Black Judaism(s) and the Hebrew Israelites

Michael T. Miller

Friedrich-Alexander University Erlangen-Nürnberg

Correspondence
Email: michael.miller@nym.hush.com

Abstract
This article looks at the field of Black Judaism, with a view to understanding how scholars articulate the distinction between Black Judaism and the Hebrew Israelite movement. The Hebrew Israelites are an autonomous African American movement who identify themselves as descendants of the Israelites and some of whom self-identify as Jews, probably originating in the late 19th-century American South. Although scholars have been working on this area for three generations, there is still little agreement and yet the implications of whether and where lines are drawn are important to understand; they go to the heart of personal identities and investments.

1 | INTRODUCTION: THE CONTEMPORARY SITUATION

There is an emerging subfield within Jewish Studies, known as Black Judaism. However, even the name of this field might be contentious and confusing for some, particularly because it is often used with regard to a religious form, which some do not agree should be considered Judaism at all. Typology and description is still being debated by scholars. This article will attempt to unravel the positions and the historical findings and assumptions that underlie those.

To begin with, we will examine the term "Black Jews/Judaism." "Black Jews" can be used as an umbrella term indicating the subset of Jews who are of (sub-Saharan) African descent. It includes individuals and families who have converted into some denomination of Judaism; those who are descended from such converts; those born of inter-racial marriage; those of established African Jewish communities such as the Ethiopian Beta Israel or the Ugandan Abayudaya and their descendants elsewhere; the growing number of "emerging" Jewish groups in sub-Saharan Africa who do not have any established lineage of Judaism but pursue conversion or acceptance; and finally those Judaizing groups, African American in origin, who take some aspects of Jewish practice and identity (the cut-off may be around the time of rabbinic Judaism’s emergence or later, but it is very rarely earlier than the time of the Roman expulsion...
from Palestine) while not seeking incorporation into the main body of modern Judaism. These last are obviously limi-
tional even in their status as Black Jews; they often reject any identification with the modern Jewish community or
practice or at least are unwilling to undergo conversion, believing that would be a relinquishing and submission of
their own—allegedly longstanding—traditions and claim of identity to one that has no stronger such claim; sometimes
they perceive themselves or African Americans generally as the authentic descendants of the Israelites or Judeans,
while the people commonly known as Jews are seen as European interlopers who by some feat have become mistaken-
ly regarded as linearly related to the people of the Bible. These Judaizing groups most generally do not name
themselves Jews, but prefer to go by the name Hebrew Israelites, or one of a few other variations. There are several
factions among this broad movement, of varying ideologies and varying degrees of militancy in their outlook.

The central Hebrew Israelite claim is that (at least some) African Americans are descended from Israelites, who
were originally black. The specifics of this are that (some or all of) the Israelites migrated across Africa, including the
Judeans after the Roman expulsion, finding themselves on the West Coast (as well as those who travelled further
and became other African tribes such as the Ethiopian Beta Israel), where they were taken by European slave traders
as fulfilment of the biblical curse that the Israelites forgetting the law would precipitate a second iteration of Egyp-
tian slavery (Deut. 28, Key, 2014a). The contemporary return to the law (and identity) heralds a salvation from the
American bondage. This is as far as the Hebrew Israelite factions have in common; some are more politically militant,
drawing substantial influence from the Black Power movement and certain black separatist factions (even indulging
in anti-Semitic rhetoric about “white” Jews as European imposters who stole the, originally black African, Hebrew
identity), while some are far more amenable to rabbinic Judaism and have created an almost para-rabbinic structure,
which adopts many of the trappings of normative Judaism (although they always favour the Bible over the Talmud).
A useful typology has been created by Key (2014b), which divides the movement into the Pentecostal “Holiness Sects” of the early 20th century; the “Black Rabbinic” who adopt most of the normative Jewish practices while refus-
ing conversion or integration into normative Judaism; the “Torah-only Sects” who reject both rabbinic and New Tes-
tament texts; and the “Messianic Hebrews” who accept the messianic status of Jesus, while being essentially
Judaizing in practice (i.e., they emphasise the Hebraic nature of Jesus’ message and its particular or exclusive rele-
vance to Israelites).2

The most high profile of these groups is the African Hebrew Israelites of Jerusalem. The AHIJ stem from Chi-
cago’s A-Beta Hebrew Culture Center (an initiative intended to unify the various Hebrew Israelite/Black Jewish
groups in 1960s Chicago) as a breakaway group that in 1967 fled America, residing first in Liberia and then Israel
since 1969. They have been based in Dimona ever since, although they live all around Israel, where they now num-
ber ~4,000, with satellite communities all around the globe (notably in the United States, the Caribbean, the United
Kingdom, Ghana, and Kenya). Their first decades were marked by tensions with the state, but now, they have all
been granted either citizenship or permanent residency and appear to be a liked and respected, and increasingly inte-
grated, element of Israeli society (Hare, 1998; Jackson, 2013; Könighofer, 2008; Markowitz, 2005).3

There is frequent transition between the general Hebrew Israelite membership in America and (normative) black
Jews. Currently, it appears more common that individuals “discover” their Hebrew identity through one of the
Hebrew Israelite groups, particularly those involved in aggressive street preaching, and later convert to normative
rabbinic Judaism. The most notable case is perhaps Rabbi Capers Funnye, Rabbi of Beth Shalom B’nai Zaken Ethiop-
ian Hebrew Congregation of Chicago, and Chief Rabbi of the International Board of Israelite Rabbis, who converted
to Orthodox Judaism in 1985, while maintaining his existing Hebrew Israelite position. There is also a community in
Rusape, Zimbabwe, who embraced first the teachings of one of the earliest proto-Hebrew Israelites, William Crowdy
(founder of the Church of God and Saints of Christ in Kansas, 1896), but, unlike other African congregations, have
gradually shifted their practice towards a more normative form of Judaism. They have not formally converted, but
they maintain that they are Jews and are descended spiritually if not genetically from the Israelites (Schwartz, 2015).
Further complicating matters, the AHIJ partake in extensive global outreach, especially in Africa; in Ghana, they have
a base in the Wiawso region, and some members of the Sefwi Jewish community have transferred their allegiance to
the AHIJ.4
However, the Hebrew Israelite movement has often included members who are part Jewish (halakhically or not) but who did not feel at home, or included, within the normative Jewish community. There is also a growing liminal status for many of the para-rabbinic groups whose attempts to be recognised as Jews, without undergoing conversion, are accepted by some.⁵

There are no available figures for Hebrew Israelite affiliation, but estimates for black Jews in America, whether inside or outside rabbinic Judaism, range from 40,000 to half a million.⁶

2 | HISTORICAL DESCRIPTION OF HEBREW ISRAELISM AND SCHOLARSHIP

During the 20th century, these apparently spontaneous, self-organised African American synagogues such as the Moorish Zionist Temple and the Commandment Keepers (both of Harlem), which styled themselves as authentically Jewish congregations, complete with rabbis and Torah scrolls, became noticed by the Jewish community. Following newspaper reports, scholarly investigation began in the 1960s with Howard Brotz (1964) and Ruth Landes (1967). Scholars overwhelmingly passed the verdict that these “Black Jews” were not historically descended from Jews but were rather groups ultimately descended from African American Christians, who found a mirror of their experiences during slavery and segregation, and a new sense of identity to replace that lost in the Middle Passage, in the narratives of Egyptian and Babylonian bondage, interment, and liberation. This has not been an overwhelmingly positive assessment. Landes (1967) talks of the “garbled pretence of the Black Jews” who, “bewildered and frightened” by their experience of the city after the Great Migration, stampeded into an impromptu Judaizing, which made some sense to them at the time (pp. 177–178). Other early scholars veered between a patronising judgement that the movement was principally an attempt to mimic modern Jewry because of their associations and social capital and that there was a conscious deception in order to appropriate Judaic history and identity.⁷

It is James Landing’s Black Judaism (2002) that is the current go-to text. Landing traces the movement back to the late 19th-century Southern United States and provides extensive documentation of congregations and individuals both pivotal and tertiary to the movement (in fact movement may be the wrong word; there is very little unity, although certain motifs persist over the many decades). While Landing is critical of trends in previous scholarship, he does not diverge substantially from their conclusions.

At the outset, Landing creates an oft-quoted typology, articulating two different categories: While the many individuals and communities of African descent who are part of the main body of normative Judaism can be identified as “black Jews” and as a unit, we can identify this trend and community as “black Judaism,” “Black Judaism” (note the capitalisation) stands apart as a distinct religious movement alongside (White or Normative) Judaism. As such, Black Judaism has no necessary ceremonial or doctrinal relationship to Normative Judaism, although it will inevitably share many common features. He writes:

Black Judaism is ... a form of institutionalized (congregational) religious expression in which black persons identify themselves as Jews, Israelites, or Hebrews (sometimes as Hebrew-Israelites) in a manner that seems unacceptable to the “whites” of the world’s Jewish community, primarily because Jews take issue with the various justifications set forth by Black Jews in establishing this identity. Thus, “Black Judaism,” as defined here, stands distinctly apart from “black Judaism,” or that Judaic expression found among black persons that would be acceptable to the world’s Jewish community, such as conversion or birth to a recognized Jewish mother. “Black Judaism” has been a social movement; “black Judaism” has been an isolated social phenomenon. Thus, “Black Judaism” will be seen to be more emphatically a black expression than a Jewish one. (2002, p. 10)
While Landing is critical of the tendency, especially of Jewish scholars, to perceive Black Judaism as a compliment towards the Jewish community’s very desirable model for minority living, he still shares with the large majority of scholars the conclusion that “Black Judaism” is in fact not descended from Judaism but is rather a specifically African American response to slavery and segregation. The appropriation of biblical Israelite identity via the sympathetic resonance of slavery narratives—named “Symbolic Identity Formation” by Merrill Charles Singer (2000)—which, in the melting pot of new migrants to the northern U.S. regions such as New York and Chicago (the first time that many of these Black Jews had encountered actual Jews) in the second decade of the 20th century, took on in some cases a growing proximity to rabbinic Judaism. Thus, Landing’s conclusion is only the most detailed iteration of a conclusion reached by scholars since the 1960s: Black (Hebrew Israelite) Jews are not Jews but black Christians who have de-emphasised the New Testament and found a lost identity in the symbolic identification with Israel.

Published less than 20 years ago, Landing’s is still the predominant text, and its conclusions regarding the formative early years of the Hebrew Israelite movement have not been challenged. Indeed, the most recent major work, carried out by Jacob Dorman, has served only to fill in the gaps and add nuance by showing that most of the early preachers were bricoleurs who combined many elements that were available to them from the America they inhabited and which led to the particular narratives and theology that still typify the movement today. Two of these, which combined to potent effect, were the existing fascination with the Israelites and the fact that all of the earliest preachers were committed Freemasons, which may have served as an entry point for “British Israelite” ideas to establish themselves. As he puts it,

Black Israelites are African Americans who practice religions based on Judaism or the belief that they are descended from the Lost Tribes of Israel. [...] black Israelite movements span a range of religions from Holiness Christianity to Orthodox Judaism and have appeared from the 1890s to the present. Black Israelite movements did not begin with conversion to Judaism, and the movements are not derivative of Jews or Judaism. Rather, black Israelite movements creatively manipulate traditions and ideas gleaned from a wide range of sources: Holiness/Pentecostal Christianity, the British Anglo-Israelite movement, Freemasonry, Mind Power, Theosophy, Judaism, the occult, and African American Christianity’s deep association with the ancient Hebrews of the Old Testament. (2006, p. 59)

However, where Dorman has diverged from Landing is in his terminology. Rejecting Landing’s “Black Judaism” for “Black Israelite,” he argues, “the term ‘Black Judaism’ obscures the fact that Judaic religions are only one of several strains of what are more properly thought of as ‘Black Israelite’ religions” (2013, p. 4). Dorman points to the fact that there are many diverse religious forms that express the idea that Black Africans are the descendants of the Israelites; some of these are closest to forms of Christianity, some to forms of Judaism, and some even to forms of Islam (he identifies the roots of the Nation of Islam as ultimately Black Israelite), while they all often share other characteristics with each other based upon their common heritage in particular preachers and congregations of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. And because of their bricoleur nature, “These faiths are better thought of as ever-evolving, kinetic polycultural assemblages than reified, bounded ‘isms’” (2013, p. 4).

Hence, we might conclude that Hebrew Israelism is not any kind of Judaism, but—as Landing asserted—rather is more dependent upon the developments within African American religious thought; it is a unique kind of mosaic constructed from various influences, only one of which is Judaism or Israelite identity. The Hebrew Israelites may emphasise their identity as descendants of the Israelites, but this is not the single foundation of their movement, historically or currently. Supporting but complicating this, we can recognise that there has been a persistent trend of increasing Judaization among some, but not all, groups: They have, over generations, shifted from an attempted replication of the apostolic church into an impromptu Old Testamentism into post-biblical Jewish rites, including ordaining their leaders as rabbis, use of the Talmud and even Yiddish language, and finally some individuals and
groups have undergone conversion into normative Judaism. In this, as in some other aspects, they are not entirely unlike the case of the Russian Subbotnik Judaizing communities (on whom see Chernin, 2007).

It certainly seems correct from the narratives of William Crowdy, William Christian, and other early preachers that they were indeed Christians first, their own background and interests being those of the Church, even if the “true church” they were called to establish was one modelled more on biblical Judaism.

However, the field of Black Judaism has progressed in other ways in the last two decades. Lewis Gordon has established the Center for Afro-Jewish Studies at Temple University, and several dissertations, monographs, and edited volumes have explored in detail black and African Jews and Judaisms in their many forms. Most importantly though, a new generation of scholars—some of whom are themselves Hebrew Israelites—have presented a different narrative that incorporates a deep (and slightly revisionist) understanding of Jewish history. These include Andre E. Key and Walter Isaac, both graduates of Lewis Gordon’s Center.

The descriptions given by Landing and others have faced scrutiny from these scholars. Firstly, as Andre E. Key (2014b) has pointed out, the terminology of either Black or black Judaism implies that normative, unqualified Judaism is inherently non-black and that any Judaism practised by blacks is an aberration to some degree or another. Notwithstanding that there is a significant portion, even within the United States, of members of the normative Jewish community who identify as black, on top of the large Mizrahi and Sephardic Jewish population, the ascription of “whiteness” even to those (Ashkenazi) Jews who would more often be coded as white is a matter of debate (in fact, it is only when discussing “black Jews” that researchers are completely comfortable using the term “white Jews”; there is more to be said about this fact alone than could fit into this article). The fact that many Hebrew Israelites do not describe themselves as Jews, preferring to assert their continuity with the people of the Bible over the people of the Talmud, also contributes to Key’s rejection of “Black Jews” and “Black Judaism” as designating the Hebrew Israelites in distinction to normative Judaism.

In this regard, we should also note that the racial demographics of the Jewish world are currently shifting, as both individuals and entire communities around the world are emerging who wish to be included within—or claim they are descended from—the umbrella of normative Judaism, including several African groups from South Africa to Nigeria. William Miles has predicted that the declining rate of practice of the traditional Jewish population could easily see the centre of gravity shifting quite soon towards the emerging Jewish communities of African origin:

As Western Jews continue to secularize their lifestyles and belief systems, the increasing adoption of it by committed practitioners of it in the Global South (including Africa) will parallel the transformation of Christianity. (2016, p. 9)

But equally, the common historical narrative given above has faced critique. Recently, Walter Isaac (2006)—a Hebrew Israelite and rabbi—has argued that all too often in scholarship, “Dismissals of Jewish blackness have revealed the white supremacist thinking that often underlay self-assertion of Jewish identity” (p. 512). Isaac asserts that the endeavour to find proof of historical lineage for self-defining black “Jewish” communities is a racist one if not applied equally to “white” Jewish communities and individuals; yet the ultimate authority of the rabbinic establishment is one not recognised by most Hebrew Israelites, any more than their own organisations are recognised by normative Jews, and if we are looking for “proof” of historical lineage, then that of white Jewish communities is no more achievable than that of African Americans. Consequently, Isaac argues for the inclusion of Hebrew Israelite groups into the umbrella form Judaism, alongside the rabbinic form. For Isaac, Landing’s distinction between normative black Jews and Black Judaism is a false one, for as he sees it, they are two sides of a single phenomenon, which scholars have sought to cast into legitimate and illegitimate camps. Thus, they are both essentially part of Judaism, rather than Black Judaism being an irreverent or militant form of (white) Judaism. Contrary to Key, Isaac wishes to apply the word Judaism to Hebrew Israelism but to include all the forms equally within it.

Isaac suggests a variety of possible descent histories for Black Jews in America. These include conversion by Jewish slave owners, intermarriage, and African Jewish communities such as those among the Nigerian Igbo (Igbos
were indeed among those taken to America and so plausibly some Jewish Igbos\textsuperscript{12}). Pointing to the Talmudic principle that upon manumission, slaves become fully Jews, Isaac (2006) argues that those slaves held by Jews were as Jewish as those slaves held by Christians were Christian, and "upon the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment, a black Jewish community was created in the United States" (p. 526). Even the possibility of this has been ignored by previous researchers, the Christianity of all slaves and their descendants being assumed without question; in fact, they are usually seen as no less essentially Christian than were white Americans. And indeed, historical documents testify to the (growing) existence of mulatto Jews around South America and the Caribbean, most remarkably in the 18th-century Surinam where they were a part of the Sephardic community (with mixed reception; there was a mixed-race Jewish congregation there for 34 years until it was forcibly closed in 1793: Dorman, 2013, p. 62).

However, the weight of scholarly opinion holds that those North American Jews who held slaves routinely did not indoctrinate their slaves into their religion.\textsuperscript{13} There has also been no further evidence forthcoming for the existence of any self-identifying black Jewish groups (and only a handful of individuals) until the emergence of the earliest preachers mentioned by Landing at the end of the 19th century, all of whom appear to proclaim, at most, hybrid forms of Christian–Jewish practice, which are most easily explained by the model of Christian groups adopting some aspects of Jewish (or even simply Old Testament) practice, all with Christ still in prominent position. This is to say that, despite the large number of self-organised black churches, there appear to have been no black synagogues in North America either before or after the emancipation, until their emergence in New York in the 20th century. However, as the majority of black Jewish communities sprang up in the period following the Great Migration of blacks from the Southern to the Northern United States, it is not impossible that this movement brought with it internal traditions, rather than forming black "appropriations" of Judaism, and we may suspect that the apparent absence of black Jewish communities means that emancipated black Jewish individuals and families were ultimately absorbed into broader black Christianity, their influence only to later emerge as the hybrid forms that drew upon both traditions.

If we take the case of the Caribbean, it is acknowledged that a large proportion of the migrants to urban New York in the early 20th century who helped create the black Jewish congregations mentioned above were from the Caribbean, particularly Jamaica, and that there was an extensive Jewish influence on the black Caribbean population that is not disputed, Landing noting that in 1911, "a Jewish rabbi, probably from Cleveland, Ohio, reported that the Jewish population in Jamaica was in serious decline due to intermarriage with blacks and that many blacks in Jamaica had Jewish names and were proud of their Jewish heritage" (2002, p. 120). (Although the rabbi in question could be forgiven his prejudices that the offspring were not in fact Jews, one wonders why Landing does not include this historical assertion in his own assessment of the status of modern Black Jews.) Dorman (2013) has also detailed extensive coupling of black and Jew across the Caribbean, although concluding that "Blacks and Jews mixed in a variety of ways on the islands, but white Jews live on in the ancestry and the language of only a small number of African-descended people in the Caribbean" (p. 63).

It is easy to imagine, then, the trajectory from a Caribbean interracial black Jewish minority in a Christian society to a Jewish–Christian hybrid, which disavowed many of the trappings of European Christianity (irreparably associated with slavery) and sought fulfilment in the more "authentic" earlier form (especially given the more communal redemption-oriented God of the Hebrew scriptures), a hybrid that considered itself Israelite while acknowledging also the highly relatable character of Jesus and the personal teachings found in the New Testament. The migrants then commingled with those from the south who were followers of Crowdy et al.’s brands of Jewish–Christian "Israelite" worship and the new congregations emerged.\textsuperscript{14}

3 | CONCLUSION

While many Hebrew Israelites feel that they deserve to be accepted as at least Jews (if not the Jews) by the establishment, many in the Jewish community feel that Hebrew Israelism is an appropriation of Jewish history and identity
by people who would be accepted if they would only convert like anyone else. Hebrew Israelites see this as gatekeeping and an unacceptable enforcing of whiteness as the normative Jewish identity, if not an expression of white supremacy. There is clearly plenty of space for tension here given the fraught pull of modern political and racial discourse, which exerts pressure in many directions. It should also be noted that many normative black Jews are unhappy with both the increasing assertiveness of Hebrew Israelites who claim to represent Black Jewry or Judaism and with the acceptance of this as such by some sections of the Jewish establishment.15

It is here that one important caveat should be noted: The historical origins of Hebrew Israelism as a movement are distinct from many of the individuals who have entered the movement. That is to say, many, likely most, did not come from self-consciously Israelite or black Jewish backgrounds (though a fair proportion did) but adhered to such groups for the same reason that any individual joins a spiritual community: It offered fulfilment that they did not find elsewhere, including in other forms of Judaism.

The issues here are quite unique, because Judaism traditionally is not something one can self-identify into; status has to be proved by heritage or conferred by an existing Jewish authority. This makes the situation quite different from other religions Abrahamic and beyond, for which either practice or belief are the sufficient criteria upon which anyone may be accepted—at least as a broadly conceived Christian or Muslim.

In part, the problem may be that who decides the criteria for Jewishness is determined according to assumed criteria, and thus, the circular nature is irresolvable. While Jewish authorities have generally been willing to accept anyone who wished to undergo conversion, most Hebrew Israelites perceive conversion as relinquishing their own narrative in favour of the whitewashed version or worse, the submission of authentic Israelites to European Gentile norms. It is difficult to imagine a resolution to this that would satisfy all involved—especially when, uniquely, Jewish identity currently confers certain citizenship privileges that no other religious affiliation does.

The problem for scholars is, how do we locate groups that self-identify and practice the rites of Judaism, without sanction from Jewish authorities? Should we accept the Jewish norms for establishing identity, or should we follow the rule of self-perception? To some extent, the lead of anthropologists can be followed, and the principal of self-definition can override questions of objective truths, so we might take a deflationary approach such that there is no such thing as ontological Jewishness and “what a group thinks about itself is at least as important as what outsiders think about it” (Parfitt, 1987, p. 3). However, this will certainly not satisfy scholars of all disciplines, many of whom are precisely involved in the discovery of objective historical truth.

The debates involved in this issue are critical and growing; both what Landing identified as black, and as Black, Judaism are increasing social phenomena, and questions of race are ones that can and should no longer be ignored; but it is crucial to also recognise the very personal nature of these ideas and the fact that in drawing boundaries we as scholars are delving into the deepest sense of identity of many individuals.

It could be that in the future, a broadening of the term “Judaism” is appropriate.16 While Christianity and Islam are broad movements that include many antagonistic and willfully exclusive groups, to the outsider, the resemblance is clear. If “Judaism” is broadened so that the currently majoritarian form, rabbinic Judaism, is seen as just one variant, then the way is clearer to admit that other groups such as Hebrew Israelites of various kinds, Lemba, Igbo, and Beta Israel, are all variants along with more established forms such as the Karaites and perhaps Samaritans; many of these groups do not accept the others, but all of them have much in common even if they found their way to this similarity by diverse paths.

ENDNOTES
1 For the purposes of this essay, I will use the term African as indicating sub-Saharan Africa and African diaspora as meaning Afro-Caribbean; Mizrahi Jews are therefore not included within this category.
2 For general information, see www.blackjews.com.
3 An excellent source of information is Andrew Esensten’s website http://andrewesensten.net/ahij/, as well as their own http://africanhebrewisraelitesofjerusalem.com/.

4 In particular, the founder of the Sefwi Jews, now a Hebrew Israelite, tells with frustration how, once their initial enquiries to the Ghana internal ministry regarding other lost tribes were passed on to the Ivory Coast Israeli embassy and reached Tiferet Israel in Iowa, curious Americans started arriving and trying to indoctrinate the group into modern Judaism (Devir, 2017, pp. 56–59).

5 Faltering attempts have been made to improve relations over the last six decades. Fernheimer (2014) recounts the first attempt at mediation in Chicago in the 1960s, and its failure, but see Rinn (1995) for more recent attempts.

6 Extrapolated from the Pew Survey (2013) and blackjews.com, respectively. Tighey, Saxe, de Kramer, and Parmer (2013) estimated 70,000 black Jewish adults.


8 This definition was divided into "allegory" and "identification" theses by Isaac (2006), the latter of which is a deliberate falsification in order to gain the self-worth and social benefits conferred by whiteness, wherein white Jewishness is selected as the easiest entry point.

9 Dorman finds three distinct generations: the pioneer generation of Southern preachers from 1890 to 1916; a second generation from 1920 to 1930, which blossomed in the urban metropolises of the North and incorporated more modern Jewish elements; and a third generation from 1960 to 1980 of militant, black nationalist groups. "At the heart of all black Israelite faiths was a radical reimagining of the black past, present, and future. It has been a religious antiracist counterdiscourse that places people of African descent at the very heart of history and civilization as God's chosen people with a unique racial mission to prepare the earth for the coming of the millennium" (2013, p. 80).

10 The 2013 Pew Report found that 2% of self-identifying Jews also self-identify as black and Tighey et al. (2013) 1.7%.

11 This is a complex and shifting debate, which is particularly potent at the present time, to do with the nature of "whiteness." For many, this is not a phenotypical category describing skin colour but a social hierarchical category denoting the racial and cultural ruling class; many point out that even though some Jews look white, they would not be admitted within the ranks of any white nationalist organisation and face prejudice from almost all such. For the historical background, see, for example, Brodkin (1994). It is also worth recognising that the question "Are Jews white?" itself underscores an assumption of a certain kind of, European, Jewishness as normative.

12 At this point, it is unclear whether the Igbo actually have any Israelite or Jewish ancestry; their claim was rejected by the Israeli Rabbinate in 1994, and the history is uncertain. Only in the late 20th century did sustained claims appear; Lis, Miles William, and Parfitt (2016) point to "an interplay among Igbo voices, which shaped the concepts of what being Igbo means, non-Igbo voices who conversed about this relationship, and Jewish sources who validated or devaluated Igbo claims of Jewish identity." (p. 72) Olauda Equiano, the freed slave who wrote in London about similarities between Igbo and Israelite culture, without ever asserting an actual connection, was perhaps one influencer of Igbo–Hebrew ideas. However, it must be remembered that some African groups do have established Jewish links, so conclusive rejection should not be made on the basis of absence of evidence. Recent research suggests that some African tribes who assert Israelite ancestry may actually derive in part from Sephardic groups who fled Spain and Portugal in the 15th century and migrated southwards, often having to conceal their Jewish identities (Levi, 2016), although this is far from clear at this point (Devir, 2017, p. 67).

13 See, for example, Korn (1961) who states that the near-blanket exclusion of blacks, free or not, from synagogues of the time precludes any suspicion that Jewish slaveowners ever converted their slaves. This logic is not watertight and does not preclude a general indoctrination of those growing up in the household, without including them in the congregational practice. In fact, Isaac argues that the need for such an explicit exclusion demonstrates that there were black Jews, somehow, who would otherwise have attempted to join.

14 Ironically, a generation later, the debt would be repaid when Hebrew Israelites settled in Jamaica and helped to produce Rastafarianism, perhaps the most famous of what Dorman labels "Black Israelite" religions.

15 MaNishtana—an African American Orthodox rabbi, blogger, and writer—argues strongly for the distinction between Hebrew Israelites and black Jews; because "no sect of it has ever been started by anyone actually Jewish" and does not require or attempt conversion to Judaism, MaNishtana (2013) argues that Hebrew Israelites are their own religious form separate from any kind of Judaism (pp. 45–54). MaNishtana sees Hebrew Israelism as the Jewish equivalent of the Nation of Islam—at most a para-Judaism, which gains much media attention, while there is a long authentic black Judaism woefully underrepresented and under respected by normative white Judaism.

16 As discussed here: http://www.blackjews.org/dimona-seeks-new-image-and-better-relations/.
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Dr Michael T. Miller works in Jewish studies, specialising in Jewish mysticism and philosophy, and Black Judaism. His monograph, *The Name of God in Jewish Thought* (Routledge 2016), offers a philosophical/theological examination of Jewish mystical traditions regarding the relationship of naming to identity, incorporating apocalyptic, rabbinic, and kabbalistic texts analysed through the lens of thinkers such as Rosenzweig, Benjamin, and Levinas. His other research outputs have been in journals such as *Journal for the Study of Judaism*, *Medieval Mystical Theology*, and *Film-Philosophy*. He has taught in Jewish studies and philosophy at Liverpool Hope University since 2016 and is currently a research fellow at FAU Erlangen-Nürnberg on a project looking at prophecy in Medieval kabbalistic sources, as well as pursuing research into Black Jewish theology, in particular the African Hebrew Israelite community.

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