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The House of Yisrael Cincinnati: How Normalized Institutional Violence Can Produce a Culture of Unorthodox Resistance 1963 to 2021

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THE HOUSE OF YISRAEL CINCINNATI: HOW NORMALIZED INSTITUTIONAL
VIOLENCE CAN PRODUCE A CULTURE OF UNORTHODOX RESISTANCE 1963
TO 2021

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Humanities

by

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B.A., Central State University, 2014

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Wright State University

WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY
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I HERBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY
SUPERVISION BY Sabyl M. Willis ENTITLED The House of Yisrael Cincinnati:
How Normalized Institutionalized Violence Can Produce a Culture of Unorthodox
Resistance BE ACCEPTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF Master of Humanities.

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ABSTRACT

Willis, Sabyl M. M. Hum, Department of Humanities, Wright State University, 2021.
The House of Yisrael Cincinnati: How Normalized Institutional Violence Can Produce a Culture of Unorthodox Resistance 1963 to 2021.

This study examines the racial, socio-economic, and political factors that shaped The House of Yisrael, a Black Nationalist community in Cincinnati, Ohio. The members of this community structure their lives following the Black Hebrew Israelite ideology sharing the core beliefs that Black people are the "true" descendants of the ancient Israelites of the biblical narrative. Therefore, as Israelites, Black people should follow the Torah as a guideline for daily life. Because they are the "chosen people," God will judge those who have oppressed them. This ideology, which began in the U.S. during the nineteenth century, has recently been growing more momentum since the rise of Black Lives Matter activism and President Donald Trump's election. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), Black Hebrew Israelites are listed as one of the violent Black nationalist communities on the rise ("Return of the Violent Black Nationalist"). In exploring this community's practices as forms of interpretivism, self-determination, and cultural nationalism, Critical Race Theory and Conflict Theory will act as the theoretical lens for examining their beliefs in a time of social and racial upheaval.

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The House of Yisrael Cincinnati: How Normalized Institutional Violence Can Produce a
Culture of Unorthodox Resistance 1963-2021

**Chapter 1: A Brief History of the Black Hebrew Israelite Movement in the United
States**

Black Judaism in America is a religious movement founded upon two different axes. It is comprised of people of the Black diaspora who identify as Jews. However, their histories and ideologies diverge within their paradigms of navigating the racial constructs implemented in the United States. Within the scope of Black Judaism in America there are Black Jews and Black Hebrew Israelites. A simplistic understanding in distinguishing these groups is Black Jews embrace conversion to the religion of Judaism, whereas Black Hebrew Israelites reject the practice of conversion; they believe their Hebrew identity is a biological heritage in addition to being a religious practice. Paradigms of race and racism are driving factors that simultaneously unite and divide Black Jews and Israelites. The focus of this paper is to understand how racism impacted a small community in Cincinnati, Ohio that is positioned on the Black Hebrew Israelite axis of Black Judaism. In order to better understand this particular group, we will briefly examine the foundation of the American Black Hebrew Israelite movement.

The history of the Black Hebrew Israelite movement in the United States has been shaped by institutional oppression and societal violence and discrimination towards African Americans. The terrorism of Jim Crow, the Black nationalism of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), and the Black Power Movement were monumental in growing and developing Black Hebrew Israelite ideology. In efforts to dismantle the oppression, degradation and trauma that Black folks had been forced to

endure, some had embraced an ideology that elevated people considered not worthy enough to be treated as full citizens of the United States, to being worthy enough to be chosen by God.

The Black Hebrew Israelite movement originated in the American South during the late 19th century. There were two major catalyst for this movement; the rise of extreme racism during the Jim crow period in the United States, and the Holiness movement that engulfed Protestantism after the American Civil War that focused on holy zeal and millennial eschatology (Landing 69). The seedlings of today's Black Hebrew Israelite movement were planted in the late 1880s, after Reconstruction during America's Gilded Age. There were Blacks who had converted to Judaism in the United States as early as the 1700s (especially in South Carolina (Haynes 74)). However, the Hebrew Israelite movement was not initially focused on Black people becoming Jews or practicing Judaism; instead, it began as an Afrocentric view of the history of the Judeo-Christian faith.

The oldest Black Hebrew sect was founded in 1886 by Frank S. Cherry (Chireau and Deutch). Cherry was a self-educated railroad worker from the South (Landing 340). His organization was established in Chattanooga, Tennessee and called the Church of the Living God, the Pillar Ground of Truth for All Nations. The teachings of this church proclaimed that God, Jesus, Adam and Eve were Black, and white people were created by way of a curse. Furthermore, Cherry taught that the white Jews were frauds and intruders. Today, these ideas are common in many Black Hebrew Israelite congregations. However, such ideas would have been radical in 1886, the same year seventy-four Black people were lynched in the U.S. and twenty African Americans were massacred in

Carrollton, Mississippi: the same year Plessy v. Ferguson legally affirmed segregation (“African American Perspectives”).

In addition to proclaiming key figures of the Bible to be Black, Cherry also attempted to explain the reason why calamities had fallen on African Americans. He reasoned that the enslavement and deliverance of Black people were foretold in the biblical scriptures (i.e., Jeremiah 12:9; Lamentations 4:8; and Deuteronomy 28:15 (Landing 342)). The entire chapter of Deuteronomy 28 is notoriously used by Black Hebrew Israelites today as the basis of the condition of Black people in America. Beyond influencing Black Hebrew Israelite ideology, Cherry also established congregational practices, such as: forming an Israelite bible class; reframing from collecting donations during his services, although the congregation was supported by tithes; using profanity in his lessons, and arming men and women with swords during his services (Landing 342-344).

The most renowned father of the Black Hebrew Israelites is Prophet William Saunders Crowdy. In 1847, Crowdy was born as a slave in Maryland (Landing 50). In 1863, at the age of sixteen he ran away after he got into a fight with his master (Miller). During his escape, he joined the Union Army serving in the Civil War until 1865. After the war Crowdy continued in his military career as a quartermaster sergeant; he was discharged in 1872 (Leaders cogasoc.org). While living in Oklahoma in 1892, Crowdy began going through a spiritual awakening by way of visions and perceived supernatural encounters. Crowdy believed it was his mission to gather the lost sheep of the House of Israel. In 1896, he moved to Lawrence, Kansas and established the Church of God and Saints of Christ. (Dorman 38-42).

By 1898, Crowdy had established multiple tabernacles in Kansas before deciding to take his message to eastern states. Crowdy's most popular message was that Jesus was Black. In alignment with Cherry, Crowdy's spreading of the message of a Black messiah, was still a bold proclamation in 1898. The same year he made this proclamation 101 African Americans were lynched in the United States, and eight Black people were killed in the white supremacist Wilmington, South Carolina insurrection. Despite the nations' racial violence towards African Americans, Crowdy promoted an anti-racist message, and most of his early converts were white (Dorman 41). Black newspapers were astonished that the church insisted on racial integration and was comprised of respected members of white and Black communities. Members of Crowdy's congregation claimed that they did more to achieve racial integration than any other organization in the United States (Dorman 43).

Moreover, after Crowdy's message spread throughout Kansas, he ventured into big cities, such as Chicago and New York setting up satellite congregations before establishing his headquarters in year 1900, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (cogasoc.org). By 1901, Crowdy's Philadelphia congregation grew to approximately 1,300 members. With the support of his congregation, Crowdy started various businesses, including a grocery store, a restaurant, a barber shop, a photo studio, a tailor shop, and a print shop (Landing 339). Income earned from these businesses allowed him to purchase forty acres of land in Belleville, Virginia. Around this time, Crowdy also began to cement his doctrinal beliefs. His message evolved from the belief that Jesus was Black, to African

Americans descending from the lost tribes of Israel.¹ In a 2020 tribute to Prophet Crowdy, member Khadijah Miller of the Belleville, Virginia temple expressed:

“He lived in a world where if one was Black, his life was not valued and respected outside of the labor that one could provide for those who ruled the land...On this mission to gather the lost sheep of the house of Israel, Prophet Williams Saunders Crowdy strove to re-establish a seemingly strange doctrine that had been lost for centuries. He encouraged folks to see the God in themselves and live accordingly.”

By 1906, his congregations observed the Jewish calendar and the feast days and observed the sabbath on Saturday. As decades progressed Crowdy’s churches also diminished the divinity of Christ and taught that he was simply a Hebrew prophet (Dorman 45-46). By the 1920s many white members left the Church of God and Saints of Christ, and today they are entirely gone (Landing 59).

William Saunders Crowdy died in 1908; however, the leaders of his congregations continued to spread his messages and established more tabernacles in the United States, the West Indies, and Africa. By far, William Saunders Crowdy emerged as the most influential in spreading Black Hebrew Israelite ideology. Today, the Church of God and Saints of Christ (COGASOC) have tabernacles and temples still thriving in eighteen states and Jamaica. One of the tabernacles is a congregation in Cincinnati, Ohio, under the current leadership of Chief Rabbi Phillip E. McNeil. Mr. McNeil is a native of Cincinnati, Ohio, and his parents and grandparents were adherents of the COGASOC faith. McNeil is an educated man with a Ph.D. in Mathematics from Pennsylvania State University. He also studied Divinity at Virginia Union University (Leaders cogasoc.org). He has been the leader of the Cincinnati congregation since 2016.

¹ The Lost Tribes of Israel derive from the biblical narrative that the Assyrians conquered and exiled the Northern kingdom of Israel consisting of ten tribes.

Prophet William Saunders Crowdy's work is admired by many Black Hebrew Israelite camps throughout the United States. Even those who disagree with his doctrine praise him for being a patriarch of the Black Hebrew Israelite movement. As one member of the House of Yisrael Cincinnati once remarked, "Crowdy was very influential in waking up our people." While describing the impact of Prophet William Saunders Crowdy, COGASOC Belleville Temple member Khadijah Miller acclaimed that he was, "A man who told us to go into business for ourselves. Is that not love? A man who told us to stay out of riots...He purchased land and empowered people who were considered three-fifths of a human to be 100 percent children of God (Miller)."

A major epicenter of Black Israelism in contemporary society is New York City. The Black Hebrew Israelite movement began there in 1899 when prophet Williams Saunders Crowdy evangelized on the street corners of Harlem. Within a month, it was estimated that Crowdy had gained over 1,000 followers (Landing 120). By 1906, there were at least seven Black Hebrew congregations in New York. A little less than a decade after the Black Israelite doctrine took root in New York, in 1914, another Black empowerment movement, the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) under the leadership of Marcus Garvey, would dominate Black ideology in New York.

Moreover, the Universal Negro Improvement Association garnered the attention of Arnold Josiah Ford. A native of Barbados, Arnold Ford was born in 1876 and arrived in Harlem around 1911. Upon hearing the Black nationalist message of Marcus Garvey, he became an avid member of the UNIA. Ford was a jazz musician and began composing songs for Garvey (Landing 129). While networking within the UNIA, Ford was

introduced to several Black Hebrews, which sparked his interest in Black Israelite ideology.

In 1924, Ford became a co-founder of the Moorish-Zionist Temple. Ford was on a mission to place Black Israelism within the framework of Black nationalism. He attempted to explain the African roots of Hebraism. Ford proclaimed Nigeria as the cradle of the Hebrew race. He believed and proposed that Africa was the foundation of Hebraism, Egypt, and Palestine (Landing 135). Ford promoted the doctrine of Black Hebrew identity and taught that Black Hebrews originated from Ethiopia. He also learned Hebrew and Arabic and encouraged Blacks to become fluent in both languages. Eventually, Ford endured financial issues and internal conflict within his organization. These challenges influenced Ford's decision to leave the U.S. with his wife and move to Ethiopia in 1930.

Before Arnold Ford exited the United States, he influenced Wentworth Author Matthews. A fellow native of the West Indies, Mathews was born on June 23, 1892 (Landing 137). In 1913, Matthews moved to Harlem, New York, where he worked a number of odd jobs, including professional boxer and wrestler. Similar to Ford, Mathews was also involved in the UNIA. In 1919, Matthews branched off and established the Commandment Keepers, Holy Church of the Living God, Pillar of Truth. Later the name was redacted down to simply the Commandment Keepers. Ford was acquainted with Matthews and initially considered him a rival. Eventually, they worked together, and Ford assisted Matthews in instructing his congregation. In 1931, Matthews received ordination papers from Chief Rabbi of the Ethiopian Hebrews in Addis Abba, signed by Arnold Josiah Ford (Landing 138).

As Rabbi Matthews' congregation grew, he offered Hebrew classes, and his members referred to themselves as Abyssinians and descendants of the tribe of Judah. They considered white Jews to be the descendants of the lost tribes of Israel. Matthews taught that Black people in America were Falasha Jews and that 'Negro' was a name given to them during slavery. Furthermore, Matthews contended that Blacks needed to go back to their original religion, which he believed was Judaism, and stop adhering to Christianity because it is the 'white' man's religion. When discussing Christ, Matthews argued as follows:

"If we could get redemption by the sacrifice of one man, it would be a good thing. But a lot of black men were lynched-for that's what happened to Jesus-and they are not martyrs, and they should be. But Jesus was not a Christian, he was a Jew of the tribe of Judah. And he was black, and I'm glad to say that I was one of the first to settle that. When the Gentiles find out that Jesus was black, they'll drop him as their Lord overnight (Brotz 25)."

Matthew's paradigm of Black Jesus in juxtaposition to the violent treatment of Black men, is indicative of the terrors of Jim Crow that Black people were experiencing throughout the nation. The Black nationalist ideas from the UNIA evolved the Black Israelite ideology beyond Afrocentric Christianity to embrace Hebrew language, culture, and practices through African origins.

The Black nationalist teachings of the Commandment Keepers spread throughout New York and other major cities in the United States, such as Chicago. Like New York, Chicago was also introduced to the Black Hebrew ideology by Prophet Crowdy in the late 19th century and had a large UNIA following. People interested in Pan Africanism and having 'pure' spiritual roots as God's 'chosen' people were attracted to Black Israelism. In 1938, Joseph Lazarus and Henry Brown established the Congregation of

Ethiopian Hebrews in Chicago under the Harlem style Black Israelism in affiliation with Rabbi Matthews (Landing 316).

The Congregation of Ethiopian Hebrews produced many Black Israelite leaders and evangelists, such as Prophet Lucius Casey. In the early 1940s, Casey went out in the streets preaching the message of the Ethiopian Hebrews. Casey's oratory gifts allowed him to gain followers who began calling him Prophet. Once he had a sizable following, Casey started the Negro Israelite Bible Class on the South Side of Chicago. Casey predominantly taught that Black people were the original Israelites; the oppressors of Black people would be punished by the Lord, and Black Israelites would meet the Lord in Palestine (Landing 318).

By the 1960s, the Black Hebrew Israelite Movement evolved out of more racial and political unrest that affected African Americans since the movement's inception, this time within the militant scope of the Black Power Movement. As usual, New York and Chicago were springboards for disseminating the 1960s militarism on top of the nationalism already acquired by Black Israelites during the UNIA movement. New York leaders like Abba Bivens, who left the Commandment Keepers and developed a separate messianic doctrine, started his own group. His followers were more militant in dress and rhetoric. They aggressively took to the streets teaching Black Hebrew identity and eschatological justice of the Black man from the Lord. In 1969, Bivens founded the 1 Wes class now known as the Israelite School of Universal Practical Knowledge (ISUPK) in Harlem. The ISUPK is notorious for preaching harsh racial rhetoric on the streets in major cities. Due to their militaristic style, they have made appearances on various talk shows, especially in the 1990s, as controversial guests. Many Black Hebrew Israelite

camps splintered away from the ISUPK after a prophecy claiming that the end of the world and the Lord's judgment would come in the year 2000 did not come to pass.

In Chicago, the 1960's Black Power movement also influenced change in Black Hebrew Israelite ideology. A member of the Congregation of Ethiopian Hebrews, Ben Carter, started a movement that would reach Israel. Carter lived on the West side of Chicago. He began going to meetings of various Black Jewish groups throughout the city's southside in his early twenties. He received the name Ben Ammi Carter, which means "righteous teacher," from a rabbi at the Congregation of Ethiopian Hebrews (Landing 325). Carter became so involved in Black Israel's identity that he took up a second wife, citing that the Old Testament scripture permitted polygyny (Landing 326). Garvey's Black nationalism and the Black Power Movement's ideas of separatism influenced Ben Ammi's message of Black Jews returning to Israel. In 1969, Carter and hundreds of other Black Hebrews briefly moved to Liberia and then moved and settled in Dimona, Israel, to use the law of return; however, they were denied citizenship but given a residency permit. Carter died in Israel in 2014, but his community in Dimona is still thriving today with about 5000 members.

Another Black Hebrew evangelist came out of Chicago's Congregation of Ethiopian Hebrews named Hananiah E. Israel. Hananiah originally was a part of the Congregation of Ethiopian Hebrews but primarily studied Black Israelite ideology from Prophet Lucius Casey and was in his Negro Israelite Bible Class. From Casey's teachings, Hananiah began traveling to spread the message of Black Hebrew identity. He ended up in Cincinnati, where he established several Black Hebrew Israelite

congregations, including the House of Yisrael Cincinnati. The details of Hananiah's work in Cincinnati will be further discussed in a later chapter.

Due to differences in environment, doctrine, development, and expression, Black Israelite communities have been umbrellaed under four different categories along two axes. The two major categories are messianic and non-messianic Israelites. There is a sub-category of holiness within the messianic category. The non-Messianics have sub-categories rabbinic and Torah-only. As Black Hebrew Israelite identity expanded into these categories, it evolved along an ideological axis of rejectionist and accommodationist (Key 45). The Black Hebrew incorporation of Christian doctrine positioned messianic and holiness Israelites on the accommodationist axis and rabbinic and Torah only Israelites on the rejectionist axis. Black Hebrews that subscribed to a historical Western Judaism perspective positioned rabbinic and messianic Israelites on the alternate accommodationist axis, and Torah only and holiness Israelites on the alternate rejectionist axis (Key 46).

Additionally, messianic and holiness Israelites embrace both Old and New Testament as scripture, and they reverence Jesus as the messiah. However, Messianic Israelites are accepting of some Jewish rabbinical traditions, and holiness Israelites are not. Rabbinic Israelites and Torah-only Israelites reject the New Testament and Jesus, adhering only to the Torah or Old Testament. However, Rabbinic Israelites accept the rabbinic oral traditions found in the Talmud and Torah-only Israelites reject the Talmud and extra-biblical books as scripture or practices to follow.

It is essential to distinguish between the various ideologies and communities that evolved within Black Israelism because each variant has its unique characteristics,

beliefs, and practices. Unfortunately, the common application in the media and in some cases academia, has been to lump all of these groups together. In doing so, the complexity and diversity of Black Israelites have been minimized and or ignored. As in the case with most marginalized or misunderstood communities, Black Israelites have been the subject of much criticism based on the offensive actions of a few of its most misguided adherents. It does not seem to matter what ‘denomination’ or congregation of Black Israelism a misguided member belongs. Their actions justify all Black Israelites to be deemed dangerous and heretical by the press and the public.

Furthermore, most Black nationalist groups, regardless of faith or political stance, at one time or another have been corralled into the categories of extremist, dangerous, heretical, racist, unpatriotic, ill-informed, and or delusional. Through examining the small Black Hebrew Israelite community of the House of Yisrael Cincinnati, this study aims to dismantle some paradigms of unease concerning Black Hebrew Israelites. In doing so, maybe we can curb the sensationalized focus on violent offenders of Black Israelism and instead examine the issues, violence, and injustices that may encourage some Black people to join nationalistic religious movements. We may find that Black Israelites are less dangerous than the institutions that have influenced their creation and expansion.

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Chapter 2: Race Relations in Cincinnati: Fertile Ground for a Radical Movement

Racial oppression inspired the spread of Black Hebrew ideology in the United States. The rise of Jim Crow allowed Frank Cherry and William Crowdy's ideologies to grow. Black nationalism and the Black Power Movement also caused the seeds of Black Hebrew identity to blossom. As mentioned in Chapter One, Black Hebrew thought took root in Cincinnati, Ohio. Why was Cincinnati a destination of a Black ideological resistance of oppression? How did Cincinnati's social climate develop an African American subculture that subscribes to a distinctive religious-based nationalistic identity? In order to address these questions, this chapter gives a general overview of the historical treatment of Blacks in this Northern industrial city.

The city of Cincinnati was first settled in 1788, in Hamilton County, in the territory that would become Ohio. Cincinnati was literally a crossroad between the North and the South. The geographic position of the city represented the tensions between slavery and freedom. Cincinnati was the southernmost city in a free state that boarded slave-holding Kentucky. In addition, although the state of Ohio was a free state, due to the proclamation of the Northwest Ordinance of 1783, freedom from enslavement did not guarantee full citizenship for Blacks in Ohio. In many instances, the attitude of the city and the state-supported white supremacy. At the 1802 Ohio Constitutional Convention, delegates opposed restricting the rights of Black people because they feared that by doing so, Congress could reject Ohio's request for statehood (Campney 14). However, when Indiana passed an anti-Black law in 1803, Ohio legislatures felt confident to embrace

restricting the rights of Black people without consequences. After that, the Black Laws, first established in 1804, codified white supremacy in Ohio.

The 1804 Black Laws required all Blacks to present a certificate of freedom from a court to reside in Ohio (Middleton 4). Blacks also had to register themselves and their children into the court system and pay a registration fee. Additionally, Black people could not be hired without producing proper freedom certificates and documentation to employers. An increase of Black settlement into the state in 1807 led to more Ohio Black Laws being created. In addition to freedom certification, Blacks had to have two white citizens willing to provide a surety of \$500 for their excellent behavior. Moreover, interracial marriage was restricted along with gun ownership.

Beyond these general restrictions, the city of Cincinnati enacted various municipal laws to segregate Blacks and restrict their access to education and entry into the job market. These laws, ordinances and practices were intended to deter African Americans from settling in Ohio. African Americans were denied access to numerous jobs and trades. Trade organizations and unions refused to hire Blacks. African Americans were also prohibited from serving on juries, legally testifying against whites, and attending public school (H. Taylor 158). Additionally, Blacks were segregated in churches and cemeteries (Richard 33).

Despite the prejudices and oppression of the Ohio Black Laws and local ordinances, many African Americans settled into Cincinnati in efforts to achieve a better life in the free industrial city. Between 1820 and 1829, the Black population in Cincinnati increased by 400 percent (N. Taylor 285). Life in Antebellum Cincinnati was tough but made bearable with partnerships from white abolitionists and friends. In order to develop

a thriving community, Black Cincinnatians created social organizations and built churches, schools, and even stations for the Underground Railroad (H. Taylor 2).

Mob Violence

Antebellum Cincinnati was not only institutionally prejudiced against Blacks, but it was also physically violent against them as well. This violence rested on the institutions that already sanctioned the ill-treatment of African Americans. For example, in 1829, with Blacks then making up almost ten percent of the city's population, many whites were worried about their growing size. The Black Laws were lax in enforcement. As a result, whites insisted that the Black Laws be more strictly enforced. With the local government being slow to enforce the laws, in August of 1829, a mob of 200 to 300 whites attacked the Black section of the fourth ward, demolishing Black buildings, homes, and shops (N. Taylor 291). As a result, approximately half of the Black population in Cincinnati left and emigrated to Canada (N. Taylor 283).

Although the mob was made up of predominantly working-class men, they did have the support of the 'elite white gentlemen.' According to historian Leonard Richards in his book, *Gentlemen of Property and Standing: Anti Abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America*, men of status supported the mobs because it preserved their political power (129). This is evident in the actions of William Green, who was the mayor of Cincinnati during the 1829 riot; he was slow to act against the mob, which resulted in Blacks receiving no police protection (N. Taylor 291). Green's actions represented Cincinnati's political endorsement of violence towards African Americans.

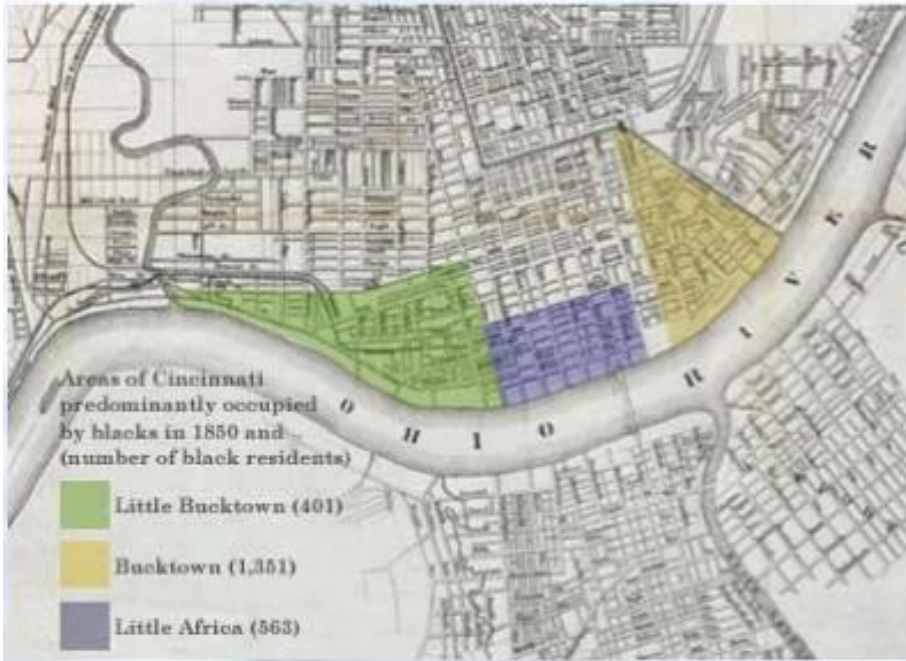
This mob action was not an isolated incident. In 1836, abolitionism and the assimilation of Blacks into society incited further violence. In December of 1835, ex-slaveowner and converted abolitionist James Birney set up his anti-slavery printing press twenty miles outside Cincinnati. On January 1, 1836, the first of Birney's publication was circulated in Cincinnati (Richards 93). By the end of the month, Cincinnati's most affluent and respected citizens, including Mayor Samuel Davies and former United States Senator Jacob Burnet, held a meeting with 500 anti-abolitionists to discuss how they should suppress all abolitionists publications (Richards 94). The primary concerns at the meeting were that an anti-slavery movement would jeopardize Cincinnati's trade with the South and the ongoing concern of Black amalgamation (Richards 94-95).

In April, Birney moved his press into the city of Cincinnati. In reaction, a white mob burned a building down in the Black community and attacked people. As a result, several Blacks were killed, and the governor had to intervene and invoked martial law to restore the peace (Meyers 15). In July, a pro-slavery mob of forty destroyed Birney's press because some African Americans attended Cincinnati's Independence Day celebration. However, Birney was not deterred and re-established his press; other abolitionists established presses as well. In response, a publication was spread across the city with a \$100 bounty put on Birney, which stated, "all his associations and feelings is Black" (Richards 96). That statement demonstrated how being Black or having empathy for Blacks was considered criminal.

Additionally, riots broke out, a mob went and destroyed various abolition presses in the city, interracial brothels were destroyed, and Blacks' homes were raided (Richards 97-100). After a few days, city leaders came together. The abolitionists were blamed for

the violence, and enforcers were dispersed throughout the city to restore the peace. The actions that took place in 1836 show that those in power in Cincinnati only viewed enslaved Blacks as valuable and purposeful; free Blacks symbolized the destruction of the white economy and the dilution of white culture through amalgamation. It reflected an important narrative in the history of the oppression of 'free' Blacks in Cincinnati.

In 1841, the war on free Blacks continued to wage in Cincinnati. In June of that year, the Ohio Supreme Court declared that all slaves voluntarily brought into Ohio by their masters would be free. As a result, an influx of runaway slaves traveled to Cincinnati to take refuge. This alarmed the white citizens of the city as rumors of "negro stealing" and abolition "take over" ran rampant (Richards 124). In August, a gang of white youth threw rocks at well-dressed Black men, and a street fight broke out (Cheek 45). The next day, an armed white mob marched into a Black hotel, and another fight occurred. By September, some white Kentuckians joined the Cincinnati mob, significantly increasing their numbers, which prompted Blacks to arm themselves in defensive preparation for another attack (Cheek 45).



Map 1: www.hamiltonavenueroadtofreedom.org

On the night of September third, the mob gathered toward the ‘Little Africa’ district of Sixth and Broadway and burned businesses and attacked Blacks in the street. Blacks responded by firing their rifles, leaving a few white attackers injured (Cheek 46). The white mob then fired cannon three times into the ‘Little Africa’ neighborhood (Meyers 19). The next morning, white citizens went to the courthouse under the mayor's leadership and issued enforcement of the Black Laws; the most immediate enforcement was the complete disarmament of Blacks. In outrage, the Enquirer newspaper reported that Blacks had enough weapons for “an Algerine pirate vessel...How was it that almost every Black among us, carried concealed about him, deadly weapons...” (qtd. in Richards 127).

After the disarmament, many Black men were arrested, and the Black neighborhood was put under martial law. Black houses were ransacked during this time, a Black church was destroyed, Black women and children were forced out of their homes,

and a young Black girl was gang-raped (Richards 128). The local government did little to nothing to intervene, and the white mob did not face any judicial consequences. In September, 75 percent of the Black men arrested were released by posting a bond or presenting their freedom certificates. The remaining Black men were either discharged or agreed to leave Cincinnati (Richards 129).

Another outcome of the fear of a growing free Black population in the United States led to the formation of colonization societies. Many Northerners thought the likely alternative to slavery and African colonization was a race war or miscegenation (Richards 44). Formed in 1816, probably, the most well-known was the American Colonization Society. Cincinnati followed suit. The Cincinnati Colonization Society was formed in 1826 to send free Blacks in Cincinnati to Africa (Richards 34). However, Black freedom, progression, and incorporation into society continued to be a pressing concern for the dominant culture in Cincinnati that would execute terrible actions on its 'free' Blacks.

In 1849, the Ohio Supreme Court repealed the Black Laws. However, this decision disturbed and angered the public majority in the state. Racial conservatives were most outraged and presented petitions for an exclusion clause at Ohio's 1850 Constitutional Convention (Campney 15). Brown County delegate James Loudon petitioned,

“...the pioneers of 1802, when they drew up the constitution under which we are now assembled, that this should be a state for the white man, and the white man only” (Terzian 372).

Votes were taken to export Blacks to Africa with funds from Ohio taxes and to ban Black immigration into the state. The most substantial support for these bans came from Hamilton County, which had the highest Black population (Terzian 375). Ultimately, these bans were voted down because they interfered with federal law and the fact that the

state had already tried to ban African American residence with the Black Laws, which were largely unsuccessful.

Segregation

The oppression of Blacks in Cincinnati continued to persist into the latter half of the 19th century. After the Civil War, racial riots and physical violence against African Americans declined in Cincinnati; however, residential, economic, and social discrimination remained consistent and increased. Before the close of the 19th century, most of the neighborhoods in Cincinnati were integrated. As a result, there were clusters of Blacks residing amid their white neighbors. The majority of the city's residents, Black and white, lived in the basin area. The basin area encompassed the West End, Over the Rhine, East End Factory, and Central Waterfront districts (H. Taylor 103).

However, by the turn of the 20th century, residential segregation began to develop as new residential neighborhoods were established. From 1870 to 1940, approximately 90,000 whites moved out of Cincinnati's basin and moved into new residential areas (H. Taylor 163). In addition, from 1900 to 1940, African American migration from the South poured into Cincinnati. As a result, the Black population grew from 15,000 to 56,000, increasing the Black population in the basin by 704 percent (H. Taylor 163).

In a study of Black women who migrated from the South to Cincinnati, results showed that migrants were motivated by new employment opportunities, education, better food, better housing, and escape from violence (Bunch-Lyons 9). In the south, even skilled laborers suffered from a lack of job opportunities. Migration was representative of a chance to acquire a job in accordance with qualifications. (Bunch -Lyons 9). Moving to Cincinnati resulted in tangible economic improvements. Many southerners were tired of

farm life and looked forward to variance in occupation. Although Cincinnati was a major manufacturing center, most Blacks were not granted access to those jobs, however (Bunch-Lyons 11).

In the first half of the 20th century, the occupations of African Americans in Cincinnati were not much different from those of the previous century. Approximately 86 percent of Blacks worked as unskilled laborers and domestic workers (H. Taylor 172). Only two percent of Blacks had professional jobs. However, most of the professions were ministers, musicians, and teachers as opposed to doctors, lawyers, engineers, or bankers. After WWII, more jobs were open to African Americans. However, by 1948, half of the companies in Cincinnati only employed blacks for menial jobs maintaining the low wage ceiling for African Americans (McDaniel 27). With industry occupying more space in Cincinnati's basin district, Blacks were pushed into the West End of the basin, which formed into the city's first Black ghetto. Historian Henry Louis Taylor explained, "No physical wall encircled the ghetto, but a wall of high rent did isolate Blacks from their more affluent white neighbors" (173). During the 1920s, Cincinnati underwent housing reform. A central goal of housing reform was to confine low-income Black workers to the basin by building codes, zoning laws, and city planning to outlaw inexpensive housing in other parts of Cincinnati (H. Taylor 176).

The second development of Cincinnati's Black ghetto emerged between 1940-1960 during the second great Black migration; with the advent of the superhighway, redlining, and relator schemes, Blacks were pushed to Queensgate and the West End (Norwood 99). Residential discrimination limited their housing options, and landlords often charged Black families higher rent than white families in similar neighborhoods

(Bunch-Lyons 12). With few options to reside in and high rent, Black families would group in small spaces becoming overcrowded in deteriorating buildings.

It was in the 1940s when the local government became concerned about the consequences of Black disfranchisement. In 1943, in the aftermath of race riots in Detroit, Michigan, the mayor of Cincinnati established the Mayor Friendly Relations Committee (MFRC), which later became the Cincinnati Human Relations Commission (CHRC). The goal of the MFRC was to prevent race riots in Cincinnati by addressing matters such as employment, housing, schools, health, recreation, civil rights, and police protection (Obermiller and Wagner 5). Interestingly, Black people's ill-treatment did not spark government action; instead, the fear of Black violence motivated a political response. For two decades, the MFRC struggled to produce any progress in African Americans' conditions within Cincinnati, and the city's worst fear manifested.

By the 1960s, housing was still a significant issue in Cincinnati. Lack of income and racial housing discrimination caused fair housing legislation to fail as a substantial number of Blacks were unable to leave the ghetto. Although nearly 50,000 new residential units were built in the city in the 1950s, fifty percent of the Black population could not afford to purchase any of them (Casey- Leininger 247). According to a study on Cincinnati conducted by President Lyndon B. Johnson's 1968 Kerner Commission, "almost one out of every eight Cincinnati Negroes was unemployed. Two of every five Negro families were living on or below the border of poverty." When examining the most densely populated Black neighborhood in the West End, the Kerner Commission reported,

"A study of the West End section of the city indicated that one out of every four Negro men living there was out of work. In one public housing area, two-thirds of the fathers

were missing. Of private housing occupied by Negroes, one-fourth was overcrowded, and half was deteriorated or dilapidated (26).”

Blacks who had adequate income to move to predominately white new residential areas were discriminated against even though racial denials violated state and federal anti-discrimination legislation (Casey-Leininger 248).

In addition to low income and inadequate housing, Blacks in Cincinnati were politically marginalized. The limited voting system in Cincinnati kept black political representation low. For example, in the 1950s, two African Americans were on the city council board. However, by the mid-1960s, there were no Blacks on the city council because the proportional representation system was replaced with an at-large electoral system (N. Taylor 27). There was also a lack of representation on the school board, even though Blacks accounted for 40 percent of the public-school children by 1967 (N. Taylor 27).

Early Protest

By the summer of 1967, racial violence erupted twice in Cincinnati. The catalyst for the summer of rioting was the death sentence conviction of Black musician Postell Laskey for the murder of a white woman. Mistrust of the judicial system caused many Blacks to believe that Laskey did not receive a fair trial. Blacks were also upset that a white man who killed his girlfriend received a more lenient sentence (Kerner 26). In response, Laskey’s cousin Peter Frakes led a protest which resulted in his arrest and charge of blocking traffic and disorderly conduct. Frakes arrest further incited the Black community as they believed it proved disparate policing. From January 1966 to June

1966, African Americans accounted for 70 percent of people arrested for that same offense (N. Taylor 28). Moreover, the Kerner Commission found that,

“Police were charging most white persons arrested with disorderly conduct— for which the maximum sentence is 30 days in jail and a \$100 fine. Many Negroes, however, were charged with violation of the Riot Act— for which the maximum sentence is 1 year in jail plus a \$500 fine (26).”

As a result of Frakes’ arrest, a massive protest ensued on June 12, 1967, in the predominately Black neighborhood of Avondale. As police began mobilizing, violence erupted and spread throughout eight neighborhoods. The following day, Black leaders presented a list of demands and grievances to the municipal court: the repeal of the anti-loitering law, the release of all prisoners arrested in the demonstration, the full employment of Blacks, and equal justice in the courts (Kerner 27). Municipal officials agreed to consider their demands but refused to hold an open meeting in Avondale because they did not want to meet with any militant representatives (Kerner 27).

Consequently, the neighborhood militants had the ear of the people. The municipal rejection caused the young militants to believe that holding another protest would be futile. Therefore, violence and rioting ensued across various neighborhoods, causing an estimated 1 million dollars’ worth of damages. Over 400 arrests were made, of which the majority were under 26 years old, and 29 percent of those arrested were unemployed (N. Taylor 28). In order to restore the peace, 700 national guards were deployed (Obermiller and Wagner 28). The following spring, more riots ensued after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Out of relentless socio-economic oppression and the violent chaos of the 1967 and 1968 riots, the House of Yisrael Cincinnati seeds were planted. However, the roots of

violence and oppression towards Blacks in Cincinnati ran more than 150 years deep. From the inception of statehood, African Americans were not welcomed in Ohio. In many instances, the words of James Loudon, "...this should be a state for the white man, and the white man only," rang true. Blacks were constantly challenged in their mere existence in the state, and too often, violently opposed. Many of the grievances African Americans endured, such as unemployment, poor housing, poverty, and lack of police protection in juxtaposition to an abundance of police mistreatment, were just as relevant in the 1960s as they were in the 1820s. In the face of such an adversary, a path of Black ideological resistance of oppression was paved. A unique sub-culture was developed, and all it took was a message that explained the purpose of Black degradation, a revelation of an inspiring identity, and a promise of redemption.

The House of Yisrael Cincinnati: How Normalized Institutional Violence Can Produce a
Culture of Unorthodox Resistance 1963-2021

Chapter 3: House of Yisrael: How It Started

The ideological foundation of the House of Yisrael Cincinnati was partially a response to institutionalized violence and oppression long demonstrated in Cincinnati, Ohio. Due to the many obstacles and hardships Black folks faced in this city, a peculiar ideology took root in Cincinnati. The message proclaimed that the Black people of America were the true Israelites, a chosen people and that our oppression had a purpose. That purpose was to be redeemed by God ultimately. What was it about this message that appealed to the founders of the House of Yisrael? Was it due to the marginalization fatigue that many Black Cincinnatians felt? Was there possibly regret and bitterness towards the presumed failures of Orthodox religions, particularly the Black Christian church? Has the state of Black people in Cincinnati caused the House of Yisrael Cincinnati to be violent? The dire conditions of some Blacks in Cincinnati and frustration with institutionalized religion contributed to the embracement of Black Hebrew ideology. However, these factors have not inspired violence within the House of Yisrael Cincinnati. This argument will be demonstrated by analyzing the formation of the House of Yisrael Cincinnati and the ideologies and legacy of its predecessor Hananiah Elkanah Israel.

Hananiah E. Israel was born in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1905 (“Death Notices”). Hananiah converted from Christianity to Hebrew Israelite in the 1940s. After conversion, he changed his birth name of Stephen Holiman to Hananiah Elkanah Israel (Kaufman). He became an Israelite under the direction of Chicago’s Congregation of Ethiopian Hebrews. He later furthered his instruction in Prophet Lucius Casey’s Negro Israelite

Bible Class. Hananiah ventured his way from Chicago to Cincinnati in 1958 and made a living off doing odd jobs and social security (Murphy C-2).

While in Cincinnati, Hananiah took to the streets spreading the message of Black Hebrew identity. Included in his message was that Black people are oppressed and suffering because they disobeyed their god- Yahweh, who punished them by putting them into captivity with a promise of redeeming them if they would obey and return to him. With this message, Hananiah garnered the attention of Elesha Yisrael, who became the leader and prophet of the House of Yisrael Cincinnati. Hananiah's influence on Elesha Yisrael made him the messenger of Hebrew Israelite ideology to the founders of the House of Yisrael.

Elesha's Journey in Black Israelism

Elesha was born on January 11, 1943 and named Carl Thomas ("Obituary for Elesha Yisrael"). He joined the United States Army when he was a young man. He was also a Golden Gloves boxer in the Amateur Athlete Union and the U.S. Army. He won many trophies ("Obituary for Elesha Yisrael"). Elesha became a barber and opened up his barber shop, Elesha Styles Unlimited, after the close of his army career. (Obituary for Elesha Yisrael"). Elesha married Carol Wilson in 1965, and they produced two children, Malcolm and Mariam ("Obituary for Elesha Yisrael"). He and his family resided in the Evanston neighborhood of Cincinnati, Ohio.

The neighborhood of Evanston, similar to other contemporary Black neighborhoods in Cincinnati, began as a working-class neighborhood of majority white people in the 1930s and 40s (Tucker). As neighboring neighborhoods such as Avondale began being redlined and deteriorating, white families left Evanston for the suburbs. As

Evanston experienced 'white flight,' it too began deteriorating as prominent businesses were abandoned in the midst of the white exodus. Because of redlining, Evanston's prosperity and demographics underwent massive changes in the 1960s (Tucker). These changes would plague the neighborhood of Evanston with low income, low home ownership, and property depreciation for the following 50 years.

Elesha became acquainted with Hananiah Israel at his barber shop in the early 1960s- a time of transformation in his neighborhood. Elesha accepted his Israelite identity while studying with Hananiah. Upon conversion, he changed his name from Curtis Thomas to Elesha Yisrael. Perhaps, Elesha was aware of how his neighborhood was negatively transforming. The impact of prejudice, discrimination, and racism in Cincinnati during the 1960s that Blacks were subject to nationally as well inclined Elesha's ears to Hananiah's message that Blacks were a forgotten people of invaluable worth. Although these broader social issues undoubtedly influenced Elesha's conversion, most Israelites give credit to Yahweh for their revelation of identity. Nevertheless, in 1963, after his conversion, Elesha, Hananiah, and Daniel Yisrael (a childhood friend of Elesha), established a study group (houseofyisrael.org). Elesha quickly became an evangelist of Black Hebrew identity spreading the message like his mentor and predecessor, Hananiah.

A few years later, Elesha separated from Hananiah over doctrinal differences. Hananiah was a messianic Hebrew Israelite who followed the Old and New Testaments of the Bible and believed that the Christ of the new testament was the Hebrew messiah. Elesha, like one of his predecessors Mathew Wentworth, no longer believed that the New Testament was scripture, and he no longer believed that Jesus was the messiah. He

transitioned to Torah only because he saw inconsistencies between the Old and New Testaments and concluded that each book represented a different deity. Therefore, Elesha adhered to a Torah-only doctrine. The only valid scripture was the Old Testament of the Hebrew bible. As explained in chapter one of this work, Torah only Israelites reject all religious text outside of the Old Testament of the Hebrew Bible as scripture. They also only accept religious practices and customs found in the Old Testament.

After his break with Hananiah, in 1968, Elesha Yisrael established the House of Yisrael Hebrew Biblical and Cultural Center (worldgatheringisrael.org). This center was located next door to his barbershop on Montgomery road in the Evanston neighborhood of Cincinnati (Pugh B5). Elesha also gave himself the title of Moreh, which means teacher. Moreh Elesha taught Black Hebrew identity at his center, on the radio, and eventually cable TV. He continued to teach next door to his barbershop until he reunited with his friend Daniel Yisrael and opened up a new sanctuary at 1664 California Avenue. The House of Yisrael Hebrew Biblical Cultural Center is still in operation there today.

Elesha Yisrael had unique teachings on a variety of topics, including identity, prophesy, marriage and integration. The most taught lesson was Black identity, a subject proclaimed by many of his predecessors as a way to wake up ‘dead Jacob.’ We will examine his teachings closer later in this work. Elesha participated in many debates in order to spread and validate his messages. He also encouraged his congregation to ask questions about his teachings or doctrines during sabbath classes to encourage learning and address disputes and challenges. As Elesha’s ministry spread, other satellite Houses of Yisraels’ were established under his influence in other cities such as Atlanta, Georgia, Jackson, Mississippi, and Raleigh, North Carolina. Moreh Elesha’s firm belief in nation-

building prompted him to establish the Restoration of the Sacred Law Conference, a national annual conference designed to gather the nation of Yisrael. These conferences encouraged the attendance of all Black Hebrew Israelites regardless of doctrinal differences. The objective was to establish unity within the community. These conferences have been in effect now for twenty-seven years.

Moreh Elesha taught in the House of Yisrael for forty-five years before his death at seventy in January of 2013. His death greatly impacted his followers across the nation and his House of Yisrael Cincinnati congregation. After his passing, the initial class at California Avenue split and multiple classes developed in Cincinnati. Nevertheless, his teachings continued to inspire, and various teachers stepped up to carry his mantle. Some of the leaders who continued his teaching in Cincinnati were Moreh Mordekay, Moreh Ishiyah, Moreh Aaron, Morah (female teacher) Hilikiyah, Moreh Ishyah, and Moreh Naphtali, to name a few. Teachers such as Moreh Ishiyah and Moreh Aaron were made Morehs by Moreh Elesha. However, all of these teachers were directly taught by Moreh Elesha. Elesha's followers admired him because they say he magnified the Law and made it honorable ("Obituary for Elesha Yisrael").

Hananiah's Legacy

After Elesha separated from Hananiah in the late 1960s, Hananiah continued his mission of evangelism to the Black community. In order to spread the Black Israelite message, Hananiah placed advertisements in the newspaper inviting those who were curious or had questions about the 'mystery' of Black identity to contact him via mail. One such advertisement was placed in the Pittsburgh Courier in 1971 which read:

"What Every Negro Should Know Concerning Scripture"

“This information is an uncovering of the greatest mystery. The best kept secret in the world today...true identity of the people called Negroes. Taken from the files of the Greatest Historian the Almighty Black God. You are invited to help sponsor this Program...write...Hananiah Israel P.O. Box-1421 Cincinnati O. 45201” (Israel).

In addition to newspaper ads, Hananiah would also evangelize by sending out tape-recorded messages in the mail. As a result, Hananiah garnered the attention of one of his most infamous students- Marcus Wayne Chenault.

Chenault met Hananiah in March of 1973 (Hahn & Hogan). Upon meeting Hananiah Israel, Chenault received an affirmation that Black people were descendants of the lost tribes of Israel who had been brought into slavery by white people (Landing 370). Chenault was a twenty-three-year-old college drop-out of Ohio State University. His family resided in Dayton, Ohio. Hananiah instructed Chenault that the underlying problem in the Black community stemmed from Black Christian ministers who misled Black people to get rich. Additionally, he taught Chenault that Black people would never be free until all the Black ministers were put to death (Landing 370). Chenault could have suffered from marginalization fatigue and bitterness from the church, causing him to adopt his new revelation.

This newfound ‘truth’ that Chenault was learning created in him a whole new identity and a mission to ‘save Black people.’ Marcus embraced Hananiah’s philosophy that seemingly justified violent retribution. He resolved within himself that Black ministers were indeed a menace to Black people and should be killed. In fact, Chenault assumed a new identity calling himself Servant Jacob. Hananiah explained that Jacob became God’s battle ax against those that caused Black people to go astray (“Akron Minister Says”).

On June 30th, 1974, Chenault, in his fixation of a ‘destiny’ to cut down ‘evil’ in the Black community, stole two of his father’s guns, boarded a bus from Columbus, Ohio to Atlanta, Georgia, and went to Ebenezer Baptist Church where he shot and killed two people and injured another. One of those who he fatally shot was Mrs. Alberta King, mother of civil rights activist Martin Luther King Jr. While in police custody, Mrs. King’s husband, Reverend Martin Luther King Sr. questioned Chenault as to why his wife was murdered. Chenault answered that Reverend King was the true enemy and target, and only killed Mrs. King because he was not there. He further explained that he considered Reverend King the ‘true enemy’ because Christians are enemies to Black people (Landing 369).

Additionally, when Hananiah was questioned about Chenault’s violent actions, he replied that Chenault was acting according to scriptures, which called for a “reawakening of the Black people to prepare for the return of Palestine” (*The Index Journal*). Hananiah further excused Chenault’s actions by stating, “He found out he was Jacob,” and “He knows he was the one directed to do this” (*The Index Journal*). Even years after Chenault was sentenced to death by electric chair (later changed to life imprisonment), Hananiah remained in contact with Chenault’s relatives in Dayton, Ohio (Murphy). There is more information and sequences of events to explore in Chenault’s assassination mission; however, it will not be examined in this work. Instead, the purpose of mentioning this violent act is to provide a backdrop of concern to the ideology of Hananiah Israel, the forerunner of the House of Yisrael Cincinnati. Did Hananiah’s beliefs about Black Christian leaders have any ideological impact on Moreh Elesha and the House of Yisrael?

Let us develop an answer to this question by examining what Moreh Elesha had to say about prominent leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr.

In a recorded teaching entitled “False Leaders of Yisrael,” Elesha lectured:

“There are many prophets that you all have made martyrs out of. You made movies out of. Every year in January you go around talking about his dreams. And let me tell you about the dream that Martin Luther King had when he said I see a day that one day a man will not be judged by the color of his skin but the content of his heart... And he went telling you his dreams. As a result of sharing his dreams with you all, you all began to get into a state of wanting total integration. All the black restaurants all the black hotels, such as they had in Cincinnati such as the Manse Hotel. All of the black businesses most of them you abandoned. You allowed them to close up in your quest to achieve total integration...I want you to know today that the dream that Martin Luther King had, it was a nightmare, it was not a dream” (“False Leaders of Yisrael”).

From this excerpt of Elesha’s teaching, we can see that he disagreed with King’s philosophy of integration. Instead, Elesha perceived integration as a destructive force that led to the demise of Black-owned businesses. He framed this argument around the decline of the Manse Hotel. The Manse Hotel was established by Horace Sudduth in the 1930s in the Cincinnati neighborhood of Walnut Hills when Cincinnati was segregated. The Manse Hotel hosted many prominent African Americans in sports, entertainment, and politics, such as Jackie Robinson, James Brown, and Thurgood Marshall; the hotel declined and went out of business once integration was permitted in downtown Cincinnati (“Manse Hotel was a Respite”). The decline of black businesses may particularly have resonated with Moreh Elesha since he was a businessman. However, the concept of integration destroying Black wealth is not original to Elesha. The correlation between integration and the decline and closures of Black businesses is a topic debated by many activists in the African American community to this day. It will be further explored later in this work.

Moreover, in expressing different feelings about Martin Luther King Jr., Elesha explained Martin's dream as spiritually offensive. He continued to lecture from Jeremiah the 33rd chapter:

“Let me show you what the Almighty said about the dream in the 25th verse it says, “I’ve heard what the prophet says that prophesied lies in my name saying I have dreamed, I have dreamed. How long shall it be in the hearts of the prophets that prophesy lies? Yea they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart which think to cause my people to forget my name by their dreams.” This is all the people want today. Either they are talking about voting or they are talking about what a dead man dreamed, and none of them are talking about what thus saith Yahweh” (“False Leaders of Yisrael”).

We will delve more into Moreh Elesha's opinions on voting and integration later.

However, from his attitude concerning Martin Luther King, we can assume that

Hananiah's perception of Black ministers may have influenced Elesha's disposition.

Although Elesha considered Martin to be a leader in error, he did not seem to have any idea of inflicting violent judgment on King, unlike Hananiah's other student, Marcus Wayne Chenault.

Furthermore, Hananiah continued to have students and connections with violent and unsavory people. Hananiah claimed to be affiliated with former Cleveland, Ohio civil rights leader David Hill, also known as rabbi Edward Emanuel Washington (Kaufman). David Hill was known for conducting a Black Power protest against the fast-food chain McDonalds (Frazier). He also started a Hebrew Israelite sect in Cincinnati called the House of Israel (Kaufman). Hill left the United States as a fugitive for extortion related to the McDonalds protest in 1972 (Frazier). Hill relocated with his Cincinnati House of Israel followers to Guyana. Hananiah claimed that Hill visited him in the early 1970s before Hill moved to Guyana (Kauffman). While in Guyana, Hill established a compound

of about 7000 members. In 1977 David Hill beat one of his House of Israel members to death and was sentenced to fifteen years in prison for manslaughter (Associated Press).

Hananiah continued to have questionable affiliations. Two of his students were twenty-three-year-old Jana Arrington and twenty-one-year-old Michael Austin, members of the fledgling offshoot organization, Children of Israel. The Children of Israel were Hebrew Israelites with a Rastafari flare. Their group was started in the Winton Terrace Projects in the Winton Hills neighborhood of Cincinnati (Rosen). Many of the members were between ages fifteen and twenty-five. Hananiah was the local leader of the group. In July 1979, Jana and Michael received murder charges for beating Jana's five-year-old son Keith Arrington to death for breaking a Sabbath fast (Hahn & Hogan). Hananiah saw the child when he went to Keith and Jana's house for Sabbath class. As a witness in their trial, Hananiah testified, "The child was in the bedroom, seemed to be unconscious and seemed to be suffering" (Hahn & Hogan). He continued to explain, "Jana asked if I knew antidotes for vomiting and she said he got a spanking for stealing some cheese. I suggested the child receive professional treatment and she reluctantly went along" (Hahn & Hogan). Dr. David Meager operated on Keith when he arrived at the hospital. Meager testified that Keith suffered from multiple blunt head and stomach injuries and ultimately died due to the delay in treatment (Hahn & Hogan).

During the trial, Jana Arrington blamed Austin for the death of her child, and she also renounced her affiliation with the Hebrew Israelite group, the Children of Israel (Redding). Austin, however, remained in the group, and many members of the Children of Israel supported him (Redding). Members of the group filled his side of the courtroom. In the hallways of the courtroom, some made outbursts, such as Obadiah Israel, who

proclaimed, “We’re the true Jews” (“Pair Charged in Child’s Death”). Naphtali Israel showed support for Austin and explained, “because that’s my brother. If they penalize him and he’s guilty he just has to serve his time...until the Father Almighty releases him from captivity” (“Pair Charged in Child’s Death”).

Moreover, when Austin showed up for trial, he wore a blue sweatshirt with the words, “Praise Yah, Great Black Creator,” printed on the front and, “Humble Servant of the Yah, Ahiqar,” the back. The mention of Ahiqar is somewhat disturbing since, in the Apocrypha book of Tobit, Ahiqar is a servant of the king who adopted his nephew. However, the nephew was ungrateful and evil. He caused Ahiqar to face execution due to lies, but ultimately Ahiqar was saved (*Bible Gateway*). Furthermore, at trial, Austin testified that he did not punish Keith for violating a religious fast but instead because the five-year-old boy was caught stealing from the refrigerator (“Austin ‘Guilty,’”). Austin explained, “I could not let him (Keith) get away with it because he would have to respect the laws of the Mighty One” (“Austin ‘Guilty’”).

Keith was beaten so severely that two doctors had to operate on him when he arrived at the hospital; he had swelling in the brain, and his stomach was filled with blood (Hahn & Hogan). Ultimately, Michael Austin was found guilty of manslaughter and was sentenced to 7 to 25 years in prison (Austin ‘Guilty’”). Jana Arrington was also convicted of involuntary manslaughter; however, due to her testifying against Austin, her sentence was reduced to five years of probation (Cincinnati Associated Press). When Hananiah Israel was asked his thoughts on Keith’s killing, he stated, “It was a terrible thing,” and, “I couldn’t defend any action like that. I feel same way about it than anyone else would feel” (Murphy).

By the 1980's members of the Children of Israel still revered Hananiah as their founding teacher. The Children of Israel described that their purpose was to leave America and deal with the providence of Babylon (Rosen). Their main points of contention with American society were education, health, and employment. Many group members believed that the education system was brainwashing from Satan and abstained from eating meat (Rosen). With regards to employment, many members sought entrepreneurship. Children of Israel member Shem Israel explained, "There are some of our brothers that work, but there are a lot being turned down because we want to be of our ancient culture. I haven't really gone out begging in Babylon for no jobs. The Father Provides" (Rosen).

As stated earlier, Winton Terrace Projects was where the Children of Israel group formed. Winton Terrace Projects were the first housing project for low-income residents in Cincinnati. It was established by the Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority in 1940 (Knight). Initially, only white residents were allowed to live there (Knight). Blacks were first allowed to reside in Winton Terrace in the late 1950s; by 1965, Winton Terrace comprised 95 percent of Black residents. As was explained in chapter two of this paper, the living conditions of most Blacks in Cincinnati in the 1960s were not ideal. By the 1980s, living conditions in Winton Terrace were subject to drug crime and crack houses ("Chronology of Drug Trafficking"). Residents also had to deal with pollution as ELDA landfill was nearby, leaching methane gas into the neighborhood. When tested in the mid-1980s, concentrations of methane gas as high as 50 percent were found in lawns near Winton Terrace apartments (Kempe 17). As a result, the landfill was shut down in 1998

(Trapp). However, six major chemical plants were located within half a mile of Winton Terrace and continue to pollute the area to this day (Knight).

Moreover, Blacks' living conditions in Winton Terrace represent obstacles that Blacks all over Cincinnati faced throughout the 20th century into the millennium.

Israelites like Hananiah E. Israel provided a message of hope and justice to those living in deteriorating Black communities. Student of Moreh Elesha, Moreh Ishyah wrote:

“If you want to see what chaos does to a child then go to the projects. Screaming children, parents, police, neighbors; gun shots daily and nightly, fights are a social event, robbery, drunkenness, poverty, drug abuse, dead bodies, dead relatives, dead young friends. Police harassment, WIC, Medicaid, poor sanitation services, and living on the top of or under 1 mile radius of a landfill” (*Escape from Babylon* 61).

The psychological impacts of living in crowded crime-ridden, impoverished, and toxic environments can create a great desire for escapism. Adolescents growing up in these conditions could certainly feel punished by powers beyond their reach. Some of those powers could be recognized as ‘the system,’ institutionalized racism, classism, white supremacy, and to the Hebrew Israelite- God.

This desire is ultimately released from the yoke of punishment that corralled some Blacks into the Israelite faith. Hananiah proved to be an influential evangelist and forerunner of Black Hebrew Israelite ideology in Avondale, Evanston, Winton Hills, and neighborhoods in Ohio beyond Cincinnati. The ideology that he shared provided a reason why Black people were subject to unique suffering no matter what neighborhood or city they reside. The concept that Blacks were suffering from a divine punishment that could be revoked through obedience appealed to those who had lost trust in conventional avenues of upliftment. It is also the idea of divine redemption and retribution that may have inspired the extreme violent behavior of some of Hananiah’s students.

Hananiah continued to inspire young Black adults for better or worse until his death on January 13, 1980, at Grandview Hospital in Dayton, Ohio (“Death Notice”). Even in his death, Hananiah’s legacy remained controversial as Marcus Wayne Chenault was listed as a surviving friend in his obituary (“Death Notice”). Nevertheless, the final note on his obituary read, “a member of the Hebrew Nation has gone to sleep with his Fathers.” Hananiah proved to be influential in establishing various Black Hebrew Israelite congregations in Cincinnati and other Ohio cities. Sometimes the messages that he preached led to thriving Black communities such as the House of Yisrael. Sometimes his messages led to violence and destruction, such as the assassination of Mrs. Alberta King. Nevertheless, whatever the path constructed following his instruction, all roads began with assessing the downtrodden position of African Americans and a desire to find solutions to the degradation of Black communities.

Is the House of Yisrael Cincinnati Violent?

Hananiah’s connection to violent people and his founding connection to the House of Yisrael may indeed merit some skepticism as to whether or not the House of Yisrael Cincinnati should be considered a group that deserves apprehension. After all, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), Black Hebrew Israelites are listed as Black nationalist groups of concern (Johnson). In 2000, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) had Black Hebrew Israelites on their domestic terrorist watch list, which stated, “Violent BHI groups are of particular concern as the millennium approaches because they believe in the inevitability of a race war between blacks and whites” (Project Megiddo 23). Even while receiving approval to conduct a study on this group, the author warned her university that they raised a safety concern. Is the House of

Yisrael Cincinnati a violent militant group that acts upon and advocates for violence? Are they a Black nationalist group of concern? To answer these questions, let us examine how the House of Yisrael deals with anger, conflict, and revenge ideas.

In 2019, a group of Hebrew Israelites made national news when they caught on camera at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C., being verbally aggressive and shouting at teenage boys from Covington Catholic High School of Park Hills, Kentucky. In response, Cincinnati radio and television host Lincoln Ware interviewed and questioned a protégé of Elesha Yisrael, Moreh Ishiyah, as to why Israelites were angry:

Ware: “Now are you guys angry about anything? Because when you look at what happened in Washington D.C. it’s your anger...What are you guys upset about?”

Ishiyah: “Well, we can be angry at a lot of things. However, the group that was featured in Washington D.C., although we’re not affiliated with them, only by the fact that we believe, we both believe as Hebrews...So, they are practitioners of the New Testament and we are not.”

Ware: “And why is that?”

Ishiyah: “Well, they believe in the religious orders of today’s world, and we do not. We believe in the commandments of the Most High. But you asked me are we angry. We’re no more angry than a republican that gets at a democrat, or that a democrat gets at a republican. We have different views. We have different ideologies, different testimonies. But no, we are no different from any group at all. Just angry about the various things that are going on in the world.”

Ware: “And I guess any Black man in America could be just as angry as they say you are.”

Ishiyah: “That is correct, and they are. They are angry. They might be called Black republicans or Black democrats or Black this...but at the end of the day we all have an excuse to be angry. But Israelites really just angry at they self. We know we are in this condition because we failed the Most High and now we’re returning back to Him. And so, we are not angry at the world. We are not angry at any group or any race or anything like that.”

As the interview demonstrated, Israelites, at least those in the House of Yisrael direct most of their anger at themselves. They believe that the mistreatments that have befallen them are because of their own doing and no one else's.

In addition, when it comes to conflict or the need to use violent force, Israelites at the House of Yisrael advocate avoiding confrontation and fleeing from physical altercations. For example, during a sabbath class, one person asked a question about self-defense: "Would it be a sin if you don't run from your attacker and just kill them" (Holy convocation 06/19/21)? Another student of Moreh Elesha, Moreh Ishyah answered:

"I like to tell people the whole truth. And the whole truth is this...this land ain't your land. If you get into a conflict, and you can run, especially if you are armed...and especially if they pull out arms before you, run. And the reason is not to be just because you are a coward or afraid. It's because if you, Black man, shoot somebody, and you got a mother, and you got a father, or you got a brother, and you got a sister, and you got children or you have a wife, wives, you're putting all of them at risk of not having you around. Whether you in prison or you dead. Just get away from the situation here in this place. If you can't then do what you got to do. But the best thing is to stay out of trouble...and to call on the Most High...But if you can't...then defend yourself...But running is also defending yourself" (Holy convocation 06/19/21).

Moreh Ishyah continued to express:

"Because I have five sons and a wife, and if somebody pull a gun out on me, and I carry a gun most of the time...my first thought ain't ohh let me have a wild wild west. I'm out of there...I'm not about to sit there and trade bullets. I don't carry a gun to get into gun fights...if you can avoid getting into a violent altercation, get out of it...you are supposed to carry weapons for defense and last resort situations...You see somebody snatch up your child and running away, that's a last resort for me" (Holy convocation 06/19/21).

Another question was prompted during this same sabbath class: "What does it mean to not recompense evil and wait on Yah? Moreh Ishyah's reply was:

"It means don't seek revenge. When you don't recompense evil, that means you're not returning evil for evil...so somebody do something evil to you, you ain't seeking to do nothing evil to them. Just keep it pushing. Wait on the Most High, he'll take care of it" (Holy convocation 06/19/21).

This question and response provide an example of how members of the House of Yisrael do not seek to impose retribution on those that have done them harm. Even when it comes to society or groups of people, they see as enemies they still do not promote ideas of taking matters into their own hands. Moreh Ishyah, aside from being an Israelite teacher, is also a Hebrew hip-hop artist with two-stage names, Author H. Bombz and I.M. Yisrael. In one of his earlier more radical songs in 2007, “Black Supremacist Vol. II,” he rapped:

“It’s death to Babylon, Death to Lucifer/ Death to America, yeah/ Death to the white man/ Death to the evil man/ Death to the oppressive man/Always on my neck/ You always feed me with disrespect...So it’s time for revolution, yeah/ We been caught in destitution, yeah/ Yah about to give us retribution, yeah/ Vengeance, He will avenge/ Not I, son I don’t seek revenge/ But I will repent for the sins I have committed...” (Death to Babylon).

Even in these harsh lyrics of Ishyah’s younger days before he was a teacher, the emphasis on vengeance and retribution is still placed on God and is not about taking action yourself. He also reinforced a need to repent of his wrongs and his transgressions. At the same time, he pointed out his perceptions of America’s evils.

In looking at the House of Yisrael’s example of whom they are truly angry with-themselves, in observing that they do not advocate engaging in violence, in examining their belief that vengeance belongs to the Lord, we can conclude that they most likely are not a safety threat to themselves or others. Although Elesha Yisrael was taught by Hananiah Israel, who seemed okay with violent retribution and continued to be connected with violent people, Elesha Yisrael was not violent, nor did he teach violence to his congregation. Moreh Elesha and Hananiah differed on liberation ideologies and on theological concepts of who the messiah was. However, they seemed to share the same views and feelings of animosity towards Christianity. In the next chapter, we will

examine how anti-Christian animosity was expressed in Elesha's House of Yisrael and their perception of mainstream Judaism. More importantly, we will observe how the role of racism, violence, and discrimination helped to mold those animosities and perceptions.

The House of Yisrael Cincinnati: How Normalized Institutional Violence Can Produce a Culture of Unorthodox Resistance 1963-2021

Chapter 4: The House of Yisrael, Judaism, and Christianity

The House of Yisrael Cincinnati, like many other Black Hebrew Israelite congregations, have strong theological, doctrinal, and political disagreements with Christianity and Judaism. Most of these disagreements are constructed beyond variances in philosophies and reside within the context of race and racism in America. Many Black Israelites see normative Jewish people as agents of the stolen identity of Black or 'true' Israelites. Many Black Israelites view Christianity as a religion used to perpetuate lies and keep Black people oppressed. How these perceptions are expressed and rationalized distinguishes the House of Yisrael from other Black Israelite groups. Throughout this chapter I explore the House of Yisrael's position on Judaism and Christianity while providing a simultaneous brief investigation of the historical treatment of Judaism and Christianity towards Blacks in the United States and abroad.

Origins of Black and Jewish Relations in the Americas

Jews had experienced persecution and expulsion in the middle ages up through the 20th century throughout Europe and the Middle East. As a result, many Jews left to find new homes in the more tolerant Netherlands and eventually the New World of the Americas. The first Jewish immigrants of the New World were primarily Sephardi Jews.

Many Jews were merchants and businessmen, and some got involved in the plantation economy and slave trade, as explained earlier in this chapter. Some Jews prospered well in the New World and developed settlements and colonies with relative autonomy. The first Black Jews recorded in the Americas were slaves of Sephardi Jews that fled to the Dutch and British-controlled territories in the Americas following the 15th-century Spanish Jewish expulsion (Bruce Haynes 67-68). Large communities of Sephardi Jews were settled in the Dutch territory of Suriname along the Atlantic coast of South America. In Suriname Sephardi Jews were the largest group of plantation owners possessing 115 plantations; most of the slaves there came from Angola and Ghana in West Africa (Stipriaan 74). Jewish slave owners would immerse or ritually bathe (mikvah) their slaves in these Jewish plantation communities and then convert them to Judaism by circumcising them (Haynes 67-68).

Additionally, it was a common practice for Jewish men to convert their African female slaves to marry them as legitimate Jewish brides (Haynes 70). However, Jewish slave masters were not exempt from forcefully possessing female slaves like their other European counterparts. Nevertheless, Jewish slaveowners and African slaves produced Afro-Jewish offspring commonly found in autonomous Jewish settlements in the Caribbean and South America (Haynes 71-72). For example, in Suriname, Afro-Jewish children were sometimes recognized by their fathers and emancipated; in such cases, those children were raised and trained in the religion of Judaism (Stipriaan 80). However, free Mulatto Jews were not accepted as full members of the Jewish community. Thus, when the number of 'Colored Jews' in Suriname increased to a population of 100, they asked permission to have their own community with their synagogue. However, Jewish

leaders denied their request because they did not want to violate the principle of Jewish identity by recognizing Mulattos as equal (Stipriaan 81). This decision is critical in understanding how Jewish leaders were instrumental in creating racial distinction and boundaries within the realm of Jewish identity.

In 1668, the first record of a Black Jew in North America was written in the court documents of Massachusetts (Landing 5). Sollomon was a traveler approached by authorities that questioned why he was not in church on Sunday; he was documented as a mulatto Jew. Other Black Jews of record were documented in Charleston, South Carolina, in the late 18th century (Haynes 74-75). The colony of Charles Town had a thriving slave economy with a large community of Sephardi Jews. Many of these new Jewish immigrants were from the Caribbean and South America. While in Charleston, Jewish immigrants were slave owners, merchants, and auctioneers (Haynes 75). The liberal culture in Charleston also allowed some Jews to marry Blacks. In the 1740s, Jews were granted naturalization in the American colonies by the British Parliament (Haynes 74).

Around the start of the 19th century, an influx of Ashkenazi Jews immigrated to South Carolina. Many of the Ashkenazi Jews that arrived in the Carolinas in the late 18th and early 19th centuries were escaping unrest in Europe, such as the partitions of Poland in the 1780s and the Hep Hep Jewish pogrom of 1819 in Germany. Their arrival produced a change in Jewish culture and religious structure in Charleston, with Ashkenazi Jews assuming authority and Reform Judaism dominating religious practice. The Ashkenazi were concerned that Jews of color would soon out populate white Jews within the synagogues. As a result, the conversion of people of color was strictly

discouraged, and proselytizing was prohibited. Although Jewish culture in Charleston transitioned, including its' attitude towards Black converts, one man was the exception to these new rules. Billy Simonds, also known as Uncle Billy and "The Black Jew of Charleston," claimed to be an Israelite who settled into Africa and was sold and sent to America by his Jewish owner (Haynes 76). Uncle Billy attended Beth Shalom Synagogue and was often praised by his rabbi for his sincere devotion and respected by the other Jewish members until his death in 1857. Uncle Billy received exceptional treatment from the Jewish community; however, his status of equal acceptance was not the norm.

Jews became more integrated into American society with minimal discrimination until the late 19th century when another influx of Jewish immigrants came to the United States to find relief from European persecution. Unfortunately, as more Jews increased their presence in the United States, the hatred and discrimination toward Jews found in Europe also made their way to American shores. As a result, Jews began to face discrimination, such as being barred from certain universities and places of business and being corralled into ghettos in larger cities.

Additionally, one concept about Jews that transitioned to the Americas was that Jews were as black as negroes (Hybrid Hate 42). This was a perception of Jews that was rooted back in the Middle Ages. For example, in England, a designated Jewish racial identity comparable to Blacks was established to place Jews in a position of inferiority (Hybrid Hate 45). By the 19th century, many philosophical, political, and pseudo-scientific accounts on Jews and their 'negro blood' in Europe and the United States.

Moreover, notable persons such as economist, philosopher, and socialist Karl Marx claimed that Jews descended from a combination of negroes, lepers, and Hebrews

that mixed together during the exodus out of Egypt (Hybrid Hate 171). German philosopher Bruno Bauer explained that Jews were white negroes with more Caucasian-like brains (Hybrid Hate 172). Dr. Arthur Talmage Abernathy, a theologian, a journalist recognized by President Franklin D. Roosevelt and elected to the American Association for the Advancement of Science, wrote a book in 1910 entitled, *The Jew a Negro: Being a Study of the Jewish Ancestry from an Impartial Standpoint*. Abernathy wrote, “Yet thousands of Years of effort to throw off their nigrescence have failed to eradicate those race characteristics, and the Jew to this day is essentially negro in habits, physical peculiarities, and tendencies (105).”

Furthermore, author of *How Jews Became White Folks: And What That Says About Race in America*, Karen Brodtkin, wrote: “The late nineteenth century and early decades of the twentieth saw a steady stream of warnings by scientists, policymakers, and the popular press that “mongrelization” of the Nordic or Anglo-Saxon race...by inferior European races was destroying the fabric of the nation” (25). Brodtkin further explained: “By the 1920s, scientific racism sanctified the notion that real Americans were white and that real whites came from northwest Europe” (30). After World War II, the racial stigma of Jews dissipated, ending popular discussions of Jews as a race - accepting them as an ethnic group, distinguished by culture rather than biology (Haynes 43). This shift in Jewish identity warrants attention because Jewish people purposely diminished the importance of being a biological Hebrew and emphasized the importance of being a part of a cultural and faith community.

Judaism and the Acceptance of Black Converts

Rabbi and professor Judah David Bleich explained in “Black Judaism: A Halakhic Perspective” that: “Judaism is color blind; skin pigmentation is unknown as a halakhic concept. The problem of determining the status of the various communities of Black Jews is totally unrelated to color. The sole issue is that of Jewish identity” (48). Although this statement portrays an accepting view of Black Jews, racism has played a role in the historical and contemporary treatment of Blacks who have converted to Judaism.

As discussed previously, Blacks initially converted to Judaism as enslaved persons. These initial conversions of circumcising male slaves were done to fulfill the Torah; they were not performed to embrace the slaves into the Jewish faith community. There were other practical reasons for Jews to perform immersion conversions on their slaves, such as rendering them qualified to prepare kosher food (Haynes 68). Conversion of slaves did not guarantee halakhic (Jewish law) status to offspring even with Sephardic subscription to patrilineal descent (Haynes 71). Due to the growth of African Jewish offspring, the Jewish community created a designation of status for Jews of color as congregants instead of recognition as Yehudim (Jews) (Haynes 71). This distinction of status was dismantled in 1841, a year after slave conversion to Judaism became illegal.

In contemporary society, conversion of Blacks to Judaism is overtly more welcoming; however, covert discouragements are active. One such discouragement is the financial burden of modern conversion. According to African American Rabbi Capers Funnye of the Beth Shalom B'nai Zaken Ethiopian Congregation of Chicago, he kept in contact with a community of 2,000 Afro-Jewish descendants in Brazil interested converting to Judaism. However, Reform and Conservative rabbis there have told that

community that it would cost \$3,000 per person to convert (Haynes 69). These costs make converting prohibitive for people with low incomes regardless of race.

The primary obstacle that ostracizes Black Jews is the normative belief that Jews are white. Once Blacks converted to Judaism, they faced another problem of identity. Professor Gordon explained in his publication “Rarely Kosher: Studying Jews of Color in North America” that: “As there were once no Jews who were white, this strange development means that large groups of nonwhite Jews simply disappeared, or at least disappeared *as Jews*” (106). Also, Karen Brodtkin explained that the admission into American acceptance was whiteness. Once Jews were considered white, they did not want to lose their new status of white privilege by being ethnically or racially associated with people of color. In essence once Blacks converted to Judaism, they were not accepted or seen socially as Jews, precisely because they were not white.

Orthodox African American Jew, Yavilah McCoy, recalled her struggle of being Black and Jewish and expressed:

“I had to reach hard for myself in Judaism, refusing black and Jewish as oxymoron. When I heard Jewish students call blacks monkeys, the *n* word, shvartses, my mother said, “That’s what racism does to Judaism. You are here for god; this is yours”” (Kantrowitz 186-187).

The old racial stigmas of Jews being ‘tainted’ with negro blood may still have subliminal effects on the contemporary mainstream Jewish community causing a reluctance to embrace a more diverse image of Judaism.

Moreover, Rabbi Blicch wrote:

“...responsible religious spokesmen have repeatedly cautioned that the claims of those purporting to be Black Jews require careful investigation before they may be accepted as authentic... those whose conversion cannot be authenticated openly concede that neither they, nor their progenitors, ever sought to acquire Jewish identity by means of formal conversion” (Bleich 74).

Professor Gordon challenged this idea of authentication stating:

“...some explanation would be needed for why some groups, such as Russian immigrants claiming to be Jews, don’t have to go through meticulous adherence to halakhic assessment versus communities of color from the Caribbean, Latin America, and Africa. Brief discussions with Russian Jews would reveal stories of Russian Christians achieving immigration as Jews in Israel and in North America (through claims of being persecuted as Jews) over Afro-Jews who count back their Jewish ancestry and their adherence to Judaism for dozens of generations. This double standard is familiar stuff. We know it’s racist, although it is impolite to call it such. It certainly isn’t kosher” (Gordon 112).

Additionally, in April of 2021, approximately 100 Black Hebrews living in Dimona, Israel, received 60-day deportation notices from the Israeli government (“Israel to Deport” Cashman). In chapter one of this work, this African Hebrew Israelite community arrived in Israel in 1969 with Ben Ammi. In 1978, the community was asked to convert but Ben Ammi refused; nevertheless, they were allowed to stay (Neiman). The Interior Minister granted many members temporary residency in 1992 and permanent residency to 1,200 members in 2003 (*Associated Press*). Most of those who received notices were born in Israel and have tried to obtain citizenship for half a century without success; some even served in the military (“Israel to Deport” Cashman). The interior Ministry commented that those who received notices were living in Israel illegally; the fact that some were born in Israel and knew of no other home made no impression on the Ministry (“Israel to Deport” Cashman). Ben Yehuda, Leader of the Black Hebrews in Dimona, stated that the community would make appeals.

Incidents like the Ben Ammi episode have illustrated how the State of Israel. Have contributed to Black Israelite perception of seeing Jewish people as racist oppressors. For example, the House of Yisrael Cincinnati discussed the Ben Ammi matter

during Sabbath class on May 8, 2021. Brother Ruachel lamented the fact that Israel was deporting Black Hebrews (“ZIF M02-W4”).

One woman expressed:

“They did them so wrong. It took them so long to even become a citizen or whatever they was supposed to be over there. They put them in the army. They had them fighting for them. You know. Now they want you to go” (“ZIF M02-W4”).

Brother Sivan read an article about the deportation in Sabbath class and concluded:

“...so, they wanted to be accepted amongst the people of Israel...this is something we are familiar with anyway being Israelites here in America...Ben Ammi...they started restorations of Israel in the land, but they are still being governed by our enemies...just as they have dominion over us here in America” (“Sivan M03-W2-D”).

Black Hebrews and Black Separatism: Paradigms of “true Israelite” Identity

With this convoluted history of conversion and rejection, many Black Hebrew Israelites refuse to submit to formal Jewish conversion. As a result, they remain on the fringes of the larger Jewish community. Many have chosen not to convert because they do not theologically nor doctrinally agree with Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform Judaism practices. However, the most significant grievance Black Israelites have regarding conversion is that they find it insulting and ridiculous to have to authenticate their faith and heritage to the white Jewish community. Many Hebrew Israelites believe racism is the primary factor that impedes their acceptance, causing the majority to accept and embrace a separatist stance rather than converting to appease white doubt.

Additionally, some Israelites find it unnecessary to convert because they believe that they are the true biological decedents of the ancient Israelites found in the biblical narrative. The House of Yisrael Cincinnati also adheres to this theory. They believe that

the European Jews stole the identity of the ancient Black Hebrews at some point in history. This ideology is common within various Black Israelite communities. However, the idea that Black people have a hidden identity is not exclusive to Black Hebrew Israelites. Various groups, such as Nation of Islam, Rastafarians, Moorish Science, Nuwaubian Nation, and the Black Indigenous American Movement, offer an alternative Black identity outside of Negro, Black, and African American.

We will examine some of the arguments for ‘true’ Israelite identity that Black Hebrews have given. Simply put, Black Hebrew Israelites do not believe their story begins in Africa; they believe it starts in Canaan. They believe that the Hebrew Bible tells the narrative of their history and not the history of the Ashkenazi or Sephardi Jews.

Religious leaders of the House of Yisrael routinely emphasize this message in their sermons. In addition, black Hebrew Israelites use biblical prophecy to prove their Hebrew identity and demonstrate how they ended up in America. For instance, Moreh Mordekay Yisrael of the House of Yisrael Cincinnati proclaimed: “We are the children of Yisrael, we are the House of Yisrael. We are the original House of Yisrael here in Cincinnati, located at 1664 California Avenue. We are the true decedents of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” (“Judah M04-W2”). He continued to teach from Psalms 147:19-20:

“... it says, what? He showeth his word to who? To y’all. To y’all bunch of dark skin folks with locs in your head. Beat down broken people. This is who Yah showed his word to. Not Donald Trump. Not all these big-time celebrities. Unless they humble themselves, I will say. But this is who Yah showed his word to. You. It says he has not dealt so with any other nation... When the people say that the Jews or the so-called Jewish people count 613 laws or whatever. Unless Yisrael validates that count, I won’t even consider it. Yisrael is the one that got to validate that count. Not the Jewish man. Not the gentile, but we have to validate that...because it’s got to be in your spirit, it’s got to be in your DNA to understand Yahweh” (“Judah M04-W2”).

Here, Moreh Mordekay highlighted the belief that Israelite heritage is not just cultural. However, it is biological that it is found in your DNA. He continued to explain: “We are going to spend some time in the book of Deuteronomy 28 today... We are going to take a journey down a timeline to show our people the plight that we have been through since we have been in this country. Since we have been scattered abroad” (“Judah Mo4-W2”).

A popular scripture that is often recited by Black Hebrew Israelites is

Deuteronomy 28:64-68:

“And the LORD shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, even wood and stone. **65** And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the LORD shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind: **66** And thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life: ... **68** And the LORD shall bring thee into Egypt again with ships, by the way whereof I spake unto thee, Thou shalt see it no more again: and there ye shall be sold unto your enemies for bondmen and bondwomen, and no man shall buy you” (KJV).

This scripture sets the ideological foundation of Black Hebrew Israelites, such as the House of Yisrael’s belief that African Americans are the ‘true’ Israelites because they believe that Black people are the only ones that fit the curses administered in Deuteronomy 28, especially being sent away in ships. They believe that the 68th verse is describing the middle passage and the transatlantic slave trade. Black Hebrews adhere to the belief that the ancient Israelites were scattered throughout Africa and then sold into slavery and carried off to America, the new ‘Egypt.’

Furthermore, at the 2004 Sacred Law Conference hosted by the House of Yisrael Cincinnati in Washington, DC, Moreh Herman Taylor of the Mississippi congregation orated:

“It is written in the book of Deuteronomy chapter 28 verse 32, “thy sons and thy daughters shall be given unto another people. And thine eyes shall look and fail with longing for them all the day long. And there shall be no might in thine hands. Our forefathers from Western Africa, looked in awe for centuries at an endless body of water. Wondering what happened to their loved ones. Where are they? How is it with them? They didn’t know. And again just a few years ago, brothers contacted Moreh Elesha, and said, “come with us and let us find the places where the ships landed.” And sanctified those locations so that we can find the spirits of our people. And here we are relatives of our brothers who were left on the distant shore at that time called the [inaudible], now Nigeria” (March on Washington DC Pt2).

Also, Moreh Elesha taught that Jewish people knew that Black people were the ‘true’ Israelites. Elesha instructed:

“Let’s go to the book of 2nd Kings the 5th chapter. ... 27th verse... [Reader, “The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed forever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow.”] A leper as white as snow. Again, here is someone that was grieved. The prophet Elisha had a servant named Gehazi, that sought to get money when the prophet told him to accept nothing. And he went to get money and changes of garments for Elisha blessing the man. And when he did this great sin ...when he came back Yahweh allowed the prophet to curse him for Yahweh cursed him and turned him white and said his descendants would be white. For how long? Forever. Now would Yahweh curse someone and turn them the same color as his people? He cursed this man and his descendants; said thou should be white forever. My question would then be...Where are they at today? None of the Jewish professors that I have ever talked to gave me an answer when I asked them that. I asked two of them that in separate debates, and both of them looked at me like I was 14 carats crazy. One the year before said, “I don’t know. Do you know where they at?” I said I know who they are ...they know who this is speaking of...they know Yah’s people are not the color of this (“Yisrael is a Black Nation” E2).”

Elesha also taught that the Israelites were Black and that the ancient Israelites were not white. Suggestions like this have contributed to House of Yisrael beliefs that Jewish

people stole their identity. Such beliefs have persisted and been instructed by other teachers under Moreh Elesha, such as Moreh Ishyah.

Moreover, Moreh Ishyah made comparisons between Israelites in the bible and Black people in America in his book *Escape from Babylon*, and wrote:

“The YisraELites were prophesied to go into captivity, and have another man sleep with their wives; just like they did in American slavery. The YisraELites were prophesied to go into captivity and forced to worship other deities they have not known; just as they did in American slavery. The YisraELites were prophesied to go into captivity and serve their enemy in hunger, in nakedness, and in thirst, for the want of all things and the enemy will put a yoke of iron upon their necks until he has destroyed us; just as they did in American slavery. The YisraELites were prophesied to go into captivity with ships and be sold as bondmen and bondwomen; just as was done in American slavery (116).”

After he made the comparison between Blacks and Israelites, he then proceeded to make a distinction between Jewish people and the circumstances of the Children of Israel and penned:

“This is our history; this is not the so-called Jewish man’s history. When did the White Jewish man ever go into a four hundred yearlong captivity, and forced to serve other gods: when did the Jewish man ever go into captivity with ships? Never! (*Escape from Babylon* 116)”

Ishyah continued to try to discredit Jewish lineage to the ancient Israelites and wrote:

“We see the people who are trying to perpetrate the fraud of being a so-called Jew as imposters. They are not Black, not oppressed in a strange land, ...My people must understand this, that the so-called black man in America are the true children of YisraEL, the chosen nation of YAHWEH, the apple of his eye, and YAH’S kingdom of Priest (*Escape from Babylon* 118-119).”

Furthermore, in Moreh Elesha’s book, *Setting the Crooked Things Straight: The Teachings of YAH’S Prophet*, he raised the question:

“If the American Black Man is the true Jew or the Original Hebrew YisraELite, then who are the people who say they are Jewish?”

Elesha answered:

“Some of them are the descendants of Esau, who is the brother of Jacob whose name was changed to YisraEL.”

Black Jews and Africa

When interviewed, Hebrew Israelites will often claim that they migrated west from the Levant, settling in the Nile region then moving far west into Nigeria and Ghana. One ethnic group in particular that Black Hebrews in America claim their affinity with are the Igbo people of Eastern Nigeria. In contemporary Africa, millions of Igbo fervently believe in their Israelite origins (“(De) Constructing Black Jews” 15).

Also, at the Sacred Law conference in Washington DC, Brother Yoseph, a representative from the Igboland in Nigeria, was one of the orators who spoke:

“There is hope for you and there is hope for your brothers in Africa because there is a powerful revolution going on in Africa. To my greatest surprise, nobody believed it could have happened. They are waking up and saying “we are Israelites” nobody would have said this ten years ago. So, the creator is fulfilling things...so keep the faith. Don’t be deceived. There is no difference between you and me. We are all from one root Yaakov (Jacob) our father” (March on Washington P2).

Israelites in America have often expressed their connection with the Igbo people. They have built relationships with them that have influenced the beliefs of those in Nigeria. However, American Black Israelites are not the only ones who have tried to establish an Israelite connection to the Igbo people.

Many have tried to identify the Jewish origin of the Igbo people. In the 18th century, Olaudah Equiano, a free educated Igbo slave living in England, wrote his famous autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano; or Gustavus Vassa, the African*, in 1789. Due to apparent similarities between Igbo and Jewish traditions, Equiano suggested a connection between the Igbo and the Lost Tribes of Israel

(“The Proto-History of Igbo” 32). Prominent writer and surgeon James Africanus Horton argued that the Igbo religion demonstrated that they are a part of the Lost Tribes in his 1868 publication, *West African Countries and Peoples* (“The Proto-History of Igbo” 33). Some of the customs the people observed connected the Igbo and Hebrews shared purity taboos, circumcision rites, and first fruit festivals. However, many of these practices have also been observed in other African cultures such as the Zulu, leaving affirmative researchers to admit that their supposed Hebrew culture only exists in an adulterated form (“Igbo Nationalism and Jewish Identity” 72).

Some recent scholars have also been convinced that there is a link between the Igbo and ancient Hebrews. For example, professor Onwukwe Alaezi, in 1999, published *Ibos: Hebrew Exiles from Israel*, where he attempted to trace Igbo people through migration from Israel to Nigeria. He wrote. “An estimated number of 400,000 Hebrews arrived in the apparent safe territory of Nigeria in about 686 BC (“The Proto-History of Igbo” 32),” Alaezi explained that the reason for this Hebrew migration was that Nigeria was a safer place to live where they could freely practice their religion. Also, Dierk Lange, an African History professor at the University of Bayreuth in Germany in his 2004 publication, *Ancient Kingdoms of West Africa: Africa- Centered and Canaanite-Israelite Perspective*, implied that Canaanite society was most likely established in West Africa through Phoenician authorities and traders from North Africa (“The Proto-History of Igbo” 33). Although these theories are interesting, they have not been validated or accepted by most contemporary scholars.

Nevertheless, the Israelites of the House of Yisrael Cincinnati embraced the minority theory that some ancient Hebrews migrated from Israel to West Africa and are

the modern-day Igbo people. The belief that Hebrews who became known as Igbo were sold and transported to the America's as part of the Transatlantic Slave Trade provides a deep sense of belonging for American Black Israelites to the Igbo people. In 2011, various Hebrew Israelite leaders gathered at the Second Igbo Landing Dedication and Conference held in Charleston, South Carolina. This conference aimed to unite American Black Hebrews with the Hebrews of the Igbo ethnic group in Nigeria. While attending this conference, Moreh Elesha Yisrael expressed, "we are part of the Igbo people.... We are one and the same.... Teach and honor our ancestors" (*Black Jews in Africa and the Americas* 100). The idea of the Igbo people being the decedents of a migration of Hebrews has been around for over two centuries. It continues to flourish among the Igbo people and the diaspora across the Atlantic, who long to be connected.

Although the peculiar belief that African Americans are Israelites that migrated to West Africa and then sold into slavery warrants inquiry and scrutiny. The incessant requirement of validation of Blacks who embrace the Israelite faith can become problematic. Though there may be errors in their theory, Black Hebrews bring to light a poignant issue, which is the debilitating racialization of the Jewish faith. The amount of effort that Blacks in America as well as in Africa have tried to put forth to try and connect themselves to a distant and ancient people speaks volumes to the encroaching tide of unacceptance that they have felt from their European counterparts.

Additionally, the mere need to be distinguished by color is a clear indication of the racial inequality within Judaism. For instance, if a person is a Christian and they are Black, they are not labeled Black Christians. Yet, if they are Jewish and Black, they automatically receive the label of Black Jew. On the contrary European Jews do not

receive the label of white Jews; they are considered Jewish. The prefixed black put before Jew subliminally indicates that “real” Jews are not Black. European Jews are automatically excepted as Jews. Their authenticity is not questioned. Whereas Black Jews are met with suspicion, inquiry of origin, and presumed to be unauthentic.

In addition, why should it be considered unconventional for Hebrews to have a dark complexion and phenotype? After all, Hebrews in the biblical narrative maintained a long history and relationship with people in the African continent; they even share the same language phylum. Hebrew is categorized as an Afro-Asiatic language, not an Indo-European language. European Jews adopted the Hebrew language as late as the 10th century yet, their knowledge of Hebrew is not questioned for validation of their authenticity like Black Jews or Israelites. Professor Paul Wexler of Tel Aviv University made a discovery that:

“Hebrew and Aramaic made their appearance in Jewish texts only in the tenth century CE and were not product of an earlier autochthonous linguistic development. This means that exiles or emigres from Judea had not settled in Spain in the first century CE or introduced their original language. During the first millennium CE, Jewish believers in Europe knew no Hebrew or Aramaic (Sands, 208).”

The idea of a single unadulterated Hebrew bloodline in modern society is unlikely. According to geneticist David Goldstein of Duke University Durham, North Carolina, “Jewish genetic history is a complicated mixture of both genetic continuity from an ancestral population and extensive admixture (Balter).” By not acknowledging a multicultural view of the Jewish people, a problematic assumption that only Jews from Europe and the Mediterranean are the true decedents of the ancient Israelites; therefore, all “real” Jews must have the appearance and genetic make-up of those people. It is this

assumption that keeps those on the fringes of the global Jewish community, such as Hebrew Israelites, to continue to resort to a racial separatist divide.

Black Jews and the Issue of Skin Tone, Race, Black Self Esteem and Anti-Semitism

As stated earlier in this chapter, Black Hebrew Israelites disagree with the seemingly universal assumption that 'real' Jews are white. The crux of Black Hebrew ideology rests on the belief that Black people are descendants of the Children of Israel spoken of in the bible. They attempt to prove this ideology by juxtaposing Israelites and prophecies found in the bible with the characteristics and circumstances of Black people in America. The belief that Blacks are the true Israelites is steadily reinforced throughout House of Yisrael teachings to improve Black self-esteem in America.

For example, in Moreh Elesha's lesson titled, "Yisrael is a Black Nation," he taught:

"Many gentiles claim that Israel is a white nation...Israel is Black, and it is not the white nation that you assume that it is. As a matter of fact, Israel is not a white nation at all. One fact is if Israel was a Black nation would the Most High have a people and turn them white for disobedience? And the answer is no ("Yisrael is a Black Nation" E1)."

He continued to explain:

"There is a law in Deuteronomy the 24th chapter and we need to understand this law. Because according to this law, it will prove to us that Israel is not a white nation, but Israel is and always have been a Black nation" ("Yisrael is a Black Nation" E1).

Moreh Elesha brought up Deuteronomy chapter twenty-four because it speaks of leprosy in the eighth and ninth verses and how the Israelites should remember what happened to Miriam. The story of Miriam is found in the book of Numbers, the 12th chapter. In that chapter, God punishes Miriam with leprosy by turning her hand white. Many Black Hebrews have used this story to prove that the Israelites are Black because they say that

to turn a hand white, the hand could not have originally been white; it would have to change from a contrasting color- black.

Moreh Elesha went on to teach, “White is what Yahweh puts on people for being disobedient (“Yisrael is a Black Nation” E2).” He continued to lecture:

“If Yahweh was white, if the angels was white, if His chosen people the House of Yisrael are white, would Yahweh curse someone and turn them the same color He is for them being disobedient to Him? ... no, He would make them just the opposite of Him...He is the personification of beauty. And He ain’t going to curse nobody and turn them the same color that He is. He ain’t going to curse nobody and make their hair look like His. Beautiful woolly and nappy like His. No, He going to curse you and make you look the opposite of Him (“Yisrael is a Black Nation” E2).”

The description of Yahweh that Elesha gave went beyond recounting an event or scripture in the bible; instead, it spoke to a place of hurt within Black people’s subconscious. In other words, if Yahweh is Black, then as opposed to being cursed as Children of Ham, Black people are the chosen ones. The focal point of this lecture was not to demean white people. Instead, he directed his words to the low self-esteem and shame that many Blacks have felt after centuries and decades of being taught that they were inferior, ugly, and cursed with blackness (i.e., the curse of Ham), that they had bad hair, that God, like their oppressors, was White. Essentially what Moreh Elesha was counter storytelling. Counter storytelling is when someone aims to doubt or dismantle the validity of an accepted idea or myth, particularly held by the majority (Delgado & Stefancic 171). By describing God as Black and beautiful with good nappy hair, Elesha was attempting to reverse the negative affirmations given to Black folks by the dominant society of the past and sometimes the present.

Moreover, one of Elesha's protégés, Moreh Mordekay, also followed suit with this teaching style. To provide an example of the Israelites being Black, Mordekay taught from the book of Songs of Solomon the first chapter and lectured:

"This is one of king Solomons wives... This is what she says... "I am black but comely oh yea daughters of Jerusalem." She said I might be a little blacker, because colorism probably always existed right. So, she said I'm a little black but I'm comely and you know she was comely because Solomon was the king, he had the comely women. She said I'm Black but beautiful. "Look not upon me because I am black because the sun has looked upon me. Then she said my mother's children were angry with me and made me the keeper of the vineyard. But my own vineyard I have not kept." This is a Black woman talking right here...this is a Black woman speaking right here, she says I am Black but comely, so she is not a gentile. This is a sister" (Juneteenth Sabbath Class).

The emphasis on Black being beautiful again appeals to the low self-esteem of having been taught that Black was ugly. Moreover, Elesha shared in one of his lessons:

"I was debating a few years ago this fella that calls himself Pharaoh. And he said that we came from a group of intelligent apes. And I said well that's totally impossible. And I said I would believe you sir if you ever found a fossil of an ape that had an afro. But I never seen an ape, a gorilla, a chimpanzee, orangutang, that has an afro. Every ape that you ever found had straight hair, like a dog. And a smell like a dog when it gets wet. We got hair like the Most High. That is not the result of a curse, that's the result of a blessing" ("Yisrael is a Black Nation" E2).

Again, Elesha attempted to reverse negative features or curses that have historically been attributed to Black people. For example, he dispelled the idea that Blacks were apes or monkeys. They have been derogatorily compared to and stereotyped as; he also inverted the concept that nappy hair is inferior and straight hair is superior.

Black people are 'true' Israelites at the root of the House of Yisrael's beliefs. This belief also transcends into their music, which plays a dual role of worship and uplift. For example, House of Yisrael hip-hop artist I Am Cipher rapped in his son "We the People":

“Skin of brass, hair like the wool on a lambs back/ James Brown style and Lena Horn yes I am Black but comely/ The sun is looked upon me, burnt faced/ They say that you the cursed race/ Was driven from your birthplace/ Cause Elohim is who we forsook, stripped from everything they took/ Yehudahdim just read and look, we the people of the book/ That was born in the east but buried in the west asunder/ These curses placed upon my people is for signs and wonders/ You showed your word to Yaacob, statutes to Yisrael only/ As far as his judgements the other nations haven’t known it/ We the people...(Letter to the Nation).

With the vitriolic teachings and writings of some members of the House of Yisrael Cincinnati, the group has been viewed as racist, anti-Semitic or Black supremacist. For example, in a debate held at Central State University in Wilberforce, Ohio, between Moreh Elesha Yisrael and Reverend Greg Draper, Pastor of Concord Baptist Church in Columbus, Ohio, the question of Black Israelites and racism was raised:

Moderator: “Moreh, Is God a racist?”

Elesha: “No, He is not.”

Moderator: “So, you call yourself Black Hebrew, Black Israelites. Can white people be a part of your movement?”

Elesha: “I don’t call myself Black Hebrew, Black Israelite. The only Israelites in the bible are Black. I don’t have to say I am a Black Israelite. All I have to say is I am an Israelite, and anyone with any scriptural knowledge would know that the people of the bible are Black. Just like they know the people of England are white.”

Moreh Elesha quickly denounced the notion that God was racist; however, he still confirmed his belief that the ancient Israelites were Black, and so are their descendants.

Moderator: “They are Semites not African.”

Elesha: “Well the Semites were Black. Was Moses a Semite?”

Moderator: “Moses was a Hebrew.”

Elesha: “All Hebrews are Semites sir, and Moses was Black. Job said he was Black; he was a Semite Hebrew. Solomon said he is Black. Jeremiah said all the Israelites were Black. All of them he described as having woolly hair, and most of the Israelites in this bible wore dreadlocks or locs. And Jerusalem is in Africa. So, I don’t have to say I am a Black Israelite.”

Moderator: “Jerusalem is where?”

Elesha: “In Africa. A matter of fact in Egypt.”

Moderator: “Is that new geography?”

Elesha: “Yes. As a matter of fact, is Egypt in Africa?”

Moderator: “Yeah, Egypt is.”

Elesha: “Well, you can walk from Egypt to Jerusalem. They are on the same land mass. What happened, the Caucasians have divided up sections with the Suez Canal. And then they tried to brainwash our people, and one country on the landmass they say belong to another continent. It is not another continent, it is on the same landmass...let me ask you this sir, what separates Jerusalem from Egypt?”

Reverend Draper: “Nothing.”

In the discourse over whether or not Jerusalem is in Egypt, Moreh Elesha reinforced the idea that lies have been perpetuated by those in power in order to keep Black people ignorant of who they are.

Although the House of Yisrael Cincinnati sees themselves as the true descendants of the Children of Israel. That does not mean that they believe all white people are ungodly or without God. The House of Yisrael also believe that not all white people should be judged and dismissed as evil. Another protégé of Moreh Elesha, Moreh Ishiyah Yisrael taught a lesson and explained:

“In the book of Isaiah 56 ... He said keep judgment, do justice because His salvation is near to come, His righteousness to be revealed. And He is revealing something... a lot of people don’t want to see that. A lot of Israelites. They don’t want to see the stranger have a good name. Especially a better name than them. Then us. We would regulate most strangers, if they white, they just nothing but

crackers. But some crackers tried to help liberate your people. Some crackers serving Yahweh today. And I'm not calling them crackers I'm just saying what people call them. But these people love Yahweh just like you love Yahweh. And Yahweh told us to keep judgement. If you want to keep judgement and justice, you have to learn how to adjudicate things. You got to learn how to judge things. And you just can't judge people by the color of they skin. You can't judge people by the family that they been born in. If that's true then we are exactly what they say we are, that's how they judge us. And we are not to judge like them...we can't allow our adversity to dictate how we see things. Because if you see things just when you down, you will never see good things (Holy convocation 05/29/21)."

In this lesson, Moreh Ishiyah explained that Israelites or Black people do not have a monopoly on God. That the suffering of Black people does not automatically place them on a pedestal of righteousness no more than the privilege of whiteness automatically places white people on a pedestal of wickedness. Moreh Ishiyah was essentially telling his congregation to judge by character and not by color.

House of Yisrael's Rejection of Christianity

The House of Yisrael advances the belief that white Christian people have been the administrators of their punishment, but they believe they Yahweh has condemned them to be punished. It is this idea of divine punishment that has driven the House of Yisrael to rebuke Christianity.

At the beginning of Elesha's debate at Central State he explained what he taught and his views on Christianity stating:

"I teach that the plight of the Black man in America is not a strange or a trivial or insignificant act that has escaped the all-seeing eye of the Most High. But I teach that everything that has ever happened to us, everything that is happening to us, and everything that will ever happen to us as a people has been prophesied in the bible. And I teach that the Almighty has a chosen people who are known as the House of Yisrael. And I also teach that everything that you have learned in your churches is false. You've never learned the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, about anything at all. I teach the Creator's word can only be found in one book. And that book is called the Holy Scriptures or the so-called Old Testament of the bible. And I teach that this book has our whole history in it. I

teach that the New Testament is a total contradiction against the words of the Most High. And not only does the New Testament contradict the Most High, I teach that the New Testament contradicts itself. And it cannot be considered a book if one is seeking to learn more about their Creator” (Central State Debate).

Here, Moreh Elesha asserted that Black people have been deceived by Christianity and expressed his belief that the plight and solutions for Black people can only be found in the Old Testament. One of the major points of contention that Moreh Elesha had with Christianity was the idea that through the death of Christ you can be redeemed from the curse of the law (*Setting the Crooked Things Straight*). When Elesha examined the condition of Black people in America, a people historically active in the church, he could not see visible signs of redemption. In Moreh Elesha’s book, *Setting the Crooked Things Straight: The Teachings of YAH’S Prophet*, he made several inquiries:

“If Christ has redeemed Yisrael from the Curse of the Law, then why are we still in America...where YAH has scattered us? Why is Yisrael still the tail and not the head? Why is it always open season on our people in Americas; and every time a policeman murders one of our people it is always “justifiable homicide”?”

In answering these questions, Elesha concluded in his book that:

“...the New Testament is totally false. By saying or asserting that the death of Christ (JC) brought an end to the curses YAH put on His people for refusing to obey His commandments, but contrary to this these scriptures prove emphatically that by worshiping JC or any other person other than YAH, we keep ourselves bound under the curses that are written in the book of YAH. This also proves that no man has died for your sins and no man can.”

Elesha reinforced his beliefs in a lecture at a New York congregation and taught:

“A farmer can’t start a garden until he starts tearing up the ground, and you can’t plant the words of the Most High until you begin to tear down the lies and deceit that is out here. You can’t talk about the sabbath day to our people throughout the world, until you tear down Sunday and let them know this is not Yah’s day. This day is not mentioned in the scriptures. This day is not ordained by the Most High. You can’t exult Yah and our people are praising someone else. You can’t magnify his words if they are reading a book that’s totally in opposition to everything that he is saying” (Christianity).

In addition, Moreh Mordekay gave a lesson where he compared Christians as common people and Israelites as excellent people. He taught:

“The law of Yah is perfect. The word is perfect meaning excellent they mean the same thing. These are some of the things that we want to remember that we don’t want to have common sense because common sense is what everybody else got. We want to have good sense; we want to have excellent sense... common people worship creatures. Common people worship a hippy on a stick. Common people worship just whatever they were told to worship. But excellent people worship the Creator...common people worship the sabbath on what day? The first day. But excellent people worship on...the seventh day...common people eat everything, and excellent people watch what they eat” (Juneteenth Sabbath Class).

This comparative demonstration shows how Israelites pride themselves in being different from other faith communities or religions; that they subscribe to exceptionalism. It also points to a possible undercurrent resentment of Christian upbringing or Christian evangelism when Mordekay mentions that common people just worship whatever they were told to worship. The idea that Black people were given the God of their oppressors and a God that looked nothing like them is implied. The hippy on a stick reference is evident that Black Israelites cannot or will not relate to the European image of Christ.

In an interview conducted on Cincinnati’s star 64 WSTRO channel with Lincoln Ware, Mr. Ware confronted Moreh Ishiyah about the “hippy on a stick” references:

Lincoln Ware: “I mean some people they call in, they call Jesus a hippy on a stick and all this stuff, so explain all that.”

Moreh Ishiyah: “Yeah, often times some of those terms came from my teacher and mentor, Moreh Elesha Yisrael. But the only reason he would say something like that is because he knew the picture and the image that our people began to worship was fictitious. It was fake and he just wanted to get their attention and let them know that this picture is fake. And that the only one that we should worship is the Most High...But we don’t have anything against our brothers who believe what they believe...but we do attack the various teachings and doctrines that goes against the Most High” (Moreh Ishiyah with Lincoln Ware).

Also, Moreh Ishyah expressed that oppressors tricked Black people into Christianity and wrote:

“Christ knew there was only one Elohim, but the oppressors twisted these stories to coax you into thinking there were three...by our people not understanding that there is one Elohim we separate ourselves from reality, salvation, and life... Many of us are Black zombies and the oppressor is leading us wherever they choose for us to go. No nation can exert self-determination by letting an oppressive regime supply them with their culture or spirituality” (*Escape from Babylon* 36-37).

The idea that Christianity has been used as a movement to deceive, subject, and oppress Black people is representative of an Israelites perception of an institutionalized racist order. This concept is often portrayed in the House of Yisrael, especially in its music.

House of Yisrael hip hop artist I Am Cipher expressed in his song “Teardrops of a Slave”:

This country was made on the backs of Black slaves/ Blood sweat and tears on my ancestor’s graves/ From the middle passage, how drastic the Atlantic trade/ the ‘Good Ship Jesus is the first one that came/ Captain Sir John Hawkins from 1555 sold over 300 negroes in Santa Domingo/ The Clotilda was the last to reel us, to Mobile Alabama 1859 such a shady time/ Cudjo Kazoola Lewis, the last of survivor’s decedents, still some reside in Africatown/ scattered around/ 1712 the Willie Lynch letter was delivered on the banks of the James River, which is in Virginia/ Tarred and feathered, Blacks lynched , castrated members/ Picnics was cookouts with hooks out to pick a nigga/ I mean picaninny/ Many racial slurs, hateful words, can’t imagine what my nation earned/ Turn the other cheek, that’s what the good book teach/ From master like Christ when you get beat/ In 1776, when they declared our independence/ Thomas Jefferson was still hittin Sally Hemings/ Look at how we living, in a town with Christians/ Wondering how this world would be without religion...(A Letter to the Nation).

These lyrics demonstrate how House of Yisrael members base many of their ideologies off of the atrocities perpetrated on Black people in America’s history.

The arguments that the House of Yisrael gives for the rejection of mainstream Judaism and Christianity are usually presented as a theological dispute, however, their disposition is underlined with the trauma of racism. The violent and degrading

experiences in America reinforce their persistent perception that Yahweh is punishing them. This punishment that consumes their thoughts is collective and affects the entire Black community in the United States. Therefore, any faith or doctrine that may sabotage their deliverance is met with the utmost contempt. The House of Yisrael does not trust Jews because they feel that they have hidden Black people's true identity, which keeps Blacks from returning to their god. Likewise, they do not trust Christians because they feel they have intentionally led Black people away from their god. The House of Yisrael have developed these perceptions along the lines of theology but they intersect at the injustices of racism.

The House of Yisrael Cincinnati: How Normalized Institutional Violence Can Produce a
Culture of Unorthodox Resistance 1963-2021

Chapter 5: House of Yisrael Social Views, Political Views, and Liberation

The political, economic, and social problems that have plagued Black people in America are the reasons why religious communities like the House of Yisrael Cincinnati exist. Most would categorize them as being Black nationalist or separatist, and they would be right. Nationalists are defined as those who believe they should focus on their affairs first; separatists perceive that they (a racial minority) should separate themselves from the dominant society and pursue their own interests (Delgado and Stefancic 180,184). The violence and discrimination that Israelites have witnessed, experienced, and learned, has caused them to be collectively focused on Black safety and wellbeing and solely concentrated on the upliftment and liberation of Black people, in essence Black power.

While others in the general African American community may seek for solutions through the justice system, through voting and legislation, and even protest, the House of Yisrael Cincinnati is not inclined to seek solutions through any of those means. In this chapter we will examine how police brutality and segregation in Cincinnati impacted the unique political views of the House of Yisrael. These political views emphasize a distrust of the police, distrusts of voting or political participation and anti-integration. Conflict Theory and Critical Race Theory will shape our analysis.

Ghettoization and Police Brutality in Cincinnati in the 20th and 21st Centuries

When Moreh Elesha established the House of Yisrael Cincinnati in 1969, the hopes of Black people that migrated from the South were becoming unraveled due to the

impact of segregation, ghettoization and racism. The housing crises in Cincinnati was a central area of contention for Black people in Cincinnati even before the days of the Great Migration. Cincinnati's first Black ghetto emerged in the late 19th century as industrialization expanded (Norwood 99). Cincinnati's second Black ghetto developed between 1940-1960 during the Great Black Migration; the creation of the superhighway, redlining, and redtor schemes, pushed African Americans into Queensgate and the West End (Norwood 99). Residential discrimination limited their housing options and landlords charged Black families higher rent than white families in similar neighborhoods (Bunch-Lyons 12). Due to limited housing options and the burden of high rent, Black families would compact themselves in small units becoming overcrowded in deteriorating buildings.

The problems for Black people in the 20th century was carried over into the 21st century and in some cases have multiplied. In addition to segregation, police brutality has also come to define the Black experience in Cincinnati. Because of stifled opportunities in Cincinnati's Black neighborhoods, the violence and discrimination that some African Americans left the South to escape, reappeared in their Northern communities. For example, from 1995 to 2001 fifteen Black men were killed by Cincinnati police (Childs and Spence).

Between the years of 1995 and 2001 fifteen African American men in Cincinnati lost their lives due to encounters with the police. Police brutality led to a major race riot in 2001. On April 7, 2001 nineteen-year-old Timothy Thomas was shot and killed by an off-duty officer after he startled the officer in an alley (Childs and Spence). Six months prior to Timothy's death in November of 2000, a Gulf War veteran and US army sergeant

was choked, mased, and beaten to death by Cincinnati police after they mistook him for a drug dealer; the officers involved in the killing were acquitted (Childs and Spence).

Within the sixth month period between October 2000 and April 2001, five Black men had died at the hands of Cincinnati's police department (Child and Spence). The shooting of Timothy Thomas the fifteenth Black man killed, which triggered protest that turned into riots and boycotts. The riots were destructive, and the historically Black neighborhood of Over the Rhine received the most damage; the damages and boycotts cost the city millions of dollars (Mock). Ultimately, the officer that killed Timothy Thomas was acquitted.

In 2013, the global movement Black Lives Matter was established to intervene on behalf of Blacks whom the state or vigilantes had violently harmed in an effort to eradicate white supremacy (About Black Lives Matter). Cincinnati garnered the attention of Black Lives Matter in 2015 when the University of Cincinnati police shot and killed Sam Dubose for driving without a license and putting his key in the ignition to leave; the officer was acquitted (Kennedy). In 2019 reports found that 75 percent of police stop arrests in Cincinnati were comprised of African Americans (Londburg and Walinchus). The disparity of Black arrests in Cincinnati was primarily due to police stopping in Black neighborhoods being 120 percent higher than in White neighborhoods because police surveillance Black neighborhoods more often (Londburg and Walinchus).

African Americans in Cincinnati have also experienced violence from within their communities, aside from the violence from the police that were supposed to protect and serve. In a 2009 local news report, three predominantly Black neighborhoods led the city of Cincinnati in crime; Westwood had the highest rapes and burglaries, Over-the-Rhine

had the most aggravated assaults and robberies, and Avondale had the most homicides (Norwood 103). The prominent legacy of Jim Crow residential segregation yielded dilapidated housing, failed schools, dangerous streets, limited employment, stagnated home equity, and high poverty that had inspired and contributed to the crime and violence ridden neighborhoods where 69 percent of Blacks in Cincinnati reside (Norwood 102). Violence in these neighborhoods transcended gender. One research study found that 30 percent of Black women in Cincinnati had witnessed a murder, stabbing, or shooting; by 2014 homicide was the leading cause of death for Black women ages 15 to 24 years old (Norwood 103).

House of Yisrael Political Views

The historical and contemporary conditions of African Americans residing in Cincinnati and throughout the United States have caused many within the House of Yisrael to perceive Black Americans to be in a state of emergency. We will examine how racial injustices surrounding police and the judicial and political systems has molded the perceptions of the House of Yisrael Cincinnati.

While witnessing the unjust conditions of their city and to a more significant extent, America, members of the House of Yisrael felt validated in their perception of Black oppression in the United States- their Babylon. While introducing Moreh Elesha at the 2004 Washington D.C. Sacred Law Conference, Moreh Herman Taylor announced: “The Honorable Moreh from the House of Yisrael in Cincinnati, Ohio, the racial profiling capital of the world, Moreh Elesha Yisrael” (March on Washington P3). This announcement represents how the House of Yisrael is aware of systemic racial injustices. This awareness fuels their ideology and mistrust of government authority and judgment.

The apprehensions that the House of Yisrael has towards police and government authority can be explained through Conflict Theory. Conflict Theory argues that minorities develop a distrust of the police because they have experienced disparate mistreatment (MacDonald, Stokes, et al. 2569). Therefore, when House of Yisrael members express their opinions of police, it is shaped by historical and contemporary imbalances of mistreatment. For example, on May 25, 2020, George Floyd was murdered by Minneapolis police officer Derrick Chauvin who pinned Floyd down by pressing his knee on Floyd's neck for nine minutes. As a result, George Floyd suffocated to death which triggered worldwide protest led by Black Lives Matter. While discussing the guilty verdict of Chauvin, Moreh Obediyah Yisrael expressed:

“In the midst of this verdict coming out, it wasn't even an hour, and in Columbus, Ohio you got a 16-year-old young woman...she [was] having an altercation with another young lady, police pull up, pull out his gun and...he shot her 4 times” (Current Events 04/24/2021).

Moreh Obediyah was unaffected by the guilty verdict even though he anticipated the common acquittal, because he continued to see Black people killed by police. Obediyah continued:

“Just last week ago you had a nineteen-year-old gentile boy went up and went on a straight-shooting spree. And he was apprehended without a scratch. The week before you had another gentile that went up into a nail salon open fire murdered eight, nine, people. And he was apprehended without a scratch. And not only was he apprehended without a scratch the chief of police was like, “well he just had a bad day.” ...You had this young gentile that went up into a church and murdered people and was apprehended without a scratch. And not only was he apprehended without a scratch...they took him to Burger King...now all these things have one thing in common and they all just happen to have the complexion for the protection. But with our people, “she had a knife, she had to be put down,” “he was resisting even though he was in handcuffs, he had to be put down” ... Now you start to see the systemic, see all this is like Malcolm X said this is the roosters coming home to roost” (Current Events 04/24/2021).

The seeming disparities that Obediyah saw shaped his mistrust of the police and their motives and actions towards African Americans. Within this mistrust, the House of Yisrael does not look to the judicial system to fix systemic racial disparities and violence issues, and they certainly don't believe in physically fighting the system or authorities.

When encountering police, one member advised:

“...A lot of times Yah will put you in positions to show you... that He is the only one that can deliver you. You know it has been plenty of cases where our brothers have been pulled over, had guns, and their guns ain't save them. You know it's been plenty of time where... police busted in the house, you had weapons and it don't save you. But then there's still...cases where brothers [had] been pulled over and all odds were against them, but Yahweh was with them you know, and that is what we have to remember. It is to stand still and see the salvation of Yah... We never are to fight our own battles, we are to always look to the Most High because He is our strength, He is our defense” (Current events 04/10/2021).

Additionally, Moreh Obediyah narrated his own encounter with the police, he recounted:

“It was me and a brother, we [were] coming from a conference one year. We [were] going up through Tennessee, we got pulled over by the police. The officer got out and he told a bold lie [as to] why he pulled us over. He said, “You were swerving in and out of traffic,” and we [were] on the highway. And he just kept asking all types of odd questions ...But you could tell by his energy, he was just waiting on us to do the typical thing. “What you pull me over for,” “I don't got to say nothing, I don't got to answer nothing for you.” He was just waiting for us to get out of line... We had to wait for Yahweh. We couldn't put our trust in, “oh I got these hands,” “I got this pistol,” “I got this knife,” cause then your trust goes into that. But they got one too, and they got more of them. And when they do something to you, they going to always be justified. But when you do something to them, [you] never going to be justified” (Current Events 04/10/2021).

When Obediyah explained how the police were always justified in killing you, he was

hinting at the various acquittals that police have been given when killing Black people.

The observation of police acquittals causes Black nationalist like the House of Yisrael to think along the ideology of Conflict Theory.

Moreover, the House of Yisrael is also mistrusting of legislation that is passed; especially legislation that can potentially negatively affect Black people. For example, during a sabbath class one House of Yisrael member brought to the congregation's attention Ohio's 'stand your ground' law (Section 2901.09) that went into effect on April 6, 2021 (Legislative Service Commission). The member explained:

"In Ohio we now have stand your ground law...just thinking about it you know the stand your ground laws always apply, or should I say been in effect, I feel like, against us you know. We was never recipients to benefit [from] any of their laws that they have" (Current Events 04/10/2021).

Moreh Obediyah Yisrael also shared his opinion of this law:

"It says in the scriptures, when the righteous rule the people rejoice. When the wicked rule the people mourn. This stand your ground law, you know who mourning, our people. Because you know who going to be at the recipient of this, our people" (Current Events 04/10/2021).

Morah Ishyah Yisrael added:

"I know the white folks stand your ground law. That wasn't for them. That was for us, so they can shoot us. Why they need another law to shoot us" (Holy Convocation 06/19/2021)?

Presumably, the reason why those in the House of Yisrael Cincinnati may perceive the new Ohio stand your ground law as a threat towards or excuse to kill Black people, may stem from the events of the notorious Trayvon Martin court case, that was the catalyst of the Black Lives Matter movement. Throughout that trial, Florida's 'stand your ground' defense law was highlighted in the media as a possible justification for a not guilty verdict. Trayvon Martin, a seventeen-year-old Black teenager was shot and killed by a private neighborhood watch citizen George Zimmerman, who followed Trayvon assuming he was a criminal. Unarmed Trayvon was fatally shot when an altercation between the two ensued after Zimmerman followed and harassed the teenager;

Zimmerman considered using the ‘stand your ground’ defense but ultimately waived his right to do so (CNN Editorial Research). Nevertheless, Zimmerman was acquitted.

In addition to Conflict Theory, the House of Yisrael’s political ideology also falls within the framework of Critical Race Theory under Derrick Bell’s Interest Convergence Theory. Interest Convergence theorizes that the majority group only tolerates the advancement of racial justice if it benefits their interests (Delgado and Stefancic 177). In chapter four of this work, we examined Israelite beliefs of lies and deception administered by Jews and Christians however, Israelites also see voting measures and civil rights legislations as deceptions as well. Their political mistrust of voting and legislation is largely due to their view that American political and legal institutions are inherently racist, and as such, are not sincerely invested in the upliftment of Black people because they believe that Black liberation does not benefit the establishment.

Moreh Herman Taylor spoke and reflected this view when he expressed his reasoning for his lack of faith in voting and civil rights legislation. As he explained:

“The civil rights act of the 1960s wasn’t the first one. There was one issued on March 1, 1875. And declared unconstitutional before the ink dried by the supreme court. [We are an] oppressed people. A mistreated people. And coming soon in just a year or so the voting rights act with certain provisions of it, will need to be restored again. Just for us. Why is it that all of these things have to be done just for us if we are not the chosen of the Creator? His chosen nation Israel” (March on Washington P2).

Taylor pointed out the civil rights legislation of 1875 failed due to Supreme Court intervention. On March 1, 1875 congress passed a civil rights bill into law that provided all persons within United States jurisdiction access and accommodations to all public places and services regardless of race, color, and prior servitude; it also ensured that if people were denied access to public institutions due their race, they would receive

monetary compensation (Landmark Legislation). In 1883, the Supreme Court ruled that the 1875 civil rights law was unconstitutional. Taylor also pointed out how voting rights were constantly under revisions and restorations even though the Voting Rights Act was passed decades ago in 1965. As recent as July 1, 2021 the Supreme Court ruled in favor of State ability to enact voting restrictions (Chung). The uncertainties of voting and legislation causes Israelites to mistrust the legal and democratic process because they believe that the system is not inclined to provide racial justice if those in power cannot benefit from it.

Furthermore, the House of Yisrael also had theological reasons as to why they don't participate in voting. Moreh Elesha taught:

“Let me show you what else the Almighty said about our people in America today voting and telling our people that if they did not vote they should not complain. According to the book of Isaiah the 30th chapter it says in the very first verse, “woe to the rebellious children said Yahweh they take counsel but not of me.” And yes, they take counsel in a republican and democratic party where all of them have given their allegiance... They walk to go down into Egypt and that is where they are at today. America is modern Egypt. He said, “they walked to go down into Egypt, and they have not asked that of my mouth.” You didn't ask the Almighty does your salvation rest in you voting... If you have been trusting in Yahweh, then show me where Yahweh said our salvation rest in voting. Tell me where Yahweh said our salvation rest in us putting an alien over us to rule us” (False Leaders of Yisrael).

In this lesson, Moreh Elesha re-enforces that Yahweh is their salvation, but we can also infer his feelings about Black people not having autonomous rule when he points to the alien/ stranger ruling over them. In reinforcement of not wanting to be ruled in accordance with the American system, Moreh Ishyah asked in his song Spirit of YAH Pt. 2: “Why you keep choosing presidents and keep voting? Worshiping in man and who you hope in” (Hebrew Psalms Vol 1). In addition, the House of Yisrael believes that putting their trust in the government through voting or legislation is vain. They do not believe

that their God will deliver them until they stop trusting in the systems of man. Moreh Obediyah taught:

“It was when the cries of oppression rose up that Elohim had respect unto the people. Because now they was crying unto Elohim. They wasn’t crying to the Supreme Court. They wasn’t crying to the senators, they wasn’t crying to the councils. They wasn’t crying to anyone or anything else other than Yahweh. And Yahweh looked and heard their afflictions. And Yahweh looked upon them and said I’m going to deliver this people” (Current Events 04/10/2021).

Integration

Aside from voting, another political view that the House of Yisrael has that falls within the realm of Interest Convergence Theory is integration. Elesha had some doctrinal reasons as to why he was against integration. In his book, *Setting the Crooked Things Straight*, Elesha formulated a question-and-answer section concerning this issue. He questioned, “Why don’t the Yisraelites help their fellow Black brothers fight for integration?” His response was, “Because our Elohim (God) hated integration. This is the reason he separated all the nations” (E. Yisrael). Elesha then references Genesis 11:6-9 concerning the Tower of Babel and provided another reference in Deuteronomy 22: 9-11 that instructs not to mix seeds in a field lest they be defiled or wear mingled fabric and so forth.

However, in examining the anti-integration policies of the House of Yisrael, there are more underlying factors than just theology. In chapter three of this work, we briefly saw how Moreh Elesha was against integration. He believed that integration led to the decline of Black-owned businesses in Cincinnati. However, the primary reason why Elesha was against integration is because he believed that integration required equality and he believed equality was impossible to achieve in America. Elesha taught:

“First of all, let me tell you what integration means if you didn’t know... The epitome of integration is when a people are made equal. But there is nothing that is equal... So, it is something that you cannot attain anyway. When I was in school, they told me matter is anything that has weight and occupies space. Anything. And then the teacher told me that there is no matter that can occupy the same space at the same time... two matters cannot occupy the same space at the same time. One will go up and the other will go down. But don’t you all realize that the white man knows that in order for you to go up, that he must come down. He cannot hold the same position that he had if you’re constantly moving up. You cannot fill it at the same time that is why he has to come down. That’s the reason integration will never be successful in America” (False Leaders of Yisrael).

The example of matter that Elesa used to describe the failure of integration in America, is similar to Interest Convergence Theory where the dominant group will not help uplift the minority at their own expense. The dominate group will only act if that action also elevates themselves or propels their own interest.

These examples of inequality within integrated systems shows the difficulty of trying to obtain equality in America and the even more challenging attainment of equity. Challenges such as these may contribute to separatist ideology and beliefs. There are many other Israelite groups as well as Black nationalist organizations such as the Nation of Islam (NOI), Black Panthers, Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and Kemetic Orthodox that reject integration. This rejection may be a response to the lack of acceptance that African Americans have felt in the history of this country. It may also signify a need for ethnic unity within the Black community economically, socially, and culturally. One example of separatist ideas can be gleamed from Malcom X. In defense of his separatist ideology Malcom explained:

“This new type of Black man, he doesn’t want segregation; he wants separation. To him, segregation... means that which is forced upon inferiors by superiors. A segregated community is a Negro community. But the white community, though it’s all white, is never called a segregated community. It’s a separate community. In the white community, the white man controls the economy, his own economy, his own politics, his own everything... But at the same time while the Negro lives

in a separate community, it's a segregated community. Which means it's regulated from the outside by outsiders" (X).

Liberation Through Religious Quietude

What House of Yisrael members desire most is the liberation of Black people. In America, some might say that African Americans have already been liberated back in 1865 at the close of the American Civil War. Others may instead mark the Civil Rights Movement and the end of Jim Crow oppression as the period of Black liberation. As a result of all of the institutionalized and systemic violence and discrimination that still effects African Americans throughout the United States, as listed earlier in this chapter as well as in other chapters within this work, the House of Yisrael is still waiting for the liberation of Black people in America. In the words of Moreh Mordekey:

“Since everybody want to celebrate Juneteenth and the day that we were freed. We are going to see are we truly free.? And have freedom been implemented and instituted to the Black man that was taken out of our land. And never returned. Taken out of our land by captivity and never returned to this day. Instead, we have as Moreh Elesha used to say, integrated, assimilated and evaporated right into the midst of all the other nations that we were scattered to” (Presentation on Juneteenth).

Freedom to the House of Yisrael, means to rule autonomously on your own land under the governance of your own people. Moreh Elesha taught:

“To be free means to be able to assert self-determination. And you can never assert self-determination while another man or class of people are ruling over you. If you say you are free, the first thing I will ask you is where your land? Where is your government? Where is your secretary of defense? Where is your secretary of agriculture? Where is your secretary of education? Where is your secretary of foreign affairs? Where is your ability to assert any type of self-determination? You don't tell me you are free because you believe somebody died for you, and all you are doing is dying every day. You are free when you show that you have been delivered” (Death to Babylon).

The House of Yisrael believes that the only one who has the power to deliver the nation of Yisrael and bring them out of captivity into their own land is Yahweh their Elohim. However, they don't believe that they will exit America (their Egypt) empty handed. They believe that they are going to leave with treasure as reparations. In fact, they view reparations as a sign of returning to Jerusalem. Brother Ruachel expressed:

“It doesn't make sense for Yahweh to give us reparations without sending us home. Every nation that done received reparations whether it be the native American Indians. Which got reparations for what they been through. Yet our people still saying that they Israelites, I don't know how... they got an opportunity to fix themselves as well as the Jews, the fake Jews and any other nation that the United States has done something for to receive their reparations- except us. That's one of the major signs of us being the children of Yisrael” (Story of Elisha).

We have seen that the House of Yisrael Cincinnati distrusts American political solutions because they do not believe that America has them in their best interest. It is difficult for them to put their trust in systems that have historically been used to oppress, exploit, and exclude them. They do not feel safe or protected in this country because they see disparities in treatment between African Americans and other races or ethnic groups. The House of Yisrael does not hope to integrate because they believe equality is unattainable in this country and efforts that have been put forth to achieve equality have been of little to no success. Their only hope is in being liberated through their God. They believe that he will deliver them out of America and place them in the land of their ancestors, Israel.

Throughout this work, five major beliefs of Cincinnati's House of Yisrael have been reinforced in every chapter. Those beliefs are that Black people of America are oppressed, and their oppression is a divine punishment for disobedience. Blacks live under a false identity, and their true identity is that they are the descendants of the

Children of Israel's biblical narrative. Black knowledge of self has been suppressed by white institutions such as the Christian church. Blacks need to be saved and redeemed out of their captivity in America, and the only one who can save them is Yahweh, but not until the nation of Yisrael returns to him. These beliefs are connected to the institutionalized and systemic violence that African Americans have been subject to in the United States.

According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, the FBI and the institution through which the author is writing, Black Hebrew Israelites raise safety concerns and are to be engaged with caution. It is America's peculiar institution of chattel slavery, its institutionalized segregation and violent discrimination of Jim Crow, its systematic abuses of power in the post-Civil Rights era that have resulted in the loss of Black lives, that has produced a culture of unorthodox resistance in Cincinnati, Ohio. The House of Yisrael Cincinnati resides outside of orthodox religion and their resistance to systems of oppression or conformity are peculiar to normalized avenues of change. They do not advocate voting, protesting or fighting for their rights through armed resistance. The House of Yisrael Cincinnati advocates that their people gather themselves in unity, that they humble themselves and collectively seek Yah their Elohim so that he will hear them and restore them.

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