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UNDERSTANDING A MODERN ANTIQUE:
CHALLENGES TO REPRESENTING RASTAFARI IN
THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Reggae, Rastafari, and the Rhetoric of Social Control. STEPHEN A. KING, with contributions by BARRY T. BAYS III & P. RENÉE FOSTER. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2002. vii +173 pp. (Cloth US\$ 40.00).

The First Rasta: Leonard Howell and the Rise of Rastafarianism. HÉLÈNE LEE. Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2003. vii +306 pp. (Cloth US\$ 26.95).

Drawing increasingly upon digital technologies and the internet to assert a sense of community even as they cultivate an austere biblical persona, adherents of Rastafari can be thought of as simultaneously modern and antique. Their claim to antiquity is grounded in a collectively professed African-Ethiopian identity that has not only resisted the ravages of enslavement, colonialism, and European cultural domination but is seen to transcend local differences of culture and language. Theirs is a way of life organized around theocratic principles that begin with a recognition of the divine in all peoples and as the basis of all human agency. Rastafari assert the universal relevance of these principles to the conditions of modernity even as they persistently claim social justice on behalf of all peoples of African descent exploited by colonialism and the prevailing global capitalist-imperialist system. Based on these general themes, the Rastafari movement has come to represent a large-scale cultural phenomenon that has long since burst the chains of its colonial containment in Jamaica. From the late 1960s onward it has spread throughout the Caribbean and the Central and South American rimland to the major metropolises of North America and Europe as well as to many sites on the African continent.

From this brief, one can perhaps appreciate that the cultural identity known as “Rastafari” (along with its associated practices and movement goals) gives rise to many potentially unstable points of identification. Moreover, with its

geographic reach and diversity, the movement promotes a complex positioning of subjects in relation to changing sociopolitical circumstances that may be at once local and global. However, despite the explosion of literature on Rastafari over the past decade or so, there is little published work that orients scholars or potential researchers to the ideological and organizational diversity that co-exists within the contemporary movement. This is significant because Rastafari principles typically exist within a state of dynamic tension. The ubiquitous Rastafari calls for universal “peace-and-love” and their contending exclusivist demands for “truth-and-rights” in the service of social justice for blacks is but the most notable example. The actual workings of these principles in shaping consensual communities of practitioners no doubt has important implications for understanding how the movement has developed (in Jamaica or elsewhere), and how Rastafari identity is shaped, transformed, and reproduced anew in specific sociopolitical contexts. This, in turn, also raises the issue as to what now constitutes a reasonable geographical or temporal frame of analysis for exploring certain aspects of Rastafari as a contemporary socioreligious movement. In her analysis of the role that symbolic ambiguities have played in the spread of the movement, Carole Yawney (1994:75-83), a long-time ethnographer of Rastafari, is to my knowledge one of the few scholars to offer systematic insights into these processes and issues.

One of the problems with the expanding literature on the movement is, of course, that so little of it is based on actual ethnography – or better, multi-sited ethnography, as is increasingly called for given the transnational reality of the movement. This is perhaps understandable given that many researchers are drawn in by what they take to be the public face of Rastafari, reggae music. This has given rise to a number of popular works that approach the culture of Rastafari largely as a media phenomenon carried forth on a wave of enthusiasm for the music as it is heard in concerts, broadcasts, and the dissemination of records and CDs (Weber 1992, O’Brien Chang & Chen 1998, Roskind 2001). This view poses multiple problems. It obscures both the depth of commitment that characterizes practitioners of Rastafari in communities throughout the Black Atlantic and the complex relationship that exists between the practitioners of the movement’s theocratic principles and the artists who disseminate its popular musical culture. In addition, it tends to obscure the deep and still largely unexplored history of Rastafari, a movement that was birthed by harmonizing discourses (e.g., Ethiopianism and pan-Africanism) and international events (e.g., the defeat of the Italians at Adwa in 1896 and the Italian-Ethiopian war, 1935-41) that resonated across the African world.

Two recent books, Stephen King’s *Reggae, Rastafari, and the Rhetoric of Social Control* and Hélène Lee’s *The First Rasta: Leonard Howell and the Rise of Rastafarianism*, warrant consideration in terms of a number of the points outlined above. The fact that King is an academic trained within

the field of speech communications and that Lee is a widely traveled French music journalist should tell us something about the fascination that Rastafari continues to command as a contemporary cultural phenomenon. Both authors came initially to their respective projects via an interest in the musical form and message of reggae-Rastafari as a popular culture. They share a general interest in understanding how Rastafari has morphed through several phases of development in order to understand how this improbable “cult” has become an international movement. If only in relation to these concerns it is useful to consider what their works contribute to the expanding field of “Rasta studies.”

How have the protest anthems of the classic era of reggae been transformed into support for Jamaica’s tourist industry? Stephen King tackles such general questions of co-optation in his monograph – a revision of his dissertation that at times suffers from an overly academic presentation, particularly when he attempts to fit data to the categories of his particular social movement theory. The study attempts to “comprehensively trace how Jamaica’s protest music has changed both lyrically and musically over a twenty-one year period, and how the Jamaican government has attempted to silence or co-opt these voices of protest” (p. xxiii). King concludes with a look at how Rastafari claims for social justice in reggae have been co-opted first in the service of the island’s emergent nationalism and then to assist Jamaican tourism.

King locates the roots of reggae in ska (1959-65) and rocksteady (1966-67), the two musical forms that preceded it. It was ska, a music that blended *mento*, the indigenous Jamaican version of calypso, with American jazz and rhythm and blues, that reflected the optimistic mood of the country during the run-up to Jamaican independence. As economic conditions worsened for the majority of Jamaica’s blacks during the mid-1960s, the more aggressive lyrics of rocksteady gave voice to the frustrations and alienation of the island’s under- and unemployed ghetto dwellers. And then there was the advent of reggae in the late 1960s and through the 1970s, the period that is remembered as the high-water mark of Rastafari influence on an emergent Jamaican nationalism. Reggae, of course, began as a Rasta-inspired music that not only articulated the pan-African vision of the movement and its demands for social justice, but that celebrated the cultural practices and symbols of Rastafari.

King does a credible job in mapping the general contours and themes of these musical developments against the backdrop of a changing Jamaican society. In the course of this he shows how the roots of Rastafari musical protest are organically intertwined with the development of both preceding forms. While this is hardly newsworthy to many aficionados of Jamaican music, King provides some interesting examples that illustrate how critical commentary and protest themes, however restrained, existed within ska lyrics from the outset. The occasional presence of Rastafari drumming, biblical references (e.g., River Jordan, Mount Zion), and allusions to repatriation through the idiom of the “promised land” were all important resonances in

this music that portended the development of popular music as an important communicative medium for the Rasta movement.

King describes rocksteady as a music that is more aggressive, that speaks more directly to the collective frustrations and suffering experienced by the island's lower classes. Frequently, this music celebrates the "Rude Boy" or new male ghetto rebel as he has been memorialized in popular discourse. Prince Buster's "Too Hot" and Derrick Morgan's "Tougher Than Tough" are both examples of this figure, an individual who sought social and political justice with a ratchet (knife) or a gun. King points out that rocksteady lyrics tended to condone more aggressive protest against the oppression of the "sufferah" class, while in specific cases evoking linkages with the general Rastafari critique of the "Babylonian" neocolonial system.

Of critical importance to the dissemination and popularization of this music, King notes, were "sound systems" developed to carry high-fidelity playback equipment to rural and urban dances throughout the island. This portable technology, he argues, enabled the development of a community of dissent by transporting music to sites where "the voice of the poor could be heard without interference by local authorities" (p. 16), a development that continued from the era of ska through reggae to the present. It is certainly true that sound systems served to strengthen an already extant discourse of protest, but King fails to recognize that long before sound systems, the Rasta movement itself was about creating alternative spaces for face-to-face communication in which counter-hegemonic discourse was reproduced and disseminated.

Many readers will be disappointed by the fact that King does not access any of the subjects who actually created this music. While he did interview a number of the key figures among the Jamaican intelligentsia, his analysis is weakened by what appears to be his near complete reliance on secondary sources. Furthermore, some of his descriptive categories are incommensurate with the cultural reality of the Rastafari. Major parts of King's analysis hinge on his use of a version of social movement theory to frame the ways in which the government and the dominant society responded to Rastafari. In this regard, he discusses strategies of aversion, counter-persuasion, coercion, and adjustment, all supposedly being forms of social control exercised by the Jamaican government or representatives of the dominant society. These seem overly cumbersome. In my view King's discussion would have been more effective if he had simply limited it to the modes of repression and co-optation brought to bear on the movement.

King appears to have a somewhat shaky grasp of the stages through which Rastafari has evolved as a polycephalous or acephalous movement. Among other things, he gives little, if any attention to ways in which the Rastafari themselves met and attempted to counter strategies of social control (particularly harassment and repression) by the dominant society, and how this may be reflected in popular music. The same is true with respect to co-optation.

It is, of course, true that Rastafari symbols and imagery have been massively co-opted in Jamaica since the 1970s. King, however, fails to recognize the ways in which Rastafari have responded to this, either directly or indirectly. In Jamaica, various forms of Rastafari cultural practice, for example, have developed as sites of struggle over the definition of who and what *is* Rastafari. I have made this point elsewhere in relation to the development of islandwide ceremonial gatherings (i.e. Nyahbinghi) as they took shape from the early 1970s onward (Homiak 1999:105). During roughly this same period, “orthodox” Rastafari organizations inaugurated their own forms of traveling culture that saw Elders move throughout the Caribbean and beyond. The result is that significant numbers of Rastafari Elders now command enormous respect outside Jamaica. Such figures routinely sojourn in Rastafari communities elsewhere in the Caribbean, Africa, or North America where they serve as models for the development of cultural practice and ideology. Along with Yawney (1994), I have argued that the popularization of the Rasta message via reggae actually prepared the ground for a kind of re-missionizing by traditional Jamaican-born Elders in black communities elsewhere in the Black Atlantic world.

In other instances King misunderstands the facts, for example in citing the state visit of Haile Selassie to Jamaica in 1966 as a government strategy of “adjustment,” intended simply to appease the Rastafari. In actuality, this was a calculated gamble on the part of the conservative JLP government to destabilize the movement and quell Rastafari demands for repatriation. It was assumed by authorities that the emperor would publicly disclaim the divinity attributed to him by the brethren and thereby undermine the central tenet of the movement. The strategy backfired when the Negus awarded ceremonial gold medals to thirteen brethren and for the first time in the history of the movement gave the Rastafari a place on a national stage.

King notes that Selassie met with various Rastafari leaders at this time and was alleged to have counseled them to “liberate the Jamaican people before repatriation to Africa” (p. 34). He links this to changes in the tone of musical protest themes, arguing that it led to and exacerbated divisions between “religious” and “political” Rastafarians. Those familiar with the social history of the movement will recognize some truth in this claim, but the claim that adherents can be separated into these two camps, made all too frequently by writers who rely primarily on secondary sources rather than firsthand experience of the Rastafari, is unjustified. Inasmuch as the emperor’s visit conferred a measure of unprecedented legitimacy upon the Rastafari, it gave them a newfound standing in society from which both to plead issues of social justice and to press for their goal of repatriation.

The major shortcoming here is that King fails to explore what the labels “political” and “religious” might actually mean in the context of a movement whose members claim to orient their ideology and practice within a theo-

cratic culture. Governance and spirituality are, from a Rastafari perspective, unified parts of a single whole from a Rastafari perspective. While adherents may place different degrees of emphasis on the agencies of spirituality (e.g., chanting, prayer, and ritual) and governance (e.g., political protest and intervention with government) to achieve their ends, the theocratic orientation they share continues to unite them in their overall critique of the hegemonic order. What is lacking in parts of King's analysis is an ethnographic perspective that enables him to grasp this and understand how Rastafari can absorb political discourse (e.g., Black Power during the 1960s) yet, strictly speaking, not be politicized by it (see King pp. 50-51).

In addition to the difficulty that King encounters in sequencing the nature of Rastafari protest, he also lacks ethnographic familiarity with the organizational diversity within Rastafari (i.e. its varied "mansions") and the different stances that these organizations have taken toward the dominant society as well as the ostensible goals of the movement. He argues, for example that the internationalization of reggae exacerbated a similar split among the Rastafari. It is true that the marketing of reggae initially caused many "traditional" Rastafari to be "appalled by what they considered the commercialization and secularization of the movement" (p. 90). To this day, the House of Boboshanti, perhaps the most theocratic of all Rastafari groups, officially rejects reggae as part of their culture. Yet at the same time, it was in large measure the popularity of reggae in Jamaica and abroad that enabled Rastafari to cross over into the middle class during the 1970s. The Twelve Tribes of Israel, a Rastafari organization that flourished during that decade, facilitated this crossover and embraced reggae as the medium by which to spread their specific variant of Rasta ideology. Perhaps ironically, this organization also became the most aggressive of all Rastafari groups in pursuing repatriation of its members to Ethiopia and arguably remains so to the present. These, however, are observations that escape King's analysis.

His discussion of the ways in which reggae has been co-opted for commercial ends (via tourism) is potentially the strongest part of the book, particularly in his treatment of the phenomenon of "rent-a-dreads" (pseudo-Rastas) that ply the north coast resort areas as hustlers and as players in the trade in sexual tourism that has developed since the late 1970s. With tourism as the current number-one source of Jamaican foreign exchange, King rightly notes the economic importance of government- and tourist-board-sponsored international reggae events like *Sunsplash* and *Sunfest*. So too with the way Jamaica has capitalized upon the legacy of Bob Marley and its own definitions of Rastafari as a "peace-and-love" island vibe. If anything, King's discussion of the topic fails to go far enough in providing examples that illustrate the extent of the co-optation of Rastafari symbols that have occurred in the past decade. This would extend to advertising campaigns by Air Jamaica (with billboards announcing "Reggae bird" flights and urging consumers to

“Fly Air JAAAAH-Maica!”) as well as to adverts by Nestle (“Rasta Ice”) and Denoes and Geddes bottling (“One Beer – One People”).

King also fails to recognize that no forms of co-optation and control are absolute. He offers no discussion of how the Rastafari themselves have responded to or circumvented co-optation by the Jamaican establishment – forms of control that have sought to model “safe” perceptions of Rastafari which could dominate the public discourse about the movement and its “Jamaicanness.” The fact that Rastafari have become part of the accepted social landscape of Jamaica must be seen as due not only to the commodification of Rasta symbols made possible by the popularization of reggae, but also to a regime of resolute persistence by the movement’s culture-bearers in the face of repression throughout the colonial and much of the postcolonial era. Over the past quarter-century, it is the latter that has made the older generation of Jamaican Rastafari models of inspiration for legions of adherents outside the island.

This and other observations raise the question as to whether the Jamaican context remains an effective unit of analysis in speaking about the movement from the late twentieth century onward. King does not mention that the Rastafari movement at large now holds “observer status” within the United Nations or that Jamaican Rastafari have forged alliances with selected members of the Jamaican intelligentsia. Nor does he question whether initiatives deriving from such alliances are developments that co-opt or empower the movement. Among these developments would be the creation of the *Folkphilosophie* Program at the University of the West Indies – which, since the late 1990s, has hosted legendary Rastafari Elder, Mortimo Planno (Bob Marley’s mentor) – and the hosting of several international Rastafari conferences. One can argue that these and other expressions of what King might consider “adjustment” now provide a platform for Jamaican Rastafari that has enabled them to consolidate their networking throughout the Caribbean region and beyond. It can be argued that organizations like the Caribbean Rastafari Organization (with members throughout the Anglophone and Francophone eastern Caribbean) and the Rastafari Centralization Organization in Jamaica have enabled the international movement to sustain a focus on its goal of repatriation and to continue to its demands for social justice on multiple fronts across much of the Black Atlantic world.

The First Rasta (originally published in 1999 in France), is a very different kind of work, much more literary in character. Like King’s, it is ultimately linked to the music of Rastafari but on a much more personal level. Hélène Lee, a widely traveled journalist who has covered music in both the Caribbean and Africa, came naturally enough to this work. Having once been married to two major stars of African music, Salif Keita and Cote d’Ivoire’s reggae star Alpha Blondy, she covered reggae during its international ascendancy in the

1970s. Infected with curiosity about the sustaining root source of the Rastafari message and how it managed to “colonize the world” in a mere thirty years after the advent of reggae, she has produced her own version of ethnography. It is one that involved living with Rastafari in Jamaica and tracking accounts of those close to “the first Rasta,” the most influential expounder of the original Rastafari message, Leonard Howell, as well as those around the most famous Rasta, Bob Marley, and other reggae luminaries.

Howell is widely acknowledged as the first person to proclaim the divinity of Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia. Like Garvey, he was among the tens of thousands of emigrated Jamaicans returning to the island during the 1920s and early 1930s at the onset of the Great Depression. The majority of these individuals were widely traveled laborers who had worked in North America and throughout the Caribbean Basin and had experienced the brunt of racial prejudice in a white-controlled world. It was in the context of this collective racial experience that the revelation of an Ethiopian divinity captured the imagination of the marginalized and oppressed of Jamaica’s black masses. Of all the early Rastafari preachers, it was arguably Howell’s mission that was the broadest and most successful. He proselytized not only in Kingston, but throughout the eastern parishes of St. Thomas, Portland, and St. Mary. Here his message of African redemption struck a responsive cord among rural plantation workers, many of whom were descendants of Central Africans who came to Jamaica as indentured laborers during the post-Emancipation period. Many of these rural converts followed Howell and helped him to establish his legendary commune in St. Catherine known as “Pinnacle.”

Lee offers some new materials to scholars of Rastafari as well as to a general readership interested in the movement. She interviewed a number of Howell’s former followers from Pinnacle, as well as most of his children and other surviving members of his extended family. Her interviews provide some interesting insights into the myths that surround Howell as prophet, mystic, traveler, and writer. Thanks to Lee’s work, we can add to this list the titles of healer and businessman. She spent time tracing Howell’s activities in New York City during the period of the Harlem Renaissance and turned up some speculative evidence that Howell may well have functioned as a healer or operator of a “tea room” where folk decoctions were dispensed. She also spent considerable time attempting to trace Howell’s business dealings from the time he purchased the estate in St. Catherine where he established his commune. This she links to his alleged subsequent dealing with the government as a major producer and exporter of ganja. In Rastafari circles, talk of an association between Howell and an international ganja trade has circulated for decades. To my knowledge, Lee is the first person to place Howell at the center of Jamaica’s developing international ganja trade in the early 1950s and to link him to politically connected local businessmen (pp. 196-

200). This, as is generally assumed, is linked to the ultimate destruction of Howell's commune and its economic base in 1954.

While there is clearly original field research (as well as archival research) behind her book, Lee's passion in telling a story as opposed to documenting and contextualizing the complex convolutions and twists in the development of a subaltern reality will present some frustrations for scholars of the movement. Lee points to the fact that she draws liberally upon the seminal work of Robert Hill, the Jamaican-born Garvey scholar who has researched Howell's impact on the genesis of the movement (Hill 1981); to a lesser extent she also acknowledges the work of Ras Michael Lorne, himself a publisher and student of Howell. In much of what the book covers with respect to the proto-Rastafari figures, and ideas and events surrounding Howell, however, it is difficult to discern where Lee is drawing on the work of these individuals and where she is leavening the text with her own insights. I have not seen the book in its original French edition (published by Flammarion in 1999), but in the English version footnotes are sparse and her references are applied to broad swaths of text, making it difficult to decipher precisely what is being cited and credited to another authorial source.

Most of the text dealing with Howell reads more like biography than ethnography. At times, one wonders if Lee knows what to make of all the information she has gathered and I suspect that she is hindered by her lack of in-depth knowledge of the sociocultural context in which the founders of the movement worked. This comes through in her treatment of Howell's leadership role in the early movement. Clearly, he was a leader with enormous charisma, but there is little in this book that gives insight into the relationship between Howell – the prophet – and his followers. From my own work with two groups of Howell's followers (some of whom were with him at Pinnacle), it is clear that Howell drew creatively on the cultural practices and worldview associated with both Kumina and the Revival complex to enhance his stature and to organize the ritual life of his followers at Pinnacle (see Bilby & Leib 1985). This reflects the fact that many of Howell's converts from rural St. Thomas were most certainly practitioners of Kumina, a family-based ancestor-oriented religion. Lee barely mentions these points.

While Lee notes the presence of Kumina drumming at Pinnacle, she apparently lacks a perspective from which to explore the broader implications and meaning of this tradition for Howell's followers. Nor does she have a way of linking the ritual life at Pinnacle to subsequent developments among the Rastafari after the Jamaican government raided and dismantled the commune in the mid-1950s. This is an omission of some significance since it is well known that many of those individuals who played key roles in the development of the movement's Dreadlocks cultural efflorescence were frequent visitors at Pinnacle, either to attend services or procure ganja. The Howellite-Dreadlocks connection thus remains obscured. In accounting for the transition

from the demise of Howell's commune to the next phase of the movement's development, Lee simply notes that "The Rastas of the 1960s were ghetto dwellers with an urban agenda" (p. 218). While it can certainly be argued that the ghettos of Kingston became the focal point for the movement during this decade, the movement, even during the heyday of Howell's influence, has always involved a back and forth between rural and urban contexts. And this was true for both followers of Howell and other early Rastafari leaders.

A similar underdeveloped sociology influences the way in which Lee construes other developments in Rastafari. At times this means using literary devices as opposed to substantive evidence to fashion the connective tissue between developments that are, in fact, sociological rather than merely narrative. In a chapter entitled "The Nya-Binghis," for example, she briefly explores the source of the term "Nyabinghi" (the name of an African secret society supposedly bent on race war), as coming from an article of Italian fascist propaganda that sought to undermine support for Emperor Selassie's fight against Mussolini's invasion in 1935. Lee points out that the racist overtones associated with the term Nyabinghi (said to be translatable as "death to the whites") combined with widespread sympathy for the Ethiopian struggle among Jamaicans. Against this backdrop, there was also Howell's highly publicized trial for sedition for his public declaration that with the crowning of Emperor Haile Selassie, Jamaican blacks no longer owed allegiance to the king of England, George VI. From the alchemy of these coincident events, Lee concludes that "Suddenly, every Rasta in Jamaica wanted to join the Nya-Binghis" (p. 93). Here, Lee gives misplaced organizational concreteness to the concept of Nyabinghi (similar to her treatment of the discourse of Jamaican Ethiopianism). What actual currency the term Nyabinghi may have had in the early movement is somewhat questionable, and, counter to Lee's implication, there was certainly never any group at the time known as "the Nya-Binghis." From the 1950s onward, as the Rastafari began to develop their own distinctive cultural practices, the term did accrete a number of meanings in addition to its initial significance as a term of racial protest. Ultimately it became a kind of omnibus term referring to the movement's stance of non-violent resistance, to the ritual-drumming-chanting complex of Rastafari, and to the loosely-knit organization later known as the House of Nyabinghi. The sequencing of these developments, however, is missed by Lee.

At times, Lee's understandings of the cultural backdrop and aesthetic sensibilities against which Rastafari evolved seems insufficient for her to do justice to the complexities of her story. For example, she notes the importance of several early proto-Rastafari texts, *The Holy Piby* and *The Royal Parchment Scroll of Black Supremacy*, that circulated among members of the movement. But she treats these as though they were lifted "whole cloth" by adherents and stamped into doctrinal status. By contrast, my experience

has been that these texts circulated in bits and shards, providing elements to be recombined anew.

There are other minor points that should be treated with caution, including assertions about the East Indian influence on the growing of dreadlocks at Howell's commune (p. 102) – a highly speculative source for this Rastafari practice. In some instances, Lee seems to have insufficient knowledge of various Jamaican folk practices to make sense of data that she gathers. Based on its esoteric wordplay and jargon, Lee concludes that the text of the *Royal Parchment Scroll* by Reverend Fitz Balintine Petersburg, a Jamaican preacher and forerunner of the Rastafari, may either have been deliberately sabotaged by the printers or that it reflected the work of a man disoriented by ganja (pp. 48, 163). A much more likely conclusion is that the florid and hyperbolic language used by Balintine reflected the style of speechifying typical of “tea meetings” and related rhetorical contests of the time in which words were taken to have talismanic power.

These reservations notwithstanding, Lee has produced a commendable work and one that attests to the passion and commitment she has brought to her efforts to tell Howell's story and that of his place in the early movement. As an ethnographer who has worked with Rastafari for over two decades, I find it rare to encounter an international journalist whose reputation precedes her, even among some hard-edged Rastafari Elders. From firsthand contact with Bob Marley and Chris Blackwell (the record producer who made him famous), to members of the Mystic Revelations of Rastafari ensemble, to former Howellites and traditional Elders of the House of Nyabinghi, Hélène Lee has known them all. For general readers this book will be a page-turner. For scholars of Rastafari, *The First Rasta* will suggest a series of other avenues for firsthand and archival research. Bearing in mind that Leonard Howell was not the only early leader within Rastafari, Lee's work will encourage readers to rethink the conjunction of events, ideas, and personalities that shaped the formation and development of Rastafari from a tiny “cult” in colonial Jamaica that seemed destined for oblivion to a spiritual nationality that has been embraced by untold numbers worldwide.

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