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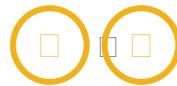
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# RACIST BLACK HEBREW ISRAELITES BECOMING MORE MILITANT



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The black supremacist wing of the Hebrew Israelite movement is spreading and its leaders are growing increasingly militant

BALTIMORE — Despite the hellish heat on this spring Saturday morning in gritty West Baltimore, the five [Hebrew Israelite](#) priests loitering near a West Franklin Street storefront are draped in heavy robes, and their heads are wrapped in matching white, red and black cloths. Star of David emblems

swing from their necklaces and are embroidered into their fabrics. One priest holds a staff.

Around them, security guards wear black headscarves, black T-shirts and black military-style pants tucked into combat boots. They grip cell phones and billy clubs. On their belts are sheaths and holsters, some empty, others holding blades and guns. The guards flit back and forth across the street, between the parking lot of an apartment complex that police say is notorious for drug-related crimes and a building with covered windows and a bolted front door.

Behind that locked door is the Baltimore branch of the Israelite Church of God in Jesus Christ, a black supremacist sect headquartered in New York City. Obsessed with hatred for whites and Jews, the leaders of the Israelite Church have managed to build up 29 church branches in recent years.

They are not alone.

Around the country, thousands of men and women have joined black supremacist groups on the extremist fringe of the Hebrew Israelite movement, a black nationalist theology that dates back to the 19th century. Its doctrine asserts that African Americans are God's true chosen people because they, not the people known to the world today as Jews, are the real descendants of the Hebrews of the Bible. Although most Hebrew Israelites are neither explicitly

racist nor anti-Semitic and do not advocate violence, there is a rising extremist sector within the Hebrew Israelite movement whose adherents believe that Jews are devilish impostors and who openly condemn whites as evil personified, deserving only death or slavery.



□ *Black-clad security guards and Hebrew Israelite priests stand outside the Baltimore chapter of the Israelite Church of God in Jesus Christ. The black supremacist group is obsessed with security and the evils of white people.*

The notorious white supremacist leader [Tom Metzger](#) once remarked of extremist Hebrew Israelites, "They're the black counterparts of us." The belief system of extremist Hebrew Israelites is basically the reversed-color mirror image of the [Christian Identity](#) theology embraced by many white supremacists, which holds that mainstream Jews are the descendants of Satan and that white people are the chosen ones, divinely endowed by God with superior status over "mud people," believers' term for non-white individuals.

Since 2000, when the prophecy of a key leader failed to materialize (he predicted Christ would return to Earth at the dawn of the new millennium to wreak bloody vengeance on white people), the rhetoric of extremist Hebrew Israelites sects has been steadily heating up, with increasing talk of an impending apocalypse and God-ordained race war. At the same time, a magnetic young leader, who counts among his disciples the lead singer of a top-selling R&B group, emerged and rapidly expanded a movement that was previously concentrated in black inner-city neighborhoods on the East Coast. There are now extremist Hebrew Israelite churches in cities throughout Florida, Maryland, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New Jersey, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Oklahoma and Oregon.

Confrontations between Hebrew Israelite street preachers and their perceived enemies are growing uglier and gaining increasing attention through video clips circulated to legions of viewers on websites like YouTube. The Israelite School of Universal Practical Knowledge, a sect that is the Israelite Church's main rival, has its own YouTube "channel," or video sharing distribution networks, with over 500 subscribers. One recently circulated Israelite School video, which has been viewed more than 26,000 times, shows a group of robed street preachers harassing a white woman until she bursts into tears. Another shows the preachers applauding as a white man kneels down to kiss the boots of "the prophets of God" while begging forgiveness for the sins of his race.

In yet another video, a preacher of the Israelite School, a man who identifies himself as General Mayakaahla Ka, offers this stark prediction for the future of the white race: "Every white person who doesn't get killed by Christ when he returns is going into slavery!"



□ *"General Mayakaahla Ka," an Israelite School of Universal Practical Knowledge preacher, regularly shouts down whites, Jews and other enemies in street confrontations.*

## **Baltimore: The Grilling**

The streets of the West Baltimore neighborhood where the Israelite Church sanctuary is located are just as tough as they look on HBO's "The Wire," a cops-and-reporters crime series acclaimed for its realistic insights into urban

life. In the middle of this scene, passersby on Franklin Street respectfully acknowledge the Israelite Church priests and their black-clad security men. These local residents would have no problem getting into the nightly classes that Israelite Church teachers offer in public libraries throughout Baltimore.

But the mysterious church here is different. Entry to its Saturday "Sabbath" sessions requires a vigorous and often intimidating screening.

First, there's the question of skin tone; those with European ancestry need not apply. Others — and, lately, Hebrew Israelites have come to include West Indians, Latin Americans, and American Indians as brother "Hebrews" — may approach security for entry. Any stranger must meet certain strict conditions.

You must promise the guards that you are "clean" — that you haven't eaten pork or had sex in the prior 24 hours. You must explain how you learned about the church and why you've chosen to attend. You must assure guards that you're not a law enforcement officer or a spy from a rival Hebrew Israelite group, and then you have to give up your photo identification. Any recording device will be confiscated during an aggressive pat down search carried out by the guards.

When the door is unbolted briefly to allow you into the building, you walk into a tiny vestibule where you're required to enter your name, address and

telephone number into a ledger. If you have a cell phone, it will be confiscated and stored in a file cabinet until you leave. You will be issued a King James Version of the Bible — and any other version that you may carry will be taken away.

Finally, a disciple approaches. He pours olive oil on your head as a final cleansing measure. Now, at last, you are prepared to enter the inner sanctum.



- *Posters used by Israelite School preachers in Washington, D.C., give a sense of what racist Hebrew Israelites think of Mainstream Christianity.*

## **Lynching Santa**

"I'm talking about 99 million n-----! You talking about 6 million crackers?"

General Mayakaahla Ka is shouting at a college-aged Jewish kid outside the

Market East Station in downtown Philadelphia. He and three other extremist Hebrew Israelite preachers, all wearing the Israelite School insignia of two swords crossed through a Star of David, berate their victim until he begins to weep. The altercation is part of an Israelite School recruiting video that began circulating this spring and has since been viewed more than 73,000 times.

"Are you saying the Holocaust is a joke?" the Jewish man asks.

"It's a joke!" the "general" responds. "The Holocaust is a damn joke! Heil Hitler!"

Mobile clusters of up to a dozen extremist Hebrew Israelite street preachers, known in the movement as "camps," have become a common presence at busy intersections, plazas and public transportation centers in large American cities, especially in Philadelphia, New York, Baltimore and Washington, D.C., as well as Venice, Calif. The camps are often remarkably aggressive and intimidating, railing against "white devils" and calling for death for Jews and gay men and lesbians.

Zacharyah ben Ya'aqov, a former racist Hebrew Israelite who was active in the movement in the 1990s, calls the activities of camps "evangelical terrorizing." Ya'aqov, who now heads the Israelite group, The Truth After Knowledge, denounces his former community's racist doctrines. He describes on his group's website his experiences as a rank-and-file member, explaining

that his superiors brainwashed new recruits, using "fear tactics to break you down," and instructed followers to join camps and verbally assault pedestrians. "They [camp preachers] told them [targeted passersby] they had hell to pay and would be going into slavery," Ya'aqov says on his Web forum. "Especially the white man, who they had special hatred for."

The Israelite School caused a major stir recently when it positioned a camp at the bustling intersection of H and 8th streets in the Capitol Hill neighborhood of northeast Washington, D.C.. The noise produced through its preachers' megaphones and amplifiers sparked conflicts with those who live in the area. "It's frightening when a person or group can force noise — whatever the speech content — inside another's home," said Capitol Hill resident David Klavitter, who monitors the Israelite School camps for his Quest for Quiet blog. "This allows amplifiers to be used as weapons to harass, intimidate and threaten people."

Last December, the Israelite School observed the holidays by "lynching" effigies of the Virgin Mary and Santa Claus in Klavitter's neighborhood.

Extremist Hebrew Israelites have a long, strange list of enemies. At the top of the list are white people, who they preach are descended from a race of red, hairy beings, known as Edomites, who were spawned by Esau, the twin brother of Jacob (later known as Israel) in the Old Testament. Equally hated are "fraudulent" Jews, "the synagogue of Satan." They're closely followed in

no particular order by Asians, promiscuous black women, abortionists, continental Africans (who, according to the extremist Israelites, sold the lost tribes of Israel, who were black, to European slave traders), and gay people, who according to extremist Israelites should all be put to death. (In December 2006, three gay men who were assaulted inside an Atlanta nightclub identified their attackers as Hebrew Israelites; no arrests were made).

Recruiting literature describing the extremist Israelite doctrine is just as harsh as the street preachers' angry rhetoric. "Does the Bible teach unity of races? NO!" reads one of the Israelite Church's widely distributed flyers. "Will the different nations who believe in Jesus be saved from the Lord's wrath? NO! Was Jesus Christ a Caucasian man? NO! Does his color matter? YES!"



□ Many racist Hebrew Israelite preachers work the streets in "camps" of up to a dozen men. Here, members of the Israelite School gather at the corner of H and 8th Streets in Washington, D.C.

## **Baltimore: The Sanctuary**

Paintings of a black "Yahawah," or Jesus, adorn the walls of the sanctuary inside the Baltimore storefront Israelite Church, along with images of dark-skinned angels. The room is long, narrow and windowless. There are metal and wood folding chairs set up in 12 rows of six each. The first six rows are reserved for men, while women are relegated to the back. The walls are lined with posters bearing the names and images of the 12 tribes of Israel and the nations who are believed to represent each of those tribes today. The biblical tribe of Judah, for instance, is said to be the forbear of today's African Americans, while those of Levi and Benjamin are believed to have become the Haitians and West Indians of the present.

At the head of the sanctuary is an altar adorned with coiled horns made of wood and metal candelabras. Just behind the altar, atop a slightly raised stage, is a table covered in cloth. Behind that are two royal-blue curtains, each embroidered with Hebrew characters. (Israelite Church members, like members of other Hebrew Israelite groups, routinely use "Hebrew" names rather than their legal names.)

A member of the audience announces the three priests who will preside today, and the men, clad in extravagant robes and staves, rise from the front seats. They take their seats at the table behind the altar, and one of them sounds the coiled horn.

This Sabbath's teaching, from the Book of Chronicles, is read out by one of the high priests. Then another, whose real name is Carlos Santiago, interprets the words for his audience. As usual, the sermon focuses on the perfidy of white people — or, in the language that Santiago appropriates from the Bible, how God restores power to Judah (read: black Israelites) and punishes Edom (white people) with death.

"The army of Judah also captured 10,000 men alive, took them to the top of a cliff and threw them down so that all were dashed to pieces," one priest reads. Then Santiago steps up to explain how this is a reference to black Israelite power. "See how powerful Judah is?" he says. "This is the kind of power we

have over them."



□ *Priests of the Israelite Church of God in Jesus Christ preach a particularly virulent form of Hebrew Israelism.*

## **Aching for Armageddon**

The man with the most power over the extremist Hebrew Israelite movement is Jermaine Grant, 30, the head of the Israelite Church of God in Jesus Christ. Grant rose from the lower levels of the organization to become its top leader in 2000. This was after Christ failed to return to earth to slay or enslave all Edomites, as had been long prophesied by Grant's predecessor, Ahrayah, the movement's founding "godfather."

It was a period of great tumult within the extremist Israelite world. Many of Ahrayah's high-ranking followers split off to form their own new factions,

while inside the Israelite Church organization, Grant's star ascended just as rapidly as Ahrayah's fell. A former rap music label owner and restaurateur, Grant is a highly charismatic figure. Although his "Hebrew" name is Tazadaqyah, his title is "Chief High Priest"; he is also sometimes referred to by followers as the Holy Spirit made flesh. Today, he can be seen in numerous YouTube videos preaching to gatherings of hundreds and typically dressed in shiny silk robes and headwraps rendered in blues and purples. He's often pictured in stretch limos or tour buses emblazoned with his portrait and his nickname — "The Comforter."

Since 2001, Grant has produced the Arch Angel Awards, a version of the Grammys for musical artists who are avowed loyalists of the Israelite Church. The most famous of them is Wanya Morris, the lead singer of Boys II Men, a popular R&B group that's won four real Grammys and sold over 60 million records.

According to former members of the church, Grant has instituted mandatory tithes and general offerings from his followers. Also, during his 2006 "I Will Not Leave You Comfortless Tour," in which he toured six East Coast states in eight weeks, Grant reportedly demanded an additional \$25 per attendee in the form of an additional "High Priest offering." (Another "world tour" is planned later this year.)

Grant, who did not reply to a request for an interview for this article, is an

energetic man. Under his leadership, the Israelite Church has expanded rapidly, and its "Hidden Truth" television programming can be seen on public access channels around the country. Meanwhile, the tone of the extremist Hebrew Israelite grows ever more apocalyptic, with its followers feverishly searching for signs of a bloodthirsty black Yahawah's impending return.

This summer, Grant boldly predicted that a hellish earthquake would soon herald the return of Christ and the beginning of Hebrew Israelite rule. He didn't set a date, but his prophecy still heightened the mood of eager anticipation for the coming doom of all enemies of the true Israelites. That, coupled with the increasing militance and numbers of his movement, is what is so worrying.

The vision of Grant and his fellow Hebrew Israelite hard-liners — an imminent and bloody demise for whites and other enemies at the hands of a vengeful returning Christ — is well captured in a scene from a 2007 documentary. In one scene from "The Gods of Times Square," an extremist Hebrew Israelite preacher delivers a sermon with his foot planted on the back of a white man laying flat on the sidewalk, arms splayed at his sides. A second preacher approaches the camera.

"White boy, you're next," he warns. "All you white people get ready for war. We're coming for you, white boys. Negroes are the real Jews. Get ready for war!"



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