new and exciting in each chapter. It needs to have a home in my permanent collection. The strength of thought and culture displayed within this book, coupled with the sounds of groups like The Abyssinians, Steel Pulse, Gondwana (the one from Chile not Australia), and the honorable Bob Marley and the Wailers, have done a great deal to change my life. I HIGHLY recommend this book for pleasure / research / a deeper look into the world of Rastafari. I have read multiple books either written or edited by Barry Chevannes and this may be the best. It strikes a memorable chord in that it balances readability with a wealth of information. Also, every chapter is nearly a new book in that this volume covers a breadth of Rastafarian topics, from music to history to culture to politics. I hope I enjoy this as much as I do.

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