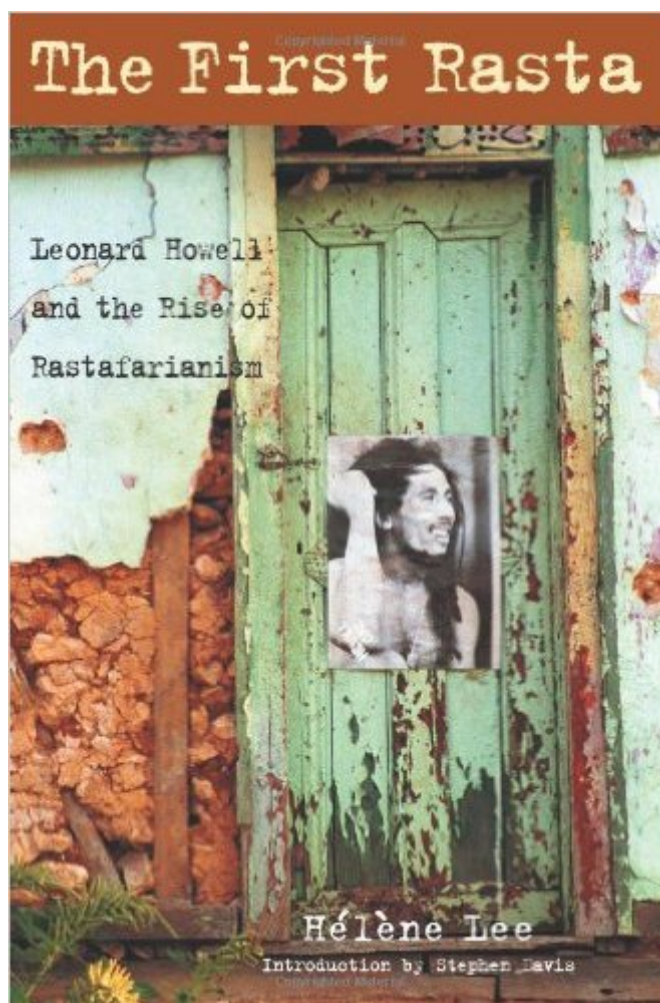


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# The First Rasta: Leonard Howell And The Rise Of Rastafarianism



## Synopsis

Going far beyond the standard imagery of Rasta—ganja, reggae, and dreadlocks—this cultural history offers an uncensored vision of a movement with complex roots and the exceptional journey of a man who taught an enslaved people how to be proud and impose their culture on the world. In the 1920s Leonard Percival Howell and the First Rastas had a revelation concerning the divinity of Haile Selassie, king of Ethiopia, that established the vision for the most popular mystical movement of the 20th century, Rastafarianism. Although jailed, ridiculed, and treated as insane, Howell, also known as the Gong, established a Rasta community of 4,500 members, the first agro-industrial enterprise devoted to producing marijuana. In the late 1950s the community was dispersed, disseminating Rasta teachings throughout the ghettos of the island. A young singer named Bob Marley adopted Howell's message, and through Marley's visions, reggae made its explosion in the music world.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I absolutely love this book. Never really one for reading, this book has kind of enthused me to go back and actually READ some of the dozens of books I had purchased over the years but never really set down with. As a descendant of Rastafarians (and a person whose family majority consists of Rastas, I found it very interesting, and answered some of the questions more distinctly than any of my family had in the past. Its mainly about Leonard Percival Howell, "The First Rasta", and talks mainly about his life and times, but the parts of this book that i find most interesting are the parts

that deal with other figures in Rastafari culture i.e. Selassie and Marley. As I said, I was never one for reading too much, so if this book got me re-interested in reading then there is definitely something to it. Written by the ex-wife of legend Alpha Blondy. If you're interested in the topic, not a bad place at all to start.

While this book contains some good information about Rastafari and Leonard Howell, most of it is hidden under a mass of rambling nonsense, where the author writes about her personal experience in Jamaica as if it has anything to do with the life of Howell. It doesn't. And she gets many of her facts wrong, such as her claim that ganja was still legal in Jamaica in the mid-30s. If you're interested in the life of Leonard P. Howell, read *Dread History* instead. If you're generally interested in Rastafari, check out *Catch a Fire*.

The first Rasta! The subject promises readers a thrilling ride, and Lee does not disappoint. Other major figures associated with Rastafari (Haile Selassie, Marcus Garvey, Bob Marley) are well-known and documented, but Lee had to dig deep into Jamaican communities and memories for a full biography. Frequent personal anecdotes are quite relevant to research founded on oral history and the trust of informants. Lee describes Howell's path to Rastafarianism, along with plenty of Jamaican social and political history. Interestingly, Howell spent many years as a Hindu, and many more womanizing, both signaling his marked charisma. Perhaps not all details are reliable (e.g. England captured Jamaica in 1655, not 1665), but the overall patterns are clear. Rastafari responds to Afro-Jamaicans' sense of oppression and marginalization, founded in slavery and sustained through emancipation and independence. This is apparent in mainstream disapproval and longstanding conflicts with authorities, not least because marijuana use is a key sacrament. Despite many parallels with other religions of the oppressed (cf. V. Lanternari on this subject), Rastafari earns wider appeal---not always from the devout, but among hedonist lovers of ganja and reggae. All the more reason to recommend this lively book.

This was a very informative and well done book. I learned a lot about the roots of Rastafarianism and I would recommend this book to anyone interested in the Rasta culture, as a starting piece on their research adventure.

THIS BOOK IS NOT ABOUT BOB MARLEY BUT ABOUT MY DEAR UNCLE--LEONARD PERCIVAL HOWELL-- THE FIRST RASTA AND THE FOUNDING FATHER OF RASTAFARI.THE

FRENCH WRITER--HELENE LEE IS A PERSONAL FRIEND OF MINE AND OF THE HOWELL FAMILY. THE BOOK IS WELL WRITTEN AND VERY FACTUAL. EVERY RASTAFARIAN, FOLLOWER, BELIEVER AND ESPECIALLY THE HOWELL'S SHOULD READ THIS BOOK AND VISIT PINNACLE IN JAMAICA W. I.

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