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“CLEAVE TO THE BLACK”:
EXPRESSIONS OF ETHIOPIANISM IN JAMAICA

It is said that he is the God of the white man and not of the black. This is horrible blasphemy – a *lie* from the pit that is bottomless ... Murmur not against the Lord on account of the cruelty and injustice of man. His almighty arm is already stretched out against slavery – against every man, every constitution, and every union that upholds it. His avenging chariot is now moving over the bloody fields of the doomed south ... Soon slavery shall sink like Pharaoh ... O God ... We are poor, helpless, unarmed, despised. Is it not time for thee to hear the cry of the needy ... to break in pieces the oppressor [Alexander Payne].¹

INTRODUCTION

Ethiopianism has provided a racial, religious, and moral framework for comprehending and criticizing history, the social world, and especially racial and economic inequalities. It originated under the slavery regime in pre-revolutionary America, and subsequently spread into the Caribbean, Europe, and Africa. It is in Jamaica, however, where Ethiopianism grew its deepest roots, as the isle has given birth to many pro-Black and pro-African groups. These identifications have existed uneasily within a predominantly Black²

1. “An Open Letter to the Colored People of the United States,” written in 1862 by the African-American minister, Payne. A reprint is in Moses 1996:215-17.

2. By using the term “Black people” I risk being accused of essentializing a multifarious category of people, even those within the same national boundaries. Definitions of racial designation, inclusion, and identity change, and meanings involving Black nationalism have always been contested. Even though “Black” as a racial definition gained its widest prevalence as a result of the Black Power movements in America and Jamaica, it retains currency within civil society if not academia. Moreover, in the parlance of Ethiopianists and Black nationalists it has greater vintage and currency. Thus I ask readers to bear in mind that I am aware of the complexities surrounding the term “Black people.” Also, I capitalize racial terms except where I use direct quotes that use lower-case spellings of these terms.

society prone to appropriate American and British law, culture, and values. Still, Ethiopianism served as a pole around which many “new” social groups erected their ideologies. By ideology I mean beliefs and consciousness that can inform action (see Fredrickson 1995:8).

Drawing upon primary and secondary materials and oral testimonies, this article seeks to illustrate the ideological and thematic content and manifestations of Ethiopianism, focusing on Jamaica and on three groups that embody it: Alexander Bedward and his followers, Marcus Garvey and the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), and the early Rastafarians. While each group varies in its origins, constituency, and relationship to the wider society, a common thread running between them is a morally-rooted sense of Black identity and Black redemption contrasted to their view of White society and institutions as oppressive and wicked. These groups’ activities became intertwined in local (and sometimes national) political and social struggles regarding issues such as employment, wages, taxation, colonial policies, allegiance to the Crown government, and White monopoly of opportunities. Participants in these groups frequently had overlapping affiliations, pointing to the diversity of Ethiopianist-oriented ideas and their general appeal to the Black proletariat, lumpenproletariat, and petty bourgeoisie. For example, some Bedwardites and Garveyites became Rastafarians and some Rastafarians could be called Garveyites. Leaders like Alexander Bedward, Leonard Howell, and Marcus Garvey did not rely exclusively on their charisma to garner support. Rather, their shrewdness lay in the mobilization of desires and extant (albeit sometimes latent) discontent around familiar and appealing ideas and practices.

First, I discuss Ethiopianism and how it manifested itself in various parts of the world. My aim is to distill its major themes and concerns in order to provide context for its manifestation among the different groups discussed. Therefore, this part of the discussion does not emphasize detailing the extent to which Ethiopianism changed between the late 1700s through the early 1900s, but neither does it elide variations. Next, I outline three twentieth-century expressions of Ethiopianism in Jamaica. Here I seek to show how Ethiopianist ideology manifested itself in practice in varying ways. The Bedward, Garvey, and early Rastafari movements illustrate the connections between religion, race, and social action in Jamaica. As the social and political climate changed, so too did interpretations and manifestations of Ethiopianism. It began as a critique of slavery and the denigration of Blackness, then took on anticolonial forms after emancipation (or in colonized territories, like in Africa), and eventually, in Jamaica, developed anti-establishment and anticapitalism orientations under the direction of the dreadlocked factions of the Rastafari.

THE ORIGINS AND TENETS OF ETHIOPIANISM

Ethiopianism began as an apocalyptic ideology widely infused with millenarian and messianic rhetoric. Its project has centered around essentializing Black identity as a cluster of core essences. Almost from the start it exhibited two ostensibly conflicting tendencies. One is a tendency that George M. Fredrickson (1995:69-72) refers to as "romantic racialism." This perspective sees Africans and Blacks in general as having special qualities that differentiate them from other races, especially Whites. In this view Africans are spiritual, close to nature and God, communal, capable of industriousness (in the form of self-help), even in a "foreign," wicked land. As the Rastafarians often note, "we are a peculiar people." For these Ethiopianists especially, and more symbolically for the later secular-leaning Ethiopianists, the hand of God (a Black God in many accounts), is expected to deliver them from oppression. Whites are viewed in contrast: aggressive, individualistic, and scornful of God. Slavery, in the view of Ethiopianists, is a cardinal sin, exacerbated by the Whites hypocritically calling themselves civilized Christians.

The view of Blacks as "special" and "different" is often associated with separatism of varying forms, ranging from desires of Blacks to have their own territory within White society, to aspirations to leave America completely. This tendency is also compatible with later calls for "Black man's government." The conflicting tendency is an admiration of European civilization and achievements alongside burning contempt for White oppression. Thus proponents of Ethiopianism could deliver an incendiary message to Blacks and a moderate or accommodating one to Whites. This contradiction does not manifest itself among all Ethiopianist-oriented groups, but it should be noted that where it does occur, it may be related to pragmatic concerns that may not be obvious.

By the mid to late 1800s Ethiopianism was more thoroughly developed by Black intellectuals, who can also be called Black nationalists, notably Henry Highland Garnet, Martin Delaney, Edward Blyden, and Alexander Crummell.³ They made it intellectually acceptable as opposed to chiefly emotive. Delany and Blyden can be attributed with developing a more secular version oriented toward a pragmatic self-help program, combined with a repatriation to Africa program. Highland and Crummell promoted more religiously-oriented Ethiopianism (Highland's work preceded Crummell). These Ethiopianist developments are primarily associated with America, even though these men and others are associated with the African diaspora. Henry Garnet traveled to England and Jamaica; Blyden hailed

3. For general discussions of these figures see Drake 1970; Moses 1978, 1996; Fredrickson 1995.

from the Virgin Islands and lived in Liberia; Crummell also lived in Liberia; and Delaney explored West Africa in search of settlement for Blacks from the West.

The travel and infusion of Ethiopianist ideas in different places, notably Jamaica and South Africa, resulted in its developing differently, as we shall see. In Jamaica, I suggest, the intellectualized versions of Ethiopianism do not become influential before Garvey's development of the United Negro Improvement Association there, although Robert Love, a forerunner to Garvey, is associated with a sophisticated and intellectual Ethiopianism that had some influence upon Garvey (Lewis 1987). Before their influence, nonscholar preachers, healers, and international travelers were bearers of Ethiopianism. The forms that Ethiopianism took there had more in common with the Ethiopianism of Prince Hall, David Walker, and Robert Young than of Blyden and Crummell. This may be because the first likely transporters of Ethiopianism to Jamaica were Black preachers from America soon after the revolutionary war, contemporary with Prince Hall and others. Yet, it cannot be ignored that Henry Garnet visited Jamaica as a missionary between 1853 and 1855, and the extent of his influence has yet to be thoroughly fathomed.

George Shepperson (1968:249) points out that the 1611 issue of the King James Version of the Holy Bible (hereafter referred to as the Bible) was translated from Hebrew and Greek into English, and that a standard convention of the time was the usage of "Ethiopian" to mean "Black people."⁴ This general usage of "Ethiopia" encompassed the lands and peoples of sub-Saharan Africa and the Kingdom of Abyssinia. It was not uncommon for White abolitionists in America and England to apply the term "Ethiopian" to the slaves (Moses 1978:23). As slaves learned Biblical lore and engaged in critiques of slavery, they came to define themselves as Ethiopians, identifying with Biblical history and figures. Over time the definitions and usages of Ethiopianism became more complex and sophisticated, and hence more diverse, reflecting changing sociopolitical conditions and shifting ideas about racial identity and citizenship.⁵ Nonetheless, certain themes

4. Shepperson (1968:249) divides Ethiopianism into four eras: 1) 1611-1871, 2) 1872-1928, 3) 1929-63, and 4) post-1963. But since he does this in the context of Ethiopianism in Africa, I do not use his periodization, although the first two eras are applicable to the Western hemisphere, especially Jamaica.

5. William Scott (1978) argues that Black people in the United States moved from Ethiopian to more neutral identifications like "Negro" and "Colored" as a result of debates about whether they should remain in the United States or remove to Africa. Those who felt, for whatever reasons, that they should remain in the United States (and there were many), argued that they should assert their American nationality by abandoning the customary self-definitions African and Ethiopian. As Scott (1978:6) has argued, most Blacks stopped defining themselves as African and Ethiopian in favor of "colored" around the 1830s.

maintained continuity, all of which cannot be comprehensively explored here.

Wherever Ethiopianism has taken root, three main factors animate it: White hegemony, especially over liberty, knowledge, and religion; a desire of Blacks for varying degrees of autonomy in economic and political affairs; and a sense of injustice and moral wrong related to Blacks' enduring White injustices, especially slavery and apartheid. Sometimes one of these factors may bear more heavily than others on how Ethiopianism is expressed, but in Jamaica all three factors are complexly intertwined and shaped by local events and histories. Thus, it distinguishes itself from Ethiopianist forms and practices in places such as the United States or South Africa, commonalities in thematic content and links between bearers of Ethiopianism in different nations notwithstanding.

Ethiopianism emerged in the United States by at least the mid-1700s, during the height of slavery. Evidence includes the teachings and writings of proto-Black nationalists like Prince Hall, the Black poetess Phyllis Wheatley, the narratives of slaves like Sojourner Truth. In 1797, Prince Hall, a revolutionary war veteran and a free African wanting to repatriate to Ethiopia, wrote:

My brethren, let us not be cast down under these and many other abuses we at present are laboring under, – for the darkest hour is just before the break of day ... [In prerevolutionary Haiti n]othing but the snap of the whip was heard, from morning to evening. Hanging, breaking on the wheel, burning, and all manner of tortures, were inflicted on those unhappy peoples. But, blessed be God, the scene is changed. They now confess that God hath no respect of persons, and therefore, receive them as their friends and treat them as brothers. Thus *doth Ethiopia stretch forth her hand from slavery, to freedom and equality* [emphasis added]. (Quoted in Moses 1978:24)

The text by Prince Hall, who is rumored to have been born in Barbados, is among the earliest identifiable sources drawing upon Psalms 68, verse 31: "Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God."

By the early to mid-nineteenth century, new voices such as those of Robert Young and David Walker, were inspiring Ethiopianism. It was being debated and developed in Black literary and missionary societies, and in Church publications like the African Method Episcopal Church's *Review*. Two benchmark Ethiopianist documents were published in 1829: Robert Alexander Young's *The Ethiopian Manifesto* and David Walker's *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World*. Young (1996:64), who believed in the coming of a "Black Messiah who would champion the cause of the 'degraded of this earth,'" wrote in his *Ethiopian Manifesto*:

for we tell you of a surety, the decree hath already passed the judgment seat of an undeviating God, wherein he hath said, "surely hath the cries of the black, a most persecuted people, ascended to my throne and craved my mercy; now behold! I will stretch forth my hand and gather them to the palm, that they may become unto me a people, and I unto them their God." Harken, therefore, oh! Slaveholder, thou task inflicter against the rights of men, the day is at hand ... when poverty shall to thee appear a blessing ... that in thine end thou might not curse the spirit which called thee forth to life.

Walker (1996:80) counseled that if Whites sought to kill Blacks, or if Blacks decided to rise up and slay Whites, then "kill or be killed." David Walker's Ethiopianist tract was so militant, radical, and threatening to the White bourgeoisie that the governors of Virginia and North Carolina, fearing that it would reach Boston and incite slaves there, asked the mayor of Boston to ban it (Moses 1996:68). At the same time, Walker granted that the English had done Blacks a service by introducing them to industry and civilization.

Generally speaking, Ethiopianism is a religious and racial ideology that sometimes bears political overtones. It has been described as a literary and "trans-Atlantic political movement" (Moses 1978:24) and as a religious movement (Campbell 1987:2), and all are apt descriptions of forms of Ethiopianism, depending upon the period and place being examined. Black people's fascination with Ethiopia grew out of the many references to it throughout the Bible, their understanding of Christianity's roots in ancient Ethiopia, and later, the recognition that Ethiopia had never been completely colonized by Europeans. The 1896 invasion of Ethiopia by Italy rallied Black South Africans to wave the banner of Ethiopianism proudly, and the 1935 invasion facilitated a brief reflowering of Ethiopianism throughout the United States, the Caribbean, and Europe. As noted in *Ethiopia Unbound*, it is thus understandable that Ethiopia came to be thought of by some as a "metaphysical black heaven" (Hayford 1969:xxiv).

In the thoughts and writings of the Ethiopianists of the 1700s and 1800s, Ethiopia and Egypt were signified as emblematic of a golden age and the high civilization of Black life. In true millenarian fashion, some looked to it as the future that awaited them. "It was the vision of a golden past – and the promise that Ethiopia should once more stretch forth its hands to God – that revitalized the hope of an oppressed people. Ethiopia to the Blacks in the Diaspora was like Zion or Jerusalem to the Jews" (Barrett 1988:75). Ethiopianism was millenarian and messianic from the outset because it predicted the fall of slavery and the West, the rise of Africa in the future, the return of Blacks to their imagined glory in precolonial Africa, all under the direction of a coming Black Messiah and redeemer.

Scott (1978:4) emphasizes how Psalms 68:31 were interpreted by eighteenth-century Blacks as a "divine pledge that the African race would

one day be delivered from slavery." In his study of Ethiopianism in South Africa, Bengt Sundkler (1964:59) observed how the "Ethiopian mythology projects the longings of the Africans to a Christian African nation under the 'Lion of Judah, King of Kings' and that its adherents sought out Mount Zion, 'City of the living God, heavenly Jerusalem,'" which is in Ethiopia. Like the Ethiopianists in South Africa, those in Jamaica preferred believing in a living, tangible God, as opposed to the abstract, "mute and so remote" White Jesus and God of the Christians, who apparently was indifferent to the suffering of Black people (Sundkler 1964:279). Mary Turner (1982) has demonstrated the great difficulty African slaves in Jamaica had accepting missionary teachings that God lives in the sky and does not visit earth to mingle with people, and that at death those people who did not live a good life went to a place called hell (they thought the West was "hell"). Yet, despite similarities, Ethiopianism in South Africa and Jamaica developed differently. We find it involved with three significant movements in Jamaica, while in South Africa its political ramifications were more ambiguous, subtle, and diffuse.

It cannot be said that Ethiopianism permeated the thinking and thoughts of the majority of Blacks of the diaspora, but the Biblical story of the bondage, tribulations, and subsequent redemption of the Jews in Egypt was familiar to Blacks who had contact with basic Christian teachings:

Whenever the Judeo-Christian tradition is made known to an oppressed people, the scenario of election, captivity, and liberation in the Old Testament seems to have special appeal. The story of the deliverance of Israel from slavery has always been understood as the prototype of nationalist redemption – the divine revelation of the transhistorical meaning of historical experience. (Wilmore 1998:60)

In Ethiopianism we find precursors to beliefs and practices associated with Black nationalism proper. This does not mean that Ethiopianism caused the practices; rather it points to a genre of Black efforts in disparate places and times to grapple with their complicated relationships with White-dominated societies. Examples include the following: Blacks should name themselves and reject names given to them by Whites; Whites are naturally aggressive and acquisitive; God, in his human form is Black, and deliberately misrepresented as White; and Blacks should direct their own religious and secular destinies. Several themes that influence the different strains of Ethiopianism include the following: 1) Ethiopia is the symbolic home of all Black people and the root of their cultural and historical legacies, especially for Christians; 2) this connection gives Blacks a direct claim to Jewry and ancient civilizations and history; 3) Ethiopia is the place to which Blacks should return and/or should develop through financial and political investment; 4) God will intercede on behalf of Blacks against Whites and their allies; 5) those nations involved in slavery will be destroyed by God; and 6) Blacks are a noble race brought low by White oppression.

THE POLITICAL AND RADICAL DIMENSIONS OF ETHIOPIANISM

Wilson Moses (1996:16) claims that the Black experience of slavery is the origin of Black nationalism, and the same can be said of Ethiopianism. Not all Blacks who experienced slavery and race-based discrimination contributed to the development of Black nationalism – many were adamantly opposed to it – and Ethiopianism is no different. Rather, out of a generalized set of oppressive conditions, ideologies like Ethiopianism emerge. In retrospect, it can be argued that discrimination against Blacks has been a primary factor in animating and reanimating Ethiopianism (when it wanes). In this way secularization and social mobility weaken, if not completely marginalize, a primary role that Ethiopianism has historically played. Slavery, colonialism, racially restrictive policies, and even poverty caused by overtaxation and low wages, were associated by many Blacks with White domination, and were objects of criticism or condemnation by Ethiopianists. To appreciate the significance of Ethiopianism, it and White supremacy and the beliefs and policies attendant to it must be juxtaposed: “The basic colonial principles were: the doctrine of the supremacy of the white race and the inferiority of the black. Europe was a civilizer and Africa was savage. Skin color was a badge of status, with blackness denoting slave labour and the gradations of color moving downwards to degradation” (Sherlock & Bennett 1998:12). Ethiopianism did not make Blacks equal to Whites, nor did it improve their condition, but it projected their desires for improvement of their condition, provided hope in the form of redemption, either supernaturally or through human agency, and occasionally it became intertwined with political activities aimed at Black upliftment and self-determination. In some cases it informed consciousness and action to the point that it can be considered political, as among the Bedwardites, Garveyites, and Rastafarians.⁶

Ethiopianism has been invigorated by European-derived interpretations of the Scriptures that ignore or downplay the role of Africans in Biblical history. A long-standing tradition in Black scholarship and religious thinking has debated the role and presence of Blacks in Biblical history. For example, it has been argued that the descendants of Ham were Black, and that the term “Cush” or “Kush,” a term of Hebrew origin, refers to Black people of Africa, especially those of Ethiopia and Egypt. Barrett (1998:74) states that the word “Ethiopia” is a Greek translation of the Hebrew term “Kush/Cush,” and that it also means “burnt” or “black.” Along these lines is a widespread Ethiopianist view that enslavement and the decline of great African civilizations were punishment from a jealous God chagrined by the idolatry and wickedness of “his people.” At the same time this was reasoned to be a part of God’s larger plan: the redemption of Blacks and Africa.

6. I define “political” broadly and include activities that involve conflict and competition between governmental and civilian actors, not only conflicts over state power.

The desire of some Black people to interpret Christian doctrines in a manner consistent with their own experience and history has been a source of conflict with Whites and among other Blacks. Mainstream Christianity still finds heretical Black interpretations of the Scriptures. An old claim of Ethiopianists is that God (or the Messiah) is Black, while Whites believe he favors them (for example, see the introductory epigram). In South Africa, according to Sundkler (1964:38-39, 53), the first "Ethiopian" Church, founded in Witwatersrand in 1892, came about because of Black dissatisfaction with White racism and control over Church liturgy. St. Clair Drake (1970: 72) acknowledges this, noting how Ethiopianism was tied to an effort of Africans to be free of White control over their religious practices. Garvey and the Rastafarians were explicit in their racialized interpretations of Biblical figures, while it seems Bedward did not emphasize this, unless we consider his later claim that he himself was divine.

There is nothing about Ethiopianism that makes it intrinsically political. While groups inspired by millenarianism and messianism may engage in protest and rebellion, many are known to disengage from worldly affairs. Thus, where Ethiopianism acts as a blueprint for action, it is important to grasp the influencing factors. Jamaica presents an interesting case for the number of Ethiopianist-inspired activist movements it has witnessed. This, to no small extent, is a feature of Ethiopianism's differential development in Jamaica. As W.F. Elkins (1977:2) points out, there is a tradition in Jamaica of "enthusiastic religion" that embraces "positive social action," and that "utilized anti-authoritarian sections of the Bible."

Shepperson (1968:250) claims that during the period of 1872 to 1928, Ethiopianism was overtly political: "it exercised its greatest political influence and was most widely noticed in the European, American, and African press." If we are to search for clues to the establishment of Ethiopianism in Jamaica, a broadsheet posted in Lucea, Jamaica, in 1865, suggests that Ethiopianism was already implanted there: "I heard a Voice speaking to me in the year 1864, saying, 'Tell the Sons and Daughters of Africa that a great deliverance will take place for them from the hands of oppression ... If the people depend upon their Arms, and upon our Queen, and forget Him who is our God ... the mistakes will lead to great distress'" (in Breiner 1985-86: 31).⁷ This quotation connotes Ethiopianist influences in how it references Africans and their release from oppression. Germane to the specificities of Jamaica, we see admonishment not to confuse their deliverer, God, with arms or monarchs. Richard Burton (1997:102) has noticed that Black religion became more radical and racialized in the 1860s, around the same time that White missionary influence over it waned.

7. Also cited, differently, in Schuler 1980:105.

Even though Ethiopianism easily accommodates quietism alongside fiery rhetoric, it has been associated with significant uprisings and millenarian movements. The Watchtower, Chilembwe, and Mjijima movements and rebellions made White Central and South Africans shudder with trepidation. In the African context Ethiopianism “seemed a clear and present danger to the white man’s order” (Shepperson 1968:253) during its early phases because it pointed to African efforts at independence within the White order. Yet, as Fredrickson (1955:86) observes, Whites slowly realized it was not a revolutionary threat and became more tolerant of it. These developments complicate the impact of Ethiopianism because some of the independent Church religionists were politically active, but not radicals, and within the larger movement, conservative influences such as those of the African Methodist Episcopal religionists favored coexistence that allowed them to maintain some autonomy.

Ethiopianism developed into an ideology around which many Black organizations and religious and political programs were built, spreading from the United States into the Caribbean, sub-Saharan Africa, Britain, and France, between the late eighteenth century and the 1940s. From the late 1700s into the first third of the 1900s, a primary mode of diffusion of Ethiopianism was Black American slave and free preachers, Black seafarers, and itinerant contract workers⁸ who visited the Caribbean, South Africa, and Central America. Many leaders and members of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church promoted Ethiopianism, ideologically and in practice. The AME Church was established throughout the Americas and maintained close ties with the independent Church movement in South Africa (Sundkler 1964; Post 1978:161). Daniel Thwaite (1936), for instance, argues that the African American bishop, Turner, of the Watchtower Association, stirred up Black South Africans with his Ethiopianism, which some of them embraced. Turner’s exhortation to the Southern Africans is classically Ethiopianist:

Why has the white man’s civilization contributed so little to the advancement of Africa? ... It is because the white man does not appreciate our value, because he believes himself by divine right to be the dominant race and thereby privileged to maintain all the others in a state of subordination. The black is the race of the future, and one day the black man will wake up and shake off the white man’s yoke. He is already rubbing his eyes and feeling his muscles. (Quoted in Thwaite 1936:37)

Turner also provides an example of the contradictory aspects of Ethiopianists. His above-cited critical exposition on Whites was delivered to a Black South

8. Recent publications have had made clearer the significant extent to which American and Caribbean Blacks of the late 1800s and first third of the twentieth century supported radical left agendas and organizations (e.g., Kelly 1990; James 1998; Bush 1999).

African audience. When he spoke before audiences where Whites were present he toned down his critique (Fredrickson 1995:83). The friction between racial radicalism and accommodation in this instance, and probably many others, is a reflection of cautious pragmatism. To chastise the Whites might have caused him physical harm or derailed his organizing efforts in South Africa. An elder Rastafarian, Brother Yendis, showed this tension in a different way: "We must always challenge Babywrong [Babylon] wherever we are. We must expose her wickedness. But we can't fight her with arms [weapons] because they will kill us off."⁹ Thus confrontation that seems largely rhetorical may in some instances be a reflection of pragmatic decisions.

Some Ethiopianists eschewed mainstream political efforts, preferring to wait for otherworldly interventions, while others directed energy into organizations resolved to facilitate repatriation and to teach Black people about Africa. What made Ethiopianism radical was its potential to raise Black racial and political consciousness about Africa and Africans. For many Blacks and Whites of the pre-Black-Power era, Africa was generally thought of as a dismal land full of savages incapable of making history and building civilization. To know or learn differently can be a racial consciousness-raising experience. As nigrescence theorists contend, such experience can be the catalyst for making Blackness a central and salient part of a person's identity (Cross 1995; 2001), leading them to privilege Black history and culture over that of other groups. One site where the literature on Black identity and Black nationalism converge is how pro-Black identifications like Ethiopianism meet psychological and social needs under conditions of oppression and segregation (e.g., Cross 1971; Cha-Jua 1998).

Ken Post (1978:168), who has written extensively on Jamaican labor, politics, and Ethiopianism, argues that Ethiopianism, especially its mystical and religious manifestations in Jamaica, prevented the emergence of radical, class-based movements: "in Jamaica it was primarily ideas which emerged out of the Ethiopian crisis, not organisation ... The pro-Ethiopia movement took not an organisational form but an ideological one." Post's politics, girded by orthodox Marxism, treats religious beliefs as a diversion from class struggle and sociopolitical organization. There is some truth in Post's view: building bureaucratic, class-based organizations was not a primary part of the Ethiopianist agenda in 1930s Jamaica. Yet, such a view neglects the numerous Ethiopianist-oriented associations, such as the United Negro Improvement Association and the Ethiopian World Federation. Non-mainstream groups like messianic, millenarian, and revitalization movements commonly create alternative forms of organization that observers ignore. For instance, there has been a robust "political" tendency within the Rastafarian movement since

9. Personal communication, 1998. The name is a pseudonym.

its birth, yet the scholarly and popular focus has been upon their messianism, culture, and ideology, promoting a view of their being apolitical (Price 2000). However, the pragmatic self-help-oriented Rastafari combine racial consciousness with moral concerns and political issues, especially poverty and racial and class-based discrimination. For example, Altamont Reid, an early Rastafarian, led an Israelite group who called for “a day of reckoning” (Post 1978:239); non-Rastafarian Frederick Evans led a group called Africa Black Ironsides, which simultaneously called for “racial independence” and “equality of human blood”; and St. William Grant, a Black activist who rose to prominence during the 1938 labor rebellion, led the Ethiopian Alliance of the World. These groups used a combination of religion, politics, and race consciousness to draw and rally followers. Such combinations could become extremely activist and political under certain conditions

Post’s (1978:242) criticisms are limited mainly to why bureaucratic organizations and overt political programs were not a pervasive aspect of Ethiopianist-inspired endeavors: “[Ethiopianism] ... as an ideology, could not itself result in meaningful class action, by leading ... to a questioning of the whole existing system, even though in racial, not economic terms, it contributed indirectly to the realisation of the poor that they existed for themselves over and against other social interests.” But race and religion have always been treated by orthodox Marxists as less important to social change than class, and they were rarely integrated into their theories. The Rastafarians, for instance, did use Ethiopianism, religion, race, and other cognitive practices to create a critique that questions the entire system. Hence, the definition of political practice must be flexible (e.g., Gray 1990).

How Ethiopianism emerged in Jamaica is unclear, but George Lisle (also spelled “Liele”), Moses Baker, and other Blacks who came to Jamaica with the Tories in the late 1700s, are likely carriers. George Lisle, who reached Jamaica in 1784, founded Jamaica’s first Black Baptist church, the Ethiopian Baptist Church. Earlier, in America, he organized and founded possibly the first Black church, in 1778, in Savannah, Georgia (Brown 1975:58; Pulis 1999:192). According to Lisle, at least four other like-minded “brethren” were in Jamaica in 1784 (Brown 1975:60).¹⁰

Lisle had been preaching since at least 1774 when he decided to join the church, around the same time that he discovered his “love to other negroes” (quoted in Brown 1975:58). Lisle’s teachings to his fellow free and enslaved Blacks drew upon a covenant that included, aside from Christian principles, not submitting to the “unjust” (Whites, elites) in courts of law (Brown

10. Pulis (1999) provides detailed discussion regarding Lisle, Baker, and the “Jamaican diaspora” of the late 1700s. Race and the content of Lisle’s preaching are not the focus of the article.

1975:62). In Jamaica he was charged with sedition because he was heard preaching that Whites must be prayed for, if "they must be saved" (Brown 1975:60), and because it was believed that he intended to incite the slaves to insurrection (Chevannes 1971:27). The implication of his plea is that Whites were guilty of sin through slavery, and that Blacks, the objects of domination, were magnanimous enough to ask God to forgive their oppressors. A fellow Black from America, Moses Baker, who was also a religious teacher, established the second Black church in Jamaica in 1791, in St. James Parish (Brown 1975:61). In Jamaica, Lisle and Baker worked together teaching free and enslaved Blacks (and possibly a few Whites) in a school of their own making. They are the root of Jamaica's Native Baptist tradition (Chevannes 1971), which as Elkins (1977) and others have shown, has a history of radicalism.

Even though literacy was low in Jamaica through the 1960s, it was the Bible that most poor Jamaicans looked to for hope, for signs of the commencement of redemption, and for answers to their questions about life's trials and tribulations. For example, one of the founding Rastafarians who, while on trial for sedition in 1934, was asked why they held Ethiopia in such high esteem, replied: "We found [out about] it in the Bible. The brethren, who could write, search the Bible and use a dictionary and we find out that we were Ethiopians" (quoted in Post 1978:160).

In Jamaica, anti-White sentiments again became prevalent in the early 1900s, as they had during the mid to late 1800s. Slowly, Jamaica's class composition was beginning to change as movement toward industrial modernization was associated with a growing proletariat and an increasingly vocal Black petty bourgeoisie (Carnegie 1973). The latter group became especially vocal against Jamaica's entrenched racial discrimination in pay, education, access to the franchise, hiring in government, political office, and even taxation. The last policies bred resentment among the rural and urban poor. Discontent was fueled by an influx of rural citizens into Kingston and other urban areas. Importation of East Indian laborers complicated matters by depressing wages for Blacks and by absorbing potential jobs. The unemployed were showing themselves to be volatile, rioting here and there, as during the 1924 Darling Street riots. Also, by the mid-1920s the impact of Garvey's influence was beginning to be widely felt. Much of the dissatisfaction with Jamaican society was expressed in racial terms; even the Chinese were targets of Black racial animosity (Carnegie 1973). Natural disasters such as plant diseases, flooding, and drought jeopardized the livelihoods of those dependent upon agriculture and affected local markets. The concatenation of economic, political, social and natural problems, and World War I was interpreted by many as the fruit of wickedness and of God's ire, and as being evocative of impending deliverance and divine intervention.

Ethiopianism intensified as a result of Italy's second invasion of Ethiopia

in 1935. Some saw this as more evidence of looming divine intervention. In the United States and the Caribbean, Blacks volunteered to go to Ethiopia to fight alongside their African brethren against the fascists. New support organizations were formed and money was raised to support Ethiopia. Black newspapers such as the *Chicago Defender*, *The Pittsburgh Courier*, and Jamaica's *Plain Talk* informed the public on what was happening in Ethiopia, and how they could help.

Arguably, the demise of Ethiopianism as an overt influence upon social action was ensured by the development of indigenous political parties in the 1930s, the decline of Marcus Garvey's UNIA and the chapters of the Ethiopian World Federation (EWF), and the emergence of national liberation and decolonization movements in the 1950s. As mentioned above, increased opportunities for Blacks in work and education, and spreading secularism, can make Ethiopianism less relevant to daily experience. Fredrickson (1995: 92) sees the growth of Pentecostalism in America and South Africa as influences that de-emphasize the political and militant potential of Ethiopianism after the 1920s, and Burton (1997:119) concurs, adding that radical Christianity in Jamaica, which had its climax around 1921, was dulled by the influences of Pentecostalism and male outmigration. Yet, Ethiopianism continued to exist through the Rastafarians.

ALEXANDER BEDWARD AND THE BEDWARDITES

It should be not be neglected that the Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865 was a watershed event in which race-consciousness blended with religion and critiques of injustice (and it led to imposition of a Crown Colony government by England). The rebellion, led by Paul Bogle, another Black Baptist preacher, may prove to be a vital link in the development of Ethiopianism in Jamaica. Race – Blackness – proved to be a “motivating force” in the rebellion and was entangled with religious speechifying (Burton 1997:112).¹¹ Bogle's infamous rallying cries, “Cleave to the Black!” and “Kill all the White men and all the Black men that would not join them” (quoted in Post 1978:34,143), illustrate how race was used as both a mode of solidarity and distinction. Bogle asked his followers to stick together on grounds of race, while also identifying and neutralizing all those Blacks who stood against their pursuit of justice and autonomy. The Rastafarians later redefined the call as “Death to all White and Black Oppressors!” This is no random coincidence, but a continuity born of shared experience and geographical proximity. The race-based radicalism of St. Thomas led one scholar to call it a site of “Negro

11. For additional perspectives see: Underhill 1971; Chutkan 1975; Robotham 1983; Heuman 1994.

nationalism" in the latter 1800s (Knox 1962). Moreover, Burton (1997: 119), citing Post, argues that "Bedward and Bedwardism provide a 'vital link in the continuity of protest from Morant Bay onwards.'" Ascertaining how Ethiopianism spread, how it was expressed, and what its influence was before Bedward remain open questions worthy of focused inquiry.

Alexander Bedward delivered sermons and teachings that instructed his followers about how the colonial government had oppressed Black people, emphasizing the Morant Bay Rebellion as an example of what happens when Black people become tired of being oppressed. The colonial government took this as solicitous of insurrection. Both the secular and romantic strains of Ethiopianism could support antigovernment critiques, and Bedward, like other preachers of his time, acted as if the "present social order is doomed to destruction ... destined to be overthrown by some cataclysmic upheaval of Society in the near future" (quoted in Elkins 1977:5). Apparently Blacks were to be facilitative of the upheaval, or were to benefit from it. Bedward emphasized that he had been prophesying for three years and that finally "the time is near at hand" (quoted in Elkins 1977:12); he saw himself as a savior of the Black race. Although the scope of Bedward's influence makes him significant, the works of Elkins (1977) and Burton (1997) demonstrate that subversive and racialized religious beliefs were common in Jamaica between the late 1880s and the 1920s. This period was characterized by economic recession, and an increase in illnesses and mortality (Elkins 1977), as well as volatility among workers and the unemployed.

Bedward drew on the emotions that motivated the Morant Bay Rebellion, while also criticizing the established religions, especially their preachers, whom he referred to as "Antichrists." The displaced peasantry were especially attracted to Bedward's messages and leadership. Bedward, most likely born in 1859, became one of Jamaica's great grassroots religious leaders. Like many Jamaicans of his time, and some of the early promoters of Rastafari ideology, he traveled to Central America (Colon, Panama) in 1883, in search of a cure to an unknown ailment. In 1885 he had two religious visions that compelled him to return to Jamaica to be baptized (Post 1978:6). In April 1889, he joined H.E.S. Woods's newly founded Jamaica Native Baptist Free Church (JNBFC) in August Town, a small community in St. Andrews Parish, on the northeastern fringes of Kingston. In October 1891, Bedward claimed that God had called on him to carry out special work in Jamaica. Nelson W. Keith and Novella Z. Keith (1992:66) suggest that Bedwardism may be the "first global expression of Afro-Christianity as an active molder of the political will." Bedward may not have called himself an Ethiopianist, but the overtones are clear in his speeches and thinking. Bedward's Ethiopianism, religious militancy, and social organization (bands and camps) provided continuities that were later embodied in the early Rastafarian movement. Some Bedwardites like Robert Hinds and Bishop

Brown took on the Rastafarian faith, holding Haile Selassie to be the Black God-King and redeemer.

Bedward's following consisted mostly of poor peasants and working-class people (e.g., casual laborers, household workers, craftsmen and craftswomen) who were drawn to his religious messages and the Black moral economy¹² he pointed to: the need for land and justice, the injustices associated with White rule, and the necessity of setting up social welfare schemes that addressed the needs of the aged, infants, sick, and illiterate. Like Bogle, Bedward developed alternative social institutions such as Black courts of law to administer justice and promote fairness.

Bedward had many clashes with the police and army and ended up in jail on several occasions. In April and May 1895, he was on trial for his "seditious" activities, and pled not guilty on grounds of insanity. He was acquitted by a jury, but was ordered to the Kingston asylum, although he was later freed of this order. The pattern that emerges here, if not earlier, and continues through the history of the Rastafarians up to the mid-1960s, is the arrest of religious and racial radicals on grounds of sedition, treason, and vagrancy, and their imprisonment on grounds of insanity.

Bedward, like the Rastafarians who came after him, became a threat to the established religions and the colonial government. He claimed that he had created a new religion, a faith that would replace Christianity. It seemed that Bedward, however, would have been content to pray with and heal his followers if the colonial and Church authorities had not intervened with his affairs, leading him to defy them. He threatened the government with blistering anti-White and anticolonial rhetoric and his talk of rebellion. In 1895, he made this statement to a huge throng of listeners:

The Pharisees and Sadducees are the white men, and we are the true people. White people are hypocrites, liars, thieves; Ministers of religion are all rogues and vagabonds. There was a white wall and a black wall. The white wall was closing around the black wall, but now the black wall was stronger than the white wall, and must crush it. The Governor is a scoundrel and robber, the Governor and Council pass laws to oppress the Black people, take their money from their pockets and deprive them of bread and do nothing for it ... I have a sign that the black people must rise. Remember the Morant War. The fire of hell will be your portion if you do not rise and crush the white people. (Quoted in Chevannes 1971:35)

In this excerpt we hear a romantic variety of Ethiopianism that is critical of oppressive White government.¹³ Bedward was predicting a confrontation between Blacks and Whites, where Black people will be the victors.

12. The Black moral economy describes a racialized conception of moral economy developed by E. P. Thompson (1971), James Scott (1976), and others.

13. Bedward, Garvey, and the Rastafari were also critical of middle-class Black people who were not race-conscious.

Between the mid-1890s and 1921, Bedward's movement grew in strength. Bedward is best known for claiming on December 31, 1920, that he would fly up to heaven from Union Camp in August Town, to return on January 3, 1921. Stories abound about how Bedward climbed a tree and jumped out, flapping his arms as if they were wings. This supports the view of Bedward as a lunatic. But Rasta Ivey,¹⁴ one of the oldest living female Rastafarians, who was a Bedwardite during the 1920s, argues that what Bedward meant was that he was going to take an airplane flight to reach the heavens, but he was unable to get access to a plane during the time he claimed. She argues that the stories about flailing arms and jumping out of trees are patent falsehoods, even though she remembers hearing people gathering to watch him take off. As Rasta Ivey remembers the event, the crowd did not understand that Bedward meant he was going to fly in an airplane. When asked if she was present when Bedward was to fly, she replied:

No, No, No, No. I only hear of it, I did not see that. I understand that he was talking to people, and he was showing them [things they did not know], but the people are so wicked and lie that they put it more than what he said. They said he said he was going to fly, but they said he flew. He only fixed up himself [dressed sharply] and when he told them that, he meant aeroplane. The aeroplane was coming. They had it false. He told them he was going to fly, but it was not himself that would fly. He meant that he was going away because he disappeared and they did not know how he disappeared. From they took him [to asylum] nobody heard anything about him. And all his members that I know were sent back to country.¹⁵ (Rasta Ivey 1998)

Even though Bedward's "flight" did not occur, and the throng of followers left disappointed, he did not lose popularity.

In April 1921, Bedward, his followers, and the colonial authorities clashed a few times, leading him to proclaim an important march from August Town to Kingston in April. On the day before the march the governor issued a warrant for his arrest:

when Bedward began his march at dawn on the next day there were 60 police, half of them armed, and 60 men of the Royal Sussex Regiment waiting to intercept Bedward on the road. Dressed in white robes, carrying wooden crosses and palm leaves, his followers offered no resistance to the arrest of their leader and 685 of their number. All were taken to Half-Way-Tree court ... the rest [excepting Bedward] were immediately tried in

14. "Rasta Ivey" is not a pseudonym. She insists that I use her real name.

15. I can only speculate that Bedward may not have wanted to tell his followers about the plane, but to rather surprise them with his "control" of modern technology. Beckwith (1969) claims to have been in Jamaica in December 1920 for Bedward's event and offers a different account of what happened.

batches of ten, being accused under the Vagrancy Law, a useful measure of class control, of "being able to labour and habitually abstaining from work." (Post 1978:8)

All were found guilty except some of those who believed that Bedward was Christ; these people were enjoined to medical observation.

Bedward was consigned to the asylum as a result of the 1921 incident, and there he died, November 8, 1930, six days after the coronation of Ras Tafari as King of Ethiopia. But for about thirty years, Bedward's ideology and practice had wide support from poor Jamaicans across the island.

MARCUS MOSIAH GARVEY: EXPANDING AND INTENSIFYING THE ETHIOPIANIST TENDENCIES

Marcus Garvey provided new fuel for Ethiopianism. He pointed to a positive future for Blacks as a proud, autonomous people. He is revered because he gave voice to what Black people needed to hear to improve their self-regard as individuals and as a race, and to what they needed to gain confidence in their capacity to improve their own condition through private enterprise and collective organization. Specifically, Garvey wanted 1) to unify Black people globally; 2) to facilitate the contribution of Black people in the diaspora to the politico-economic development and self-determination of Africa; 3) to advocate the creation of Black educational establishments that teach Black culture and history; and 4) to rid Black people of their negative self-images.

Garvey¹⁶ was born in 1887, in the parish of St. Anne. He left school early (around 1901), worked as a printer, and traveled through Central America as young man. Garvey was not initially a "radical" Black man, but could be described as an adherent of Booker T. Washington's assimilationist tendency (Washington was one of young Marcus's heroes). One of the greatest influences on Garvey was the Black Nationalist and Pan-Africanist, Robert Love (1835-1914). Love too was influenced by Ethiopianism (Lewis 1987). In 1916 Garvey left Jamaica for the United States, and popular and academic lore hold that in his parting speech he said: "Look to Africa for the crowning of a Black king, he shall be the Redeemer." While Rastafarians took this statement literally, and academics confirmed it by repeating it in print, there is no hard evidence that connects the statement to Garvey (see Hill 1983: 25). Upon arrival in the United States, Garvey became radicalized, being influenced by the "New Negro" movement.

In 1914 Garvey founded the UNIA in Jamaica, and somewhere between 1916 and 1918 he founded the first chapter in New York City. Garvey's message combined the Jamaican peasants' aspirations for economic and

16. The general reference for this section is the compilation of Robert Hill (1989).

cultural independence with the American mantra of success.¹⁷ In 1919 he inaugurated the Black Star Line shipping company, one of his more widely known ventures. The *Negro World* newspaper, introduced in 1918, was read by Black people throughout the Americas, Europe, and Africa; annual circulation ranged between 50,000 and 200,000 copies between its inception and 1933 (Carnegie 1999:60). His venture helped to spread his message of Black empowerment, African redemption, and self-reliance.

Ethiopianism was a diffuse model for arousing activism compared to the Black nationalism espoused by Marcus Garvey. Garvey was coherent, articulate, and forceful in linking his rhetoric to Black moral economies in Jamaica and abroad. He held constant some of the mystical symbolism and religiosity of Ethiopianism, while elaborating by modernizing the discourse and making tradition secondary to Black progress and empowerment. Garvey's rhetoric brilliantly utilized religious imagery, while emphasizing capitalist and American ideology. In Jamaica, the conditions of the early 1930s were ripe for a charismatic figure to garner a constituency. Anti-British and anticolonial sentiments were high, Blacks were agitating for political representation and self-government, and times were hard. Garvey filled a space and met receptive audiences (and reactionary forces). Regrettably, observers have placed more attention on the "sordid, entangled and unfortunate history of the Black Star Line as business venture than to its symbolic import or the imaginative fires it kindled" (Carnegie 1999:65). Garvey intensified Ethiopianism with his fiery racial upliftment rhetoric, and the Rastafarians paid close attention:

we as Negroes have found a new ideal. Whilst our God has no color, yet it is human to see everything through one's own spectacles, and since the white people have seen their God through white spectacles, we have only now started (late though it be) to see our God through our own spectacles. The God of Isaac and the God of Jacob let him exist for the race that believe in the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. *We Negroes believe in the God of Ethiopia, the everlasting God ... we shall worship him through the spectacles of Ethiopia* [emphasis added]. (Garvey 1989:34)

In a later passage, Garvey says the desire of the UNIA is "not to disturb the tranquility of other men, but to lay down our burden and rest our weary backs and feet by the banks of the Niger and *sing our songs and chant our hymns to the God of Ethiopia* [emphasis added]" (Garvey 1989:120).

Whereas the tenets of Ethiopianism easily merged with Garvey's Black nationalism, his politics did not allow an uncritical association between the two philosophies and their proponents. Garvey looked positively upon the crowning of Ras Tafari as Emperor of Ethiopia, and as late as 1935 held res-

17. See Marcus Garvey, "An Overview," in Hill 1989.

pect for the emperor, being one of many who condemned the invasion of the fascists and offered support to Ethiopia. However, by 1936, after the emperor fled Ethiopia and sought assistance from the League of Nations, including colonial powers like Britain, Garvey became stinging critical of the emperor, accusing him of seeking help from those who were the enemies of Black people and not identifying with the average Black African (referring to Selassie's Amhara ancestry, which distinguished itself as an elite group). Garvey lashed out against Haile Selassie in the article "Italy's Conquest?" printed in *Black Man* (Garvey 1936). Garvey's anti-Selassie standpoint caused him to lose support, showing that people's affinities to Ethiopianism were deeper than an attachment to charismatic personalities.

Even though most Rastafarians revere Marcus Garvey, he did not hold a favorable view of them, nor of grassroots religionists like the Bedwardites, which he called a cult. In a speech at a UNIA convention late in the summer of 1934, he said that the

prevailing religious fanaticism existing among certain classes of Negroes was alarming, and that up to the present the Race had not properly settled upon sound religious policy ... [E]very day very simple and ignorant people were founding and organizing new cults which were extremely contradictory to the set principles of true religion, and that it was to the Race's benefit to use its intelligence to curb this spreading fanaticism. (*Daily Gleaner* quoted in Post 1978:188)

Although he knew how to tap into Black moral economies, Garvey apparently favored "civilization" over the grassroots.

Garvey's exile facilitated the deterioration of the UNIA in Jamaica. Still, some UNIA locals continued to exist into the 1940s. A significant number of Rastafarians participated in or were sympathetic toward UNIA locals, and Garveyites often literally took up the banner of Rastafari. Sister Aleisha (a pseudonym) for example, was a Garveyite during the 1940s and 1950s. Although she holds Haile Selassie as divine, she does not see herself as a Rastafarian (she is also a member of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Kingston), primarily because she disagrees with their use of marijuana and their growing of dreadlocks (most Rastafarians did not wear dreadlocks before the mid to late 1940s).

MAINTAINING AND REFORMULATING ETHIOPIANISM: THE RISE AND SPREAD OF THE EARLY RASTAFARI

I now examine Ethiopianism as it manifested itself among the first Rastafarians, focusing on the period between 1930 and 1938. Founding members of the Rastafari found new energy for their conception of

Ethiopianism abroad, while some remnants of the Bedwardites gravitated toward the incipient Rastafari movement. I focus especially on the transnational connections of Ethiopianism and how it comes to reassert itself in the same region that gave birth to the Morant Bay Rebellion.

Ethiopianists like Robert Young believed that a Black Messiah would come to redeem Africa and Black people:

As came John the Baptist, of old, to spread abroad the forthcoming of his master, so alike are intended these our words, to denote to the black African or Ethiopian people, that God has prepared for them a leader, who awaits but for his season to proclaim to them his birthright. How shall you know this man? By indubitable signs which cannot be controverted by the power of mortal, his marks being stamped in open visage, as equally so upon his frame. (Young 1996:65)

On November 2, 1930, Ras Tafari was crowned Emperor of Ethiopia and took the name Haile Selassie, which translates as "Son of the Holy," entitling himself King of Kings, Lord of Lords, and the Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah. Lij Tafari Makonnen¹⁸ was born July 23, 1892, in Harar, a city in the Eastern province of Harege, Ethiopia. Soon after his birth his mother died, and by 1896 Ethiopia was at war with the invading Italians, whom the Ethiopians defeated in 1896 at the Battle of Adawa. In 1928 Ras Tafari was given the title "Negus," which meant he was now a king. At the age of thirty-seven, Ras Tafari Makonnen was crowned Emperor of Ethiopia, at St. George's Cathedral, Addis Ababa, on November 2, 1930. This event was reported to the world. Not only did African dignitaries attend the coronation, but colonial representatives were also present, including the son of King George V, the Duke of Gloucester. Reportedly the duke kneeled to kiss the hand of the emperor. For the Rastafarians this meant that the British throne was bowing to a force it recognized as greater than itself. After all, why would the Empire pay tribute to a Black king of a small, unmodernized nation like Ethiopia? This pageantry was recorded by Jamaican newspapers, and was much discussed.

The events framing the experience and interpretations of the early Rastafarians included a world war, the American stock market crash, inept colonial administration, natural disasters, and the specter of a strengthening fascism. From their Biblical perspective, the second coming of Christ and the resultant new world would be signaled by wars, rumors of war, famine, pestilence, and hard times. Black Jamaicans were looking to their Bibles for answers to the turmoil and instability engulfing the world. The Book of Revelations provided them with many answers. The Scriptures were con-

18. "Lij" and "Ras" are titles of respect; "Lij" is applied to those of lower stature, like young people.

strued by them to promise that on his second visit, the Messiah would return as a king. To be able to recognize the King when he returned required piecing together statements made in Revelations and other Biblical books: the King would be of the lineage of Kings David and Solomon, and of the Tribe of Judah, and he would emerge during a time of great instability and uncertainty. Moreover, the King would be challenged by the Beast or Antichrist and would win. Selassie's conflict with the Italians and fascism satisfied for them their expectation that the Beast would challenge the Messiah and lose, while the world watched. For these reasons and many more, Haile Selassie fit the bill.

M.G. Smith, Roy Augier, and Rex Nettleford (1960:5-6) nicely sum up the Rastafari perspective:

Revelation 5:2, 5 – And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the Book, and to loose the seals thereof?”... And one of the elders said to me “Weep not: behold, the Lion of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the Book and to loose the seven spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.” Later, when the Italians invaded Ethiopia, Revelation 19:19 was fulfilled – “And I saw the Beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, against his army.” In 1941, with the Emperor's return to Ethiopia, the succeeding verse was fulfilled – “And the Beast was taken.”

There is convincing evidence that suggests that Rastafarian ideology emerges from a cross-fertilization between Ethiopianist ideas in the United States, South Africa, and Jamaica. Robert Hill has tracked down three of the originative documents of the early Rastafari movement: *The Holy Piby*, *The Royal Parchment Scroll of Black Supremacy*; and *The Promise Key* (see the interview with Robert Hill, Scott 1999:135-44). *The Holy Piby* had great influence on religious radicals in South Africa and Jamaica. Robert Athlyi Rogers, an Anguillan who settled in Perth Amboy, New Jersey, wrote *The Holy Piby*,¹⁹ which was published in 1924. There are two versions of it, a larger and a smaller one. *The Holy Piby*, the first of the trilogy, preaches the “doctrine of the divinity of Ethiopia” (Scott 1999:141).

Rogers, as a result of a dream, decided that he had to go to sea, where he came into contact with a South African Garveyite, Joseph Masogha, who was a distributor of Garvey's paper *The Negro World*. Rogers was once the president of a UNIA local in Perth Amboy and the minister of his own church, the Afro-Athlyican Constructive Gaathlyans Church, of which he later made Masogha the head (see Scott 1999:140; see also Chirenje 1987; Fredrickson 1995). He believed that the leadership of the African struggle

19. South African colonial authorities apparently confiscated a copy of *The Holy Piby* and filed away quotations from it, from which Sundkler (1964) then quotes.

should be an African or someone who had made Africa his home. This was perceptive on Rogers's part, because South Africans like James Dwane,²⁰ a leader of an indigenous South African tribal clan, believed that the phrase "Africa for the Africans" had to be interpreted literally. Dwane's experience with the Black American Churches during his visit to the United States made him feel that the church leaders had required him to be subordinate, and did not acknowledge the importance of reaching out to their African compatriots (Sundkler 1964:41; see also Chirenje 1987; Fredrickson 1997).²¹

Sundkler's work on Bantu prophets in South Africa indirectly confirms the relationship between Rogers, Masogha, and *The Holy Piby* and between Ethiopianism in the United States, South Africa, and Jamaica:

The Bible which the Bantu now have is the wrong book. There exists, they say, another Bible, hidden away from the Bantu by the Whites, a book containing the real truth, whilst the "old Bible" – as the Bible is called in such circles – was written only to cheat the Black man. One source of this propaganda seems to be the Afro-Athlican [sic] Constructive Church, of Negro [Black American] origin ... they know and [claim to] possess "another" Bible, the right, Ethiopian Bible, called "The Holy Piby." According to them, *the "old Bible" was given to the children of the house of Israel, whereas the Holy Piby has been given to children of the house of Ethiopia* [emphasis added]. (Sundkler 1964:278)

These views fit the basic tenet of Ethiopianism, showing the consistency of the ideas, despite the widespread sowing of these thoughts in disparate lands.

While traveling at sea, Rogers stopped in Colón, Panama, where he met two Jamaicans who expressed an interest in *The Holy Piby* and his Athlyican Church. Around 1924-25 the two, Charlie Goodrich and Mother Grace Garrison, resettled in Jamaica and formed a branch of the Afro-Athlyican Constructive Gaathlyans (or the Hamatic Church) in Jamaica. The Garveyites condemned the Hamatic Church (Scott 1999:142), notwithstanding its race-conscious aspects. The Garveyites ran Goodrich and Mother Grace out of Kingston, and it was a former Bedwardite living in Port Morant

20. Dwane and former leaders of the Wesleyan Mission Church broke away and decided to affiliate with the AME Church of America. Dwane visited the United States to obtain this affiliation (Sundkler 1964:40). Dwane helped to incorporate the African Ethiopian Church leadership into the AME, and even asked for financial support to visit King Menelik of Ethiopia and to expand into Sudan and Egypt. In 1900 Dwane formed the "Order of Ethiopia" (Sundkler 1964:40). Dwane and others came to feel that American Negro missionaries posed the same problems of rule and control as White missionaries, and proceeded to lodge similar criticisms against the AME Church Black leadership as against Whites (Sundkler 1964:42).

21. He visited England in 1894-95 and soon thereafter, visited the United States (Sundkler 1964:40).

who helped the fleeing pair find respite. This is likely how *The Holy Piby* ended up in St. Thomas, where Leonard Howell would soon be preaching Rastafari (Scott 1999:142). Robert Hill (1983) believes that Howell found *The Holy Piby* in Port Morant (Scott 1999:142,143).

Reverend Pettersburgh, an African American who apparently visited Jamaica, wrote the second document of the trilogy, *The Royal Parchment Scroll*. The *Promise Key*, the final document of the trilogy, was published by the original Rastafarian Leonard Howell, in 1934, and according to Hill, was plagiarized from *The Royal Parchment Scroll*. The *Promise Key* was the main text used in street meetings of the early Rastafari.

Sundkler (1964:59) mentions that the “Ethiopian mythology projects the longings of the Africans to a Christian African nation under the ‘Lion of Judah, King of Kings,’ the Zionist mythical charter leads their thoughts to the Holy Land itself.” He goes on to note that Black American influence on Ethiopianism in South Africa was significant:

Influences from Negro churches in America sometimes introduce a decidedly anti-White note into this [South African] Ethiopian ideology. The influence of Marcus Garvey – the Negro prophet, visionary and agitator – is strong in the Afro-Athlican Constructive Church, centred in Kimberly ... The creed of Church easily out-Ethiopians the Bantu Ethiopians: We believe in one God, Maker of all things, Father of Ethiopia, and in his Holy Laws as it is written in the book Piby ... Who did Athlyi, Marcus Garvey, and colleagues come to save? The down-trodden children of Ethiopia that they might rise to be a great power among the nations. (Sundkler 1964:58)

In South Africa and Jamaica Garvey and Athlyi influenced Ethiopianist ideologies.

Four individuals have been identified as the first evangelists advancing the idea that Haile Selassie was the Messiah returned: Leonard Howell, Archibald Dunkley, Robert Hinds, and Joseph Hibbert. However, it is likely there were others. Howell returned to Jamaica in 1932 from the United States. Hibbert lived in Costa Rica from 1911, and returned to Jamaica in 1931 (Post 1978:164). Dunkley served as a seaman on Atlantic Fruit Company boats, leaving the AFC toward the end of 1930 to study the “Bible for two and a half years ‘to determine whether Haile Selassie was the Messiah whom Garvey had prophesied’” (Post 1978:164). Less is known about Hinds, but Rasta Ivey was a follower of his teachings, having met him at Bedwardite meetings. All of these men were preaching the doctrine of Ras Tafari by 1933, and documentary evidence places the emergence of the first Rastafarians somewhere between West Kingston and St. Thomas Parish around early 1931.

Ethiopianist-inspired associations and teachings were not uncommon in the greater Kingston area during the 1920s. For example, in 1924 Hibbert

joined the organization of the Ancient Mystic Order of Ethiopia, a Masonic group. Hibbert's mission was established in St. Andrew, in the district of Benoa, and later moved to Kingston, where he met Howell (Barrett 1988: 82). In 1933 Dunkley founded his King of Kings Missionary Movement, preaching that His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie was the "Son of the Living God, but not the father himself."²² Dunkley's mission was founded in Port Antonio and later moved to Kingston. According to Barrett, Dunkley recruited many members who were Garveyites. Post speculates that Altamont Reid, another early preacher, "radicalized" and likely took over the King of Kings Mission.

These early evangelists were drawing upon extant traditions and symbols,²³ but they were piecing them together in novel ways. Rasta Ivey has a phrase she uses to explain how she made sense of the new beliefs as she was coming into the faith: "The five is become one." She is referring to the four evangelists mentioned plus a little-known evangelist, Bishop Brown. She implies a connection between Bedward and the ideas of at least two early evangelists:

I understood [the varying doctrines of Rastafari] because from Mr. Bedward forward I could put everybody together and it becomes one. When he [Leonard Howell] came and was telling me, I understood because it is one thing. Mr. Bedward, Bishop Brown and all those men is one thing. It seems as if it is divided, but it is not. It is one thing. At that time [before the coronation], he [Selassie I] was not on the scene ... [he was not] in our midst yet that we could understand that it is Him [Selassie had not yet been crowned emperor]. (Rasta Ivey 1998)

Rasta Ivey means that even though she found several people preaching about Rastafari, she realized that they had a common message. For her, this realization was an important part of her conversion to Rastafari. Another possible influence on the proto-Rastafarites was the Salvation Army, which around the same time, was preaching of a "Lion of Judah that will break every chain," which is how Selassie I was conceived after he was crowned emperor (Rasta Ivey 1998). This Rastafarian chant enshrines the idea:

22. Despite some overlap in listeners and followers, these early leaders had core constituencies. These cores may be the roots of some of the ideological differences between groups within the movement, reinforced by a tendency to create small, independent units organized around charismatic leadership.

23. Chevannes (1998:39) has demonstrated that the early Rastafari are closely tied to the Revival tradition, an ecstatic and enthusiastic form of Christianity blended with African-rooted religious traditions; he sees it as a "cultural movement" and a "worldview movement."

The Conquering Lion must break every chain
 The Conquering Lion must break every chain
 and give I a victory again and again
 The Lion of Judah must break every chain
 and give I a victory again and again

It was not the racial rhetoric that first got Rastafarians into trouble; it was their rejection of allegiance to the British Crown and their challenge to the indigenous religions that sparked animosity between them, the public, and authorities.

Most observers hold Leonard Howell as the father of Rastafari, being the first to preach the faith. Yet, Hibbert and Dunkley were also preaching around the same time, and the three were aware of each other, although the extent of inter-influences is not clear (Hinds is sometimes referred to as Hibbert's assistant or deputy). Post suggests that Hibbert could possibly have been preaching Rastafari before Howell (1978:164). They were racially-conscious street preachers in the anti-establishment tradition discussed by Elkins (1977). Rasta Ivey claims that Hinds was preaching Rastafari around the same time.²⁴ He also was one of those who participated in Bedward's 1921 march against the police and tried and charged as being mentally incompetent. According to one source, Hinds claims to have learned of Ras Tafari from someone who had returned from Cuba (Post 1978:163).²⁵ Howell, however, left the most tangible evidence of his activities, mainly his writings, and it is this that gives him original founder status, from an academic perspective. Most Rastafarians acknowledge him as founding father. But this story is far from being complete.

Another important source of information and imagery for the nascent Rastafarians came from the June 1931 issue of *National Geographic*, which carried photographs of life in Ethiopia.²⁶ How many copies of the issue were

24. Rasta Ivey, born around 1912, remembers listening to Howell, Hibbert, Dunkley, and Hinds give street sermons in the early 1930s.

25. Hinds might be one source of the belief of the first- and second-generation Rastafarians that ships would be sent to ferry them to Ethiopia (see the *Daily Gleaner* March 17, 1934). One version holds that Haile Selassie himself would send the ships, while another holds the King of England would be responsible for sending the ships. Mamie Richardson of the EWF continued the propagation of belief in the arrival of ships from Addis Ababa to Jamaica, even though she was speculating based on what the EWF in New York was doing. Even as late as 1998 I spoke with one elder Rastafarian woman who believed that a ship was coming to pick up those who were ready, on August 1, 1998, to take them to Jerusalem and Ethiopia, whichever they chose. She said her dreams told her the United States would send the ship. The ship never arrived.

26. The November 3, 1930 issue of *Time* magazine carried a picture of Haile Selassie I on its cover. The story, "Abyssinia: Coronation," notes that "Negro newsorgans hailed him [Selassie I] as their own" (see www.time.com/time/europe/timetraits/selassie/hs301103.html).

circulating among Jamaica's poorest citizens is not clear. One elder remembers getting a glimpse of it from a seaman or a man who worked on the Kingston docks. Those elders who remember seeing the issue talked about it in ways that suggest that those who got a glimpse of the article cherished every picture and word.

Howell spent a short time in Kingston before moving, in around 1933, to that rural hotbed of radicalism and racialism, St. Thomas Parish. Integrating himself into an already discontented peasant and squatter population, Howell found an audience ready and receptive to hear about the Black Messiah in Ethiopia who was ready to stretch forth his hands and redeem the scattered Blacks of the diaspora. The *Daily Gleaner*²⁷ estimated that Howell had about 800 followers in the Leith Hall and Pear Tree Grove areas of St. Thomas.

There was considerable overlap between Ethiopianist themes as discussed above, the racial rhetoric espoused in the St. Thomas area, and the early doctrines of Rastafari: 1) Whites are evil and to be distrusted; 2) the Black race is morally superior; 3) Whites will be punished for their sinfulness; 4) the Jamaican government and its laws are to be dishonored; 5) make mental and physical preparation to return to Africa; and 6) Haile Selassie I is the sovereign God and the King of Black people.

Rastafari views and exhortations on the eschewing of allegiance to the Crown quickly brought them to the attention of colonial authorities, who began spying on them and recording the content of their speeches and meetings.²⁸ It may be these experiences that inform the Nyabingi chant "White boy a follower, everywhere Rastafari go White boy a follow." Although there were many ideological and cultural continuities with the past, what made the Rastafarians "new" was the combination of their positive evaluation of Africa and Blackness, their desire to repatriate to Africa, their criticism of the Crown and colonialism, and their view that the Messiah had already returned and was walking once again among mortals – a Black Messiah at that.

By the late 1930s, the working and middle classes were disavowing the Rastafarians, who they now called extremists and racists, and the public began to confront them physically in their open-air gatherings.²⁹ Petitions were put forward to prevent the public assembly of those preaching Rastafari. The real threat to the colonial and Black middle classes was their antistate and anticolonial views, and the growing support they garnered among people in Kingston and St. Thomas.

27. *Daily Gleaner* December 16, 1933.

28. For more on colonial reactions to the Rastafari, see Hill 1983; Chevannes 1994; Van Dijk 1995.

29. Post (1978:192) gives the example of how the St. Andrew Civic League denounced the Rastafarians, and how Dunkley and his followers exchanged blows with passersby.

Fueled by propaganda, anti-White sentiments continued to grow among Rastafarians and non-Rastafarians alike. In 1935, an article by Frederico Philos (probably a pseudonym) was published in the *Jamaica Times*.³⁰ The article “revealed” that a threatening and arcane group, the “Nya-Binghi,” had arisen in the jungles and cities of Africa and had spread throughout the world wherever Blacks had been transplanted as slaves. According to Philos, their name, “Nya-binghi,” meant “death to Whites.” The problem the Nya-Binghi posed was that they were approximately twenty million strong and that Haile Selassie had agreed to be their leader. This newspeak fit perfectly with the widespread anti-White, anticolonial, and Ethiopianist sentiments of the time. For the early Rastafari the article confirmed the new message: Haile Selassie had recently been enthroned as Emperor, and because he was the Messiah, it was logical in their eyes that he would head an organization of Black people aimed at overthrowing Whites and colonialism. Moreover, Philos’s name suggested that he could be of Italian extraction, and given Rastafari views on Rome (including anti-Catholicism), it was not outrageous that people took the article seriously. Their views on Rome had precedence in other groups’, such as the Bedwardites, criticisms of the Catholic Church in Jamaica. On another level, critical views of Rome were tied to the awareness that Romans crucified Christ, and that the Pope did not disapprove of Mussolini’s invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 (accepting his “civilizing mission”). In 1935-37, the Rastafari were not the only ones agitated by the invasion of Ethiopia. Tens of thousands of Blacks in the United States and the Caribbean were protesting, and the emperor’s face became an icon in the homes and hearts of many Blacks (for more on diverse Black reactions to the invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, see Weisbord 1970; Robinson 1985; Scott 1993; Yelvington 1999).

Philos’s account of the Nya-Binghi fit with the emerging Rastafarian doctrines, particularly the view that White domination of Blacks was about to end, and that the meek (Blacks) would soon reign supreme. Despite the inaccuracies of Philos’s propaganda, the article may have been the inspiration for the name of the oldest Rastafarian sect, the Nyabinghis. They defined the name to mean “death to White and Black oppressors.” This is consistent with the themes and cries raised during the Morant Bay Rebellion: “death to the Whites and those Blacks who would not join them.” Nyabinghi became the term associated with Rastafarian culture and identity.

Under the direction of Haile Selassie, the Ethiopian World Federation (EWF), founded by Dr. Malaku Bayen, was established in New York City in 1937. It was created as an organ to collect funds and build support for Ethiopia’s war against the Italian fascists. The EWF preamble states:

30. The series was republished in installments in 1937 (February 6, 20, 27) in the paper *Plain Talk*.

"We the Black people of the world, in order to *effect Unity, Solidarity, Liberty, Freedom, and Self-determination, to secure Justice and maintain the Integrity of Ethiopia, which is our divine heritage*, do hereby establish and ordain this constitution for the Ethiopian World Federation [emphasis added]." ³¹ Many Jamaicans were clamoring for a branch of the EWF, and they received their wish in 1938. Local 17 of the EWF was founded in Kingston in August of 1938, organized by Rastafarian Paul Erlington, who also served as the first vice-president. The first president was L.F.C. Mantle, who formerly preached in the ghettos. Local 17 was organically linked to the nascent Rastafarians. Besides Erlington, H. Archibald Dunkley was a co-founder, and Joseph Hibbert, Vernal Davis, and Ferdinand Ricketts, all early social-justice-oriented Rastafarians, were members. The first EWF local did not remain active for long. In 1942, a second local, 31, was formed, and for a while Vernal Davis and Ferdinand Ricketts were among its members.

Apparently another EWF chapter was later formed, according to one Rastafarian elder and former EWF member, Brother Woks (whose godfather was Joseph Hibbert); this chapter had scores of Rastafarian members, as he tells it. Mamie Richardson, a deputy of the New York City EWF, visited Jamaica and

blessed the informal groups of BSUE (Brothers Solidarity of United Ethiopia) that same BSUE had changed to [the] ACL, the African Cultural League. When she came here it was either the BSUE or the ACL, one of them ... she blessed the group with a charter and named it His Imperial Majesty Emperor Haile Selassie I First Local 37 of the Ethiopian World Federation. ³²

The Rastafarian movement grew more radical from the mid to late 1940s (the wearing of dreadlocks as a part of the ideology developed during this period) through the early 1960s (see Chevannes 1998; Homiak 1998). During this period the dreadlocks developed an ascetic anti-establishment and anticapitalism orientation. The ascetic expression was not new to the extent that some religionists had similar tendencies during the latter half of the 1800s (see Elkins 1977). The movement became truly pan-African when in 1961 the People's National Party (PNP) sponsored a mission to Africa that included Rastafarians and other Blacks. The "Majority Report" on the Mission to Africa noted the warm welcome received by the delegates, but dwelled on problems of migration, which included the issues of adjusting to African cultural norms, and Africa's desire to attract skilled and not poor emigrants. The Rastafarian delegates wrote their own "Minority Report" which focused on

31. The preamble can be found at the EWF website: <http://www.ethiopianworldfed.org/Constitution/constitution.htm>

32. Interview with Brother Woks, October 14, 1998.

the willingness of African governments to “co-operate in resettling people of African descent within their ancestral borders” (Nettleford 1972:69; see the *Minority Report* 1961).

CONCLUSION

My aim has been to show how various elements of Ethiopianist thinking and praxis among three movements in Jamaica have a complicated and international ideological lineage. Even though it has been expressed in three nations, Ethiopianism has reflected a common Black experience in more than three centuries of slavery, discrimination, poverty, and the longing for redemption and freedom from oppression. Ethiopianism is a racialized model that develops culturally-constructed positive self-images of Black culture and history and that provides a critique of White hegemony and injustice and a blueprint for thinking about the redemption of Black people. It has informed Black insurgents, preachers, and lay people in numerous ways: ideas about righteousness, justice, and redemption in relation to race; ideas about the wrongness of White hegemony over interpretations of the Scriptures; ideas about Black redemption and the end of White hegemony, by force or divine intervention; and ideas about the egregiousness of Blacks participating in their own subjugation by assisting their oppressors in impeding their pursuit of liberty and autonomy. In some cases Ethiopianism has been associated with eruptions of militancy and activism, while in others it may have been a consolation that did not instigate action.

From the eighteenth through the early twentieth centuries, religion and the Bible played a significant role in many Black ideas about freedom, justice, dignity, and Black identity. Secularizing and deracinating influences have nearly caused the extinction of Ethiopianism. Yet, in Jamaica and elsewhere, the Rastafari, and especially survivors of the first two generations, are maintaining the tradition. Ethiopianism did not affect all strata and sectors of society equally, and disproportionately influenced the Black poor and petty bourgeoisie. Before the creation of the UNIA, the primary carriers of these ideas were typically preachers and seamen. With the establishment of UNIA chapters throughout the Black diaspora, there came to be a greater mingling of ideas about Blackness, justice, and redemption. In Jamaica the romantic and secular versions of Ethiopianism found fertile ground, the latter tendency coming later than in the United States and possibly even South Africa. Much of this exchange of information took place as a result of sharing literature or outright organizing and proselytizing.

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