

Religious Cults of Liberation: An Analysis of the Nation of Islam and
the Ras Tafarian Movements.

By

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Synopsis

The emergence of Black religious cults like the Nation of Islam in the United States and the Ras Tafari in Jamaica, derives from the comparatively meagre participation of the Black population of these countries in other institutions of society. This paper outlines the themes for understanding the emergence of these 'cults of liberation.' It is an examination and analysis of the desperate situations of lower class Blacks in urban areas. Religion is seen as offering a sense of group solidarity in situations of uncertainty and extreme privation; providing an 'identity' in opposition to the 'Negro' image, and overall, as performing a 'revitalizing' role in situations of subjection and denigration. The cults of liberation aim at turning the sense of disadvantage, which arose from submission to dominant societal values and deprivation from material, cultural and moral advancement of Black people, into one of advantages.

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Introduction

In the United States and Jamaica the population of African descent have suffered centuries of oppression on the basis of their 'racial'¹ origin. The wider societies within which these people of African descent (Black Americans and Black Jamaicans) live, have imposed classifications and definitions upon them which exclude them from meaningful participation in the established social, economic and political system. Traditionally, oppressed communities upon whom wider society has imposed undesirable classifications and definitions, (to exclude them from mainstream cultural appropriation) have created sub-cultures to evade the alien environment of wider society, and subvert their imposed identity. In certain crisis situations however, the need to evade the dominant perspective and to formulate an alternative self-definition becomes increasingly urgent: the oppressed communities have urgent need to effect the required inversion, evasion and subversion of society's imposed dominant classifications. Among the oppressed, this need has frequently been met by the development of religious cults of liberation which helped to explain the meaning of their positions in society and which provide them with alternative self-definitions.²

³

1. Despite many attempts by biologists and social scientists to define it, 'race' has remained a nebulous term. None of the known definitions is appropriate to apply to the American or Jamaican Blacks; for they are at once African and Anglo-Saxon, Indian, and French, Portuguese, Spanish, German and Italian - a composite of every major 'racial stock' and every Nationality of Western Europe and West Africa. The concept of race is understood here as a socially defined sub-section of population more or less distinct from the rest of the population by virtue of certain real or putative physical and cultural differences. What makes a racial distinction is not the presence of these differences between groups but the allocation of social significance to such differences.
2. The term 'cult' is defined here as a group of people unrelated to any other religious institutions and tied together by common religious emotions and needs. The 'cult' is characteristically organised around a leader or leaders in whom are centered the loyalties of rank and file, and is confined to specific groups or areas. (J. Milton, Yinger, (1957), p.155.
3. See Vittorio Lanternari, (1963).

The aim of this paper is to provide examples of where the birth of religious cults of liberation have emerged among sections of oppressed population, to demonstrate that the birth of religious movements can only be understood by examining present concrete secular conditions, the historical experiences, prevailing value orientation of the society and the traditional and existing ideological patterns of subject peoples in their striving to become emancipated.

The task here is to analyse the Nation of Islam cult in the United States and the Ras Tafari cult in Kingston, Jamaica. Both movements burgeoned into being in the economic crisis of the Great Depression, and the followers of both cults are exclusively black in societies where blackness is 'denigrated'. These two movements are examples of what I have termed as religious cults of liberation. Both envisage a collective flight from a cruel reality, of a considerable portion of the social population, to some new (real or imagined) promise land, and both cults are built around the idea of a 'messiah' who has come to deliver the faithful from their captivity in the 'Babylon'.

The object here is to show that the conditions of life for the Black population in these societies have prepared the ground for the emergence of cults of liberation, as well as the content of their religious doctrines. The exigencies to be found at the root of the Nation of Islam and Ras Tafari religious manifestations are rooted to the oppression that people of African descent have suffered for centuries, and the plight they find themselves in today. The main

content of the religious doctrines of these cults of liberation is the glorification of blackness. This is so mainly because in America and Jamaica, the Black man finds that he is identified primarily as a Black and he is excluded because he is black before anything else. Under the circumstances of racialism confronting him, the Black man will seek to glorify that from which he cannot escape. The corollary to the glorification of blackness is the inversion of the dominant White values - the deprecation of whiteness, Western culture and traditional Christianity.

The demonstration of the close link between religious life and the secular, political and cultural, is an attempt to stress that when a people strive to seek salvation from everyday oppression, their efforts are often the combination of existing ideology and values of society, with traditional forms and myths, showing that ideas are strongly influenced by culture, ideology and the concrete secular conditions. The myth of Africa which the Black people of the New World inherited, largely from an oral tradition, and the Biblical tradition in which the illiterate slaves have been heavily steeped, are echoed in the doctrines and ideologies of the Black religious cults of liberation. In addition, the values of the secular societies from which the religious cults have emerged, are reflected in the Eschaton (final goals): the ends envisioned in their search for salvation from their painful situation are humanistic rather than theological. Their notions of judgement, 'last things', are not linked to conceptions of an after-life. This humanistic eschatology

is an expectation of a world in which man will be fully integrated and free from oppression, rather than a Kingdom of God after death. It is further observed that in the 'crisis' situation of the oppressed, the 'messiah', 'prophet' or leader is he who raises his voice against the conditions to which the local population are subjected; has a 'relevant' message to convey to the oppressed and who can offer a common hope and promise for a better future, inclusive and vivid for all who find their circumstances painful and unacceptable. The success of leaders or prophets to gain a following of significant size, as in the cases of the Nation of Islam and the Ras Tafarians, depends upon their ability to forge links between the traditional culture and ideas with new liberating ideas and values.

Generally, it is claimed here that religion can be seen as providing ways in which the oppressed can avoid the painful situation of concrete secular life; accept some aspect of life as the situation before the millenium, whilst at the same time religion provides a new form of identity and solidarity function. The emergence of Black religious cults can be understood in part as a device of escape from conditions relating to the implications of being black in situations where whiteness is the most highly valued skin colour. It aims to show that the movements began with people who participated in a common hope for a better future in situations of economic, political, cultural and ethical deprivation.

This paper does not attempt to justify religion in a functionalist approach, the account here is from a structuralist perspective, in the sense that the structuralist defines a religion by recognizing that a certain behaviour is religious in terms of the existence of certain fundamental pattern or structure which is recognised as religious, despite the diversity of its forms. The structuralist is then concerned with describing the structural link of religion to secular, traditional and ideological institutions.

The task here is to underscore the social, political and economic conditions implicit in the cry for freedom of oppressed peoples. It remains to be said that while this paper aims to point out that the call to freedom and liberation has risen from the mouths of 'prophets' and peoples in the form of religions of the faithful because of the cultural dignity the oppressed seek and because they demand a relief from their oppression, it does not attempt to formulate the terms in which the answers must be couched.

1. For the defining characteristics of religion I have relied on Anthony C. Wallace(1966). According to Wallace the minimal characteristics include prayer, music, physiological exercise, exhortation, reciting the code, simulation, mana, taboo, feasts sacrifice, congregation and symbolism. All of which, in greater or lesser degree are present in both the Nation of Islam and the Rastafarian cults.

Chapter 1Theoretical Considerations

In any discussions of the socio-cultural functions of religion, the names of two scholars, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber must inevitably be introduced. For both, the religious institutions of a society represent, and elicit, acceptance of core values of society, the internalization of which by members of the society makes possible for the adequate integration of that society's various institutions. Max Weber discovered in the Protestant Ethic, a new value system which was uniquely suited to the development of capitalism in post-Renaissance Europe, demonstrating that the special capitalistic ethic could be derived from the more general Protestant ethic.¹ Durkheim in his search for the origins of religion, suggested that the true object of religious veneration was not a God but a society itself and that the function of religion was to inculcate those sentiments necessary to society's survival.²

Religion, it has been observed has not been merely to support and inculcate values, but can also be a device for resolving conflicts, or at least a means of providing the relief of tensions generated by a society's structural contradictions. These structural contradictions throw ordinary individuals in the course of their ordinary lives, into continual uncertainty and anxiety, which make it necessary for them to provide or devise some means to relieve the uncertainty and anxiety,

1. Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.
2. Emile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life.

for example, conflict and tension could arise when mutually contradictory cognitions are experienced (which include perceptions, knowledge, motives, values, and hopes). In such situations individuals act to reduce the dissonance. Theoretically, an individual can reduce the tension either by changing the data input (carried out by modifying the real world) or he may achieve relief from dissonance by modifying both his perceptions of self and of the real world until the dissonance is removed. This attempt to modify experience, that is to shape it into 'suitable' cognitives may be part of the function of religion. Religion is seen here as a 'rationalizer' for contradictions of expectation and experience which cause conflict and tension for the individual.¹ This explanation relies upon the classic psycho-analytical view of Freud on religious myths and rituals, which claims that the stable and institutional forms of religious behaviour were often the need to hold in balance the conflicting emotional forces. For Freud,² religious doctrines, myths and rituals are inherited symptoms formations, (Freud was not entirely clear as to whether the inheritance was biogenetic or cultural or both) expressing in symbolic form, a neurotic compromise between oedipal wishes and super ego commands; and that the fantastic presentations, denials, displacements, reaction formations and other defensive manoeuvres institutionalised by religion are necessary but painful discipline imposed on an immature ego control of sexual and aggressive instincts. This view is clearly influenced by evolutionary theories. According to these theories religious beliefs are generally primitive or pre-scientific efforts to explain and predict natural events--

1. Festinger (1957). Also Festinger, Reicken and Schachter (1956).
2. Freud (1924, 1949, 1952, 1955)

the problem is an intellectual one and religion is seen as providing a rational solution. The assumption is that in situations of cognitive discomfort or dissonance, man generates a formula which yields a satisfying sense of understanding. The emphasis here is in the fact that religious beliefs are cognitive products and the function of religion is evaluated in this context.

Many anthropologists have been rather critical of Freud's publications on religion. Some have developed and modified in a measure the original argument. Kardiner and Linton¹ developed the concept of religion as a projective system, that is, religion is seen as a system of beliefs and rituals which 'ventilates' and resolves those tensions of the typical individual that his society, by its child rearing practices, has built into him during the process of acculturation. Jung² and his followers³ see religion as therapeutic, in that it is viewed as a kind of cultural patching 'plaster'. Religion is seen as a culturally manufactured product which at once integrates the personality and unites the individual with society and its traditional values. Religious behaviour is regarded as instrumental in the striving for the personality to grow mature and achieve integration. The 'self' was in general divided between the person or mask which was presented to the world and the ego and the anima, or real and often unconscious personality. In the normal course of development the two aspects would fuse, and maturation would occur by the synthesis of opposing forces which was the proper course of growth.

1. Kardiner and Linton (1939, 1945).
2. Carl Gustav Jung (1938).
3. See for example Paul Radin (1956).

But by reasons of various vicissitudes, (which cause fixations) in many cases the resolution did not occur, in such situations religion provides a stock of symbolic models in terms of myths and rituals for the synthesis of opposing complexes in the psychic life. Religion in this context is a mechanism by which men transcend the limitations imposed by infantile fixations. Jung saw in myth and ritual positive models of maturation and spiritual renewal.¹

It is in the latter aspect - 'spiritual renewal' or 'revitalization' that the attention of sociologists have been drawn. Psychologists using the 'revitalizing theory as shown, recognise the integrative power of religious experience on the personality. Sociologists see the significance of 'revitalization' as a process of any conscious effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture. As such, the concept of revitalization is central in analyses of the development of new religious sects or cults, suggesting that religious beliefs and practice originate in situations of cultural stress and are in fact efforts on the part of the stress laden and tension bearer to construct systems of dogma, myth and ritual which are internally coherent as well as fitting description of a world system. Interesting contributions along this line have been made by Mead,² Schwartz,³ Voget,⁴ and descriptions of such movements have also appeared in a number of compendiums which provide descriptions of various Cargo cults,⁵ messiahs,⁶ millenarian movements⁷ and nativistic movements⁸ around the world.

1. The Winnebago Trickster by Paul Radin, (1956) has been analysed from this point of view.
2. M. Mead, (1956).
3. T. Schwartz, (1957)
4. F. Voget, (1956).
5. P. Worsley, (1957).
6. W.D. Wallis, (1943).
7. S. Thrupp, (ed.), (1962).
8. V. Lanternari, (1963).

The 'revitalizing' theory of religion in sociology recognises the integrative power of religious experience for the disraught and disillusioned individual in search for salvation; and the spritual renewal religion offers to the disprivileged and discriminated. In this paper the 'revitalizing' function is recognised, with the view that religion and religious productions such as myths and rituals, come into existence as parts of the programme or code of revitalizing movements, with the aim of showing that religious cults can be explained in terms of the social situation. They are observed as emanating in situations of social and cultural stress and are explained as both conscious and unconscious efforts of the deprived and discriminated against, to construct systems of dogma, myths and rituals which serve as guides to action in their situations.

The concept of deprivation is in fact central to an explanation for the rise of new cults or sects.¹ Richard Niebuhr² had emphasised that the emergence of religious sects is not to be understood merely as expressions of religious dissent; but the emergence of religious sects should be seen in the context of social unrest in the secular realm - what appears to be the theological is an underlying social protest. According to Niebuhr, incipient protest is channeled within the religious framework because of existing social and traditional links. Although Niebuhr was concerned with sects, which are religious groups which have split off from the established Church form, for example, the Pentecostal movement or the group known as Disciples of Christ, some of his observations are applicable

1. Even the Apostles were aware of this special feature of their movement: St. Paul wrote to his converts, "Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth." I Cor. 1:26 (RSV).
2. Niebuhr (1929).

to cults such as the Nation of Islam and the Ras Tafari movement. The cult like the sect provides a channel through which the members are able to transcend their feelings of deprivation by replacing them with feelings of religious privileges; in that, cult members like sect members cease to compare themselves to others in terms of their relatively lower economic positions, instead the comparison is made in terms of their new 'superior' religious status. The puritanical ethic built into the cult and sect ideology helps to elevate cult and sect members to new status positions.

Like Niebuhr's study, current discussions about the origin and development of religious groups have explained the emergence of sects in terms of deprivation.¹ The short-coming of such accounts is that their primary concern is to distinguish types of religious groups, rather than to discover the socio-economic conditions under which religious groups originate. Further, though the sect-Church theorists regard deprivation as a necessary condition for the rise of new religious movements, their concept of deprivation seems due for a general extension and restatement: the sect-Church theorists conceive of deprivation almost entirely in economic terms. This kind of deprivation although important cannot account for the situations where there are individuals and groups who are economically deprived and who are at the bottom rung of the economic hierarchy who have not developed religious movements. The implication here is that there are other dimensions of deprivation which must be taken into account in

1. Kingsley Davis (1948) p.532. See also Charles Y. Glock and Rodney Stark (1965).

explaining the development of religious movements. It is suggested that deprivation should be extended into economic, cultural-ethical and socio-political dimensions. Economic deprivation may be subjective or objective, since a person who is objectively economically deprived is no more deprived than one who perceives himself to be so deprived. The next dimension of deprivation is cultural-ethical, which refers to conflicts between values of society and those of individuals or groups. In the twentieth century, the most important disjunction of values is that associated with Blackness and the 'African personality' and Whiteness and Western culture - which Du Bois noted as the 'race' issue.¹ In the present analysis, the wider societies have devalued and 'denigrated' blackness and its African connection, while the Black population of African descent have nurtured some idealistic myth of their African past and the value of blackness; built upon the hopes of the original slaves of an eventual return to Africa. The third dimension of deprivation, that of socio-political deprivation, is based on society's propensity to distribute or withhold societal rewards according to attributes that are valued or devalued. As mentioned, the attributes which have been devalued are blackness and 'things African'. These carry with them a whole baggage of low achievements in terms of status, prestige, power, civil rights and security and opportunities for social and political participation accordingly. The presence of all three dimensions of deprivation in a situation of rising expectations turns a situation into one of 'crisis', which is a 'flash point' for the emergence of some organizational effort to overcome the exigencies.

1. W.E.B. Du Bois, (1905), p.13.

The organizational effort to overcome economic, cultural-ethical and socio-political deprivation may be religious or it may be secular. Religious resolutions are likely to occur where the nature of the deprivation is inaccurately perceived or where those experiencing the deprivation are not in a position to work directly on the concrete secular level at eliminating the causes. In this context religious resolutions are seen as reactions to economic, socio-political and cultural ethical deprivation. In assessing the efficacy of religious resolutions, it is necessary to separate economic and socio-political deprivation from the cultural-ethical dimension. In the former, religion is likely to compensate for feelings of economic and socio-political deprivation rather than to eliminate its causes. In the latter situation of cultural-ethical deprivation, 'revitalization' as part of religious activity may be as efficacious in overcoming the sense of deprivation directly: while revitalization may not make a Black man more acceptable in society, it can give him a new identity charged with pride and confidence leading perhaps towards a reassessment of himself and his values in comparison to the values of wider society.

Chapter 2

The Emergence of the Nation of Islam Cult

In this chapter an examination is made of the socio-economic conditions and the situation of racialism confronting a certain section of the population in America at the time when the religious cult of the Nation of Islam developed. Attention is focussed on conditions in the Northern cities where membership to the cult is significantly large.¹

Some time in the mid-summer of 1930, a man named W.D. Farrad appeared in the Black ghetto of Detroit. His exact identity remains uncertain. Physically, he has been described as 'light coloured' with an 'oriental cast of countenance'.² At first, Farrad went house to house selling raincoats and silks in the ghetto areas of Detroit. In this manner he was admitted into people's houses and into their confidences. Farrad listened to the problems of his customers and in turn he had his own stories to tell them.³ His tales were mainly the history of the Black man; in which Islam featured prominently. Farrad declared that Islam was the natural religion of the Black man and that only in Islam could the Black man find the freedom, justice and equality which they were deprived of in their ghettos. Farrad's contact with the ghetto Blacks though casual and informal, grew popular and the pedler soon began holding meetings from house to house throughout the community.

1. Farrad used various names, for example, Walli Farrad, Professor Ford, Farrad Muhammad, F. Muhammad Ali; some of his followers have also referred to him as God or Allah. Some said that W.D. Farrad claimed that he was Drew Ali reincarnated, others said that he was born in Mecca, the son of a wealthy member of the Quresh tribe of which the Prophet Muhammad was a member.
2. Essien Udom (1966) p.52.
3. Farrad utilised such varied literature as the writings of Joseph F. 'Judge' Rutherford, then leader of the Jehovah's Witness, Van Loon's story of Mankind, Breasted's 'Conquest of Civilization', the Quran, the Bible, and certain of the literature of Freemasonry to bring to the Black people a 'knowledge of self'. (Beynon, 1938, p.900.)

In his tales of the glorious history of the Black man, Farrad began to include description of the 'deceptive' character of the White man which found willing ears in the Black ghettos. Before long the house to house meetings were inadequate to accomodate all those who wished to hear this 'prophet', and a hall was hired which was named the Temple of Islam. This was the embroynic stage of the movement of the Nation of Islam¹ or later to be labelled, the Black Muslim² cult.

At this stage the movement was an informal organization, but it quickly developed into more formal gatherings with a hierarchy of officials and registered membership. Within three years an effective organization had developed³ with a Minister of Islam to run the entire movement, aided by a staff of assistant ministers, each of whom was selected and trained by Farrad, who himself gradually stopped appearing in public and eventually disappeared from active leadership and the public view. Before his disappearance, Farrad appointed Elijah Muhammad - one of his first followers - as his successor to be spokesman for the 'Nation of Islam in the West'. The movement continued to recruit members who then looked to Elijah Muhammad as the messenger of Allah and their leader. As membership grew, Temples became established in the Northern American cities. Membership in Detroit is said to have reached eight thousand during the Depression years; and Chicago, the permanent residence of Muhammad, became the headquarters and assumed the character of a Mecca for Muhammad's followers.

1. Not to be confused with the Moorish Islamic sect established by Noble Drew Ali in 1913. Drew Ali found his Islamic sect after a visit to North Africa where he claimed to have received a 'commision' from the King of Morocco to teach Islam to Blacks in the United States. He preached from his own 'holy Quran' which consisted of a mixture of words from the Quran, Bible and the words of Marcus Garvey.
2. Coined by Eric Lincoln in 1956, see Lincoln(1961) p.xii.
3. See Essien Udom (1966) Chapter 6.

Thus, the Nation of Islam or the Black Muslim cult began in the first year of the Great Depression. This was a period of widespread unemployment, hunger and privation for many people in American society in general, but for the Blacks who form the lowest strata in American society, the hardship was extreme. The lowest strata acted as a barometer sensitive to the changing weather of economic and social conditions. When the Fat Years ended in 1930, and American housewives balanced their budgets, one of the first things they cut out was their Black servants; and when factories cut productions, unskilled Black labour was the first to be laid off, resulting in hunger and eviction for hundreds of unemployed Blacks and their families. Describing the impact of the Depression on the Blacks in America, Frazier said:

Suddenly the purchasing power and the savings of the masses began to melt... and the hot house growth of Negro business behind the walls of segregation shrivelled and died, often swallowing up the savings of the black masses... ¹

Many Blacks in the American cities were new rural migrants. Between 1900 and 1930, a quarter of a million Blacks had moved into the urban North from the farms and plantations of the South. ² The most popular destinations were New York, Philadelphia, Chicago and Detroit. The flow from the rural South increased at cumulative rate. The total Black population in the North increased from 75,000 to 3,000,000, an increase of ³ 4000 per cent. The Black population of Detroit, for example, increased

1. Frazier (1938) p.496 ff.

2. There was a loss of 380,595 Blacks from the farms of the South between 1920 and 1930. Johnson (1967) p.49.

3. Lincoln (1961) p.xxiv.

* All along the line Blacks were displaced in a ratio of roughly three to one. The high water mark of unemployment among Blacks was reached in 1930 and 1931. In January 1931, the Unemployment Census revealed that over half of the Black employable women (58%) and nearly half of the employable men (43%) were without jobs. See summarised data in Richard Sterner, (1944), p.362.

by 611 per cent during the ten years to 1920, and between 1930 and 1940, the Black population of Chicago increased by more than 43,000¹. They moved into the metropolis throughout the Depression, filling the vacuum left by White middle classes who had moved to the suburbs seeking fresh air and leaving the heart of the cities to newer immigrants, the underworld and the rural and intercity migrants². (A significant number of Whites who were left behind resented the change in the composition of the population, especially to the presence of Blacks, and made their resentment clear by attacks on Blacks and by bombing incidents.)³

The exodus of the Blacks from the rural South continued, influenced by several factors: floods, crop failures, unemployment, the revival of lynchings and threats to civil security served to 'push' the Black rural population from the South, while hopes of employment, better race relations and direct advertisements and encouragements from industrial firms helped to 'pull' them to the North⁴. The dependence upon staple crops in the South meant that life was dependent upon uncertain weather conditions and the quantity and quality of harvest. These conditions were further exacerbated by the uncertainty of employment associated with a high rate of tenancy.⁵

Even those who were employed lived in poverty. Studies of rural Black families in the Southern counties revealed that the most distinguishing features of the rural Black family was extreme poverty. This poverty appeared not merely in figures of income but was shown by all indices of

1. Cayton and Drake (1946) p.88.

2. Ibid Part I, Ch.3.

3. Ibid Part I, Ch.4.

4. It was common practice for agents of industrial firms to purchase tickets for whole families and to move them en masse for resettlement in the industrial cities.

5. For a description of the conditions of tenant farming see U.S. Census of agriculture: 1910 (Washington: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1911), Vol.V, p. 925; see also Woofter, T. J. Jr., Landlord and Tenant on the Cotton Plantation, 1935.

living conditions: in education, recreation, housing, religion and other forms of institutional life.¹ This situation was further complicated by the bi-racial system which prevented escape from the restriction of a 'Negro' life. Most Blacks in the rural South envisaged better situations in the Northern cities. In 'Growing Up in the Black Belt', Johnson cites a youth making a comparison of the situation in the South to what he imagines the North would be: At 18 Hesehie is tired of farming and thinks he would rather be up North, "Where you don't have to say 'Yes, suh' and 'No, suh' to every white man." "If you don't do it here," he says, "they are going to try to see what's ailin' you."² In the same vein a cotton farmer in Shelby County, Tennessee said of his son proudly:

My boy in Chicago, he don't do nothing, just dresses up in fine clothes and be a sport. He the one what done well. Don't have to hit a lick, and got all the shoes he can wear 'til he's dead. I don't know what he do for money, but I know he ain't got to work.³

When lynching returned as a regular practice in the South after being interrupted by the First World War, the vision of the North became more alluring. During the first year of this century 100 Black Americans were lynched, by the outbreak of the 1914 war the number stood at 1,100. When the War was over the practice was resumed - twenty Blacks were burned alive between 1918 and 1921, while scores of others were hanged, dragged behind automobiles, shot, drowned or hacked to death.⁴ The civil security of Black citizens in the South was tenuous and remained uncertain even up to the late fifties. The lynchings of Emmett Till in 1955 and of Mack Parker

1. See Johnson (1967) pp.42-47.

2. Johnson(1967)p.4.

3. Ibid. p.96 ff; 299ff.

4. John Hope Franklin(1956) pp. 472;473-74 and 471.

in 1959 illustrate the tenuousness of the civil security of the Black population in parts of the United States. Many Blacks consider some of the lynchings to be little more than 'official murder', claiming that the circumstances of taking into custody of accused Blacks and the resultant cases for the Grand Jury are 'set ups' inviting abduction and 'execution'.¹

Throughout the Depression years participation in the political decision making process by Blacks was 'discouraged'. Voting rights were still unsecured in certain parts of the country by the late fifties: The Tennessee Blacks in Gayette County were starved out for wanting to vote in 1959. When 450 Blacks insisted on registering to vote as did 3,000 White citizens, the local White owned stores and wholesale houses refused to sell food and household necessities to Blacks and to supply Black owned businesses. Bank credits for crop loans were stopped and it was impossible for Black citizens to buy oil or gasoline for their tractors and other machinery for months.²

The important factor in all these is that the Black population were highly aware of and were dissatisfied with, the discrimination against them as illustrated by the following comment:

Down here in the South a Negro ain't much better off than he was in slavery times... Now you asked me 'bout voting. I'm willing to cooperate and go to vote, but white folks don't want that. They don't think much of Negroes voting. I ain't got nothin' 'gainst white people, but they won't give Negroes a chance...³

The unevenness and uncertainty of justice in the courts, poverty, hunger and the problem of finding employment and a decent livelihood

1. See William Peters (1959) pp.214-218 for a description of a double "self-defence" killing by a Southern Sheriff.
2. Ebony September, 1960.
3. Johnson(1967) p.17.

are contributory to the making of conditions for discontent for the Blacks in the South and for them to migrate to the Northern cities to escape from oppression and privation.

Once in the North, the Blacks soon realised that it was their labour that was desired not their presence. 'Race' remained a determining criterion for employment and for achieving a high position in the occupational and status hierarchy. Drake and Cayton observed that in 1930 Black men were over-represented in the poorly paid and less desirable work. Over half of all the Black men who earned their living by manual labour, were employed in jobs categorised as unskilled which suffered heaviest from unemployment when the economy was depressed.² Work conditions of these Black labourers could be described as 'extreme' since they were characterised by extreme conditions of exposure, heat, dampness, dirt, and danger.³ Black males who managed to secure employment in the Public Services sector were mostly employed as porters, cooks, janitors, sextons and mail carriers.⁴ Female workers were mostly domestic servants.⁵ Job restrictions continued to be enforced against Blacks in the cities. There were always twice as many Blacks unemployed as there were Whites, with a larger percentage of Black labour being underemployed.⁶

In terms of income, a study conducted in Chicago in 1935-36 by the United States Department of Labor found that, taken in aggregate, most Blacks were living close to the poverty line:⁷ Almost 70 per cent

1. See Appendix I, p.75.
2. See Appendix II, p.76.
3. See Appendix III, p.77.
4. See Appendix I, p.75.
5. See Appendix II, p.76.
6. See Appendix IV & VI, pp. 78,79.
7. See Appendix V, p.79.

of the Black families in Chicago at the time of the study had less than \$1000 per annum (\$83 a month) to spend. In other words, as Sterner points out, two out of three Black families were living on less than \$83 per month in 1935-36. The reverse is true of the White population - only a little over 30 per cent of the White families received incomes of less than \$1000 per annum. Indeed as the table in appendix shows, more than 30 per cent of the Black families were living below \$500 per annum. Almost 50 per cent of the Black families were on relief, compared to just over 10 per cent of White families. In direct contrast, while only 5 per cent of Black families had more than \$2000 per annum to spend, 30 per cent of Whites had more than \$2000 a year. ¹

Regarding educational achievement, the Black metropolis was essentially a community of sixth graders. In 1930, the few Black males and females who had been attending college did not secure occupations commensurate with the education they managed to achieve. Very few were employed in 'white collar' jobs for which they had hopefully trained, and the outlook for securing white collar jobs was bleak. College educated students were frequently reminded by teachers or 'significant others' to be more realistic in their aspirations, as in the example cited by Drake and Cayton:

Teacher said not to take a commercial course because there were no jobs opening up for coloured. So there's nothing but housework and cleaning left for you to do. ²

An analysis of the 1930 and 1940 Census data revealed that not more than 3 per cent of the Black women held bona fide clerical and sales jobs. ³

1. See Appendix V & VI, p. 79.
2. Cayton and Drake (1946) p.259.
3. Cited in *ibid*, p.259.

In political affairs, the Black Americans in the Northern cities lacked sufficient consistent power to affect major decision in the Government, although the level of political life had been generally raised in comparison to the situation in the South. Coming from a situation where political activities were strongly sanctioned, the Black migrants were inexperienced in political life. Once in the cities their predicament was that, while the business of politics seemed to be the only medium for obtaining justice in courts, police protection, protection against persecution from police, a fair share in playgrounds, libraries, sewers and street lights, their political participation was in having to make a choice between the Republican and the Democrats which according to Drake and Cayton was akin to choosing between 'Tweedledee and Tweedledum'.¹ For a few Blacks the business of politics itself provided a form of employment since some payment was made for working the polls on election day. Others who were more ambitious and 'exceptional' found minor jobs at the city halls, and for the very fortunate few, there were some chances to be voted into an elective office.²

Despite the unemployment, underemployment and discrimination against Blacks, the stream of rural Blacks continued to pour into the Northern cities with hope for something better than they had left. Few had skills, many were illiterate. They were herded into the urban areas where there was not only a shortage of jobs but also of houses to accommodate them. Most were inevitably crowded into the most deteriorated part

1. Cayton and Drake (1946) p.353.

2. Ibid, Ch.13.

of the inner city where landlords and law enforcement agencies were exploitative and unsympathetic.^{1.} Hunger, crime and delinquency and the consequent trouble with the police turned their hopes into despair and discontent. The continuous tide of migrants and the squeezing of Blacks out of industry with every economic downturn, combined to raise the proportion of Blacks on the relief rolls. By 1939 four out of ten Black families were dependent upon some form of government aid for their subsistence. These Black denizens of the Northern cities were conscious of the disjunction between the 'American creed' and the practice of racial discrimination against Blacks. The discrimination in the Armed Forces, the Marines and the Navy was common knowledge, and was discussed in the Black Press,² street corners and barbershops. The Blacks were conscious of having 'undesirable' skin colour and 'Negroid' features and many suffered from a feeling of 'self-hate', as a summary of Drake and Cayton's findings illustrates:

A young girl says that she hates her sister because of being teased about her dark skin. A young man reported that his mother was 'partial to colour'. She told him that he was disgracing himself by playing with black children. In a game of 'house' the darkest children were chosen to play servants and the fairest to play father. A dark skin young man remembered that he had often wished to be light skin, "For light fellows get all the breaks." A light brown skin mother wishes that her daughters were lighter skinned. Another light skin woman said that she liked dark skinned people in their places, "I like them but not around me."³

It was in such a 'race' situation that the conditions of the Blacks were further depressed by the economic crisis of the Great Depression.

1. Cayton and Drake, (1946) Ch.8.

2. *Ibid* p.400-409

3. A summary of pages 495-506 of *ibid*.

These who joined the cult - all but half a dozen or so of the two hundred families interviewed - were recent migrants from the rural south. The majority had come to industrial Detroit from small communities in Virginia, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. Investigations by the Wayne County Prosecutor's office indicated the same origin. See H. Baynon, (1958), p.397.

4. See V. Lombardi, (1961); F. Kessler, (1957); B. Thrupp (ed.), (1962).

5. S. Franklin-Frazier, (1957), p.57.

The desperate circumstances of the Depression and the racial discrimination in employment, education and housing required explanation. The old order of accommodative behaviour had been destroyed and with it the old value system within which explanation was usually sought. These were people whose aspirations had been raised and whose sense of imminent emancipation had been enhanced and yet for whom the painful facts of disprivilege and discrimination had remained. What occurred then was a growing gap between what individuals hoped for and what they could expect, which increased dissatisfaction and demoralization in the literal sense of the term.

So often in history we note that when a people share the experience of desolation and despair, they have been 'easy joiners' in movements which promised a panacea of the millennium to remedy their desperate situation. Under these conditions, religious innovations were not inevitable, but they occupied a prominent place as a way of overcoming the sense of deprivation and despair of such people. The oppressed were ready to follow a 'prophet', 'saviour', or 'messiah' who promised to lead them to a new path; to bring them a new promise for a better future.

In America, in the 1930s Frazier observed that some Blacks in the professional class formed groups to study Marx's 'message', but more often the disillusioned Blacks turned to racial chauvinism as a way of realizing their salvation. One form of such racial chauvinism is the Black religious cult. W.D. Farrad's message that he had come to

1. A survey taken in Detroit during the early years of the formation of the Nation of Islam (1930-1934) revealed that the overwhelming majority of those who joined the cult - all but half a dozen or so of the two hundred families interviewed - were recent migrants from the rural South. The majority had come to industrial Detroit from small communities in Virginia, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. Investigations by the Wayne County Prosecutor's office indicated the same origin. See E. Beynon, (1938), p.897.
2. See V. Lanternari, (1963); P. Worsley, (1957); S. Thrupp, (ed.), (1962).
3. E. Franklin Frazier, (1957), p.87.

lead the oppressed Blacks in America to redemption in a 'new world of Islam' where their fears, frustrations, anxieties, and the suffering and corruption of the world about them will be purged, struck a receptive congregation.

He came to offer an alternative to the body of principles and systems of values within which framework Americans have customarily sought to negotiate their grievances. The cult, with Farrad and later Muhammad as its spokesman offered to create and to fashion a new community, with a new culture and to carve for its members a new image or identity in society. The leader offered to provide the Black population with a new pride, morality, confidence and energies; and to set for them a new goal to achieve in American society. By joining the cult, members could repudiate the roles that they have been ascribed, even those within the Black community itself; whilst males could denounce the matriarchal character of the 'Negro' community and the relative lack of masculine parental authority within the family, women who joined were honoured and were required to perform important functions within a defined female role which did not conflict with the male role. In Eric Lincoln's words:

The true believer who becomes a Muslim casts off at last his old self and takes on a new identity. He changes his name, his religion, his homeland, his "natural" language, his moral and cultural values, his very purpose in living. He is no longer a Negro, so long despised by the White man that he has come almost to despise himself.

1. Eric Lincoln, (1961), p. 114.

2. Ibid, p. 74.

3. N. Brown, (1960), p. 105.

4. Eric Lincoln, (1961), p. 224; N. Brown, (1960), p. 90.

5. The Muslims are reluctant to disclose the aims of their movement in an effort to keep their strength a secret. Eric Lincoln, (1961), p. 21.

6. Ibid, p. 74.

Now he is a black man divine, ruler of the universe, different only in degree from Allah Himself. He is no longer discontent and baffled, harried by social obloquy and a gnawing sense of personal inadequacy. Now he is a Muslim, bearing in himself the power of the black nation and its glorious destiny. His new life is not an easy one: it demands unquestioning faith, unrelenting self-mastery, unremitting loyalty, and a singularity of purpose. ¹

The doctrine of the Nation of Islam appealed to young, low class males and the under-achievers and 'rejects' of society. About 80 per cent of a typical congregation was between the ages of seventeen and thirty-five. ² At the time of their first contact with Farrad, practically all of the members of the Nation of Islam cult were recipient of public welfare, unemployed and living in the most deteriorated areas of Black settlements. ³ If employed they were generally low educated domestic workers factory hands, common labourers and the like. Some were ex-convicts or even convicts, as some Muslim Temples became established behind prison walls. ⁴ Others included dome addicts, alcholics, pool sharks and gamblers. Few members of the Black intelligentsia have been attracted to the cult, if they have had occasion to join they have kept their affiliation secret. Membership has been almost entirely of Black Americans; possibly because of the tendency among West Indians to make distinctions among themselves in terms of colour shades, which could jeopardise the Muslim appeal for a united Black front. Exactly how many members there were at any one time is difficult to ascertain. ⁵ In December 1960, there were sixty-nine Temples or missions in twenty-seven states, from California to Massachussetts. In 1972 there were still at least fifty Mosques with viable congregations. ⁶

1. Eric Lincoln, (1961), p.114.

2. Ibid, p.24.

3. E. Beynon, (1938), p.905.

4. Eric Lincoln, (1961), p.26; E. Beynon, (1938), p.905.

5. The Muslims are reluctant to disclose the size of their movement in an effort to keep their strength a secret. Eric Lincoln, (1961), p.21.

6. Ibid, pp.4-5.

Thus, the Nation of Islam cult appealed to that section of society for whom society had failed to effectively supply the minimum needs for a meaningful level of participation in the significant social activities.

It is central to the Nation of Islam's doctrine of Black civilization and the degradation of the white man's - and which developed among people who were economically, socially, and culturally deprived in the - the Nation of Islam cult which emerged in West Virginia, America. In this chapter an investigation is made of the conditions surrounding the birth of the cult and its growth, a task which is more complex than that undertaken by Eshon of Islam for unlike the Nation of Islam - which was a system of an one movement, the Nation of Islam cult is a loosely organized group of individuals of various groups sharing certain common beliefs.

In the 1930's with the economic depression, America was facing widespread riots and unrest from the Black working class whose racial consciousness had been stirred by Marcus Garvey and his call of "Africa for Africans to live and develop". At the same time the country of Italy declared as Emperor of Ethiopia and consequently was proclaimed for this recently discovered African Kingdom. Prior to this publication, the Jamaican form of Ethiopia was a place name in the Biblical text. Acquiring their knowledge from the Bible, they knew of Ethiopia

11. For an excellent account of Marcus Garvey see D. Cronon, *Black Power*, (University of Wisconsin Press, 1955).
 12. See Daily Worker, 11.11.1931, p.1.

Chapter 3

The Ras Tafarians in Kingston, Jamaica

The Nation of Islam cult is not the only phenomenon that is rooted to a structure of social, economic and racial tension. Another religious cult which operates in the name of Black unity - its central theme being the glorification of Black civilization and the deprecation of the White man's culture - and which developed among people who were economically, socially, and culturally deprived is the Ras Tafarian cult which emerged in West Kingston, Jamaica. In this chapter an examination is made of the conditions surrounding the birth of the cult and its growth - a task which is more complex than that regarding the Nation of Islam; for unlike the Nation of Islam which can be spoken of as one movement, the Ras Tafarian cult is a loosely connected proliferation of informal groups sharing certain common beliefs.

In the 1930s with the economic depression, Jamaica was facing widespread riots and unrest from the Black working class whose racial consciousness had been stirred by Marcus Garvey and his call of 'Africa for Africans at home and abroad'. At the same time the crowning of Haile Selassie as Emperor of Ethiopia had occasioned some publicity for this formerly obscure African kingdom.² Prior to this publicity, many Jamaicans knew of Ethiopia merely as a place name in the Biblical text. Acquiring their knowledge from the Bible, they knew of Ethiopia

1. For an excellent account of Marcus Garvey see D. Cronon, *Black Moses*, (University of Wisconsin Press, 1955).
2. See *Daily Gleaner*. 11.11.1930, p.1.

mainly from the prophecy that "Ethiopia would stretch out its hand to the exiled sons of Israel." The realization that there was in fact an independent African state bearing this name with its own monarchy and cultural heritage was an important revelation to the Black population who were starved of a dignified identity. Many remembered that Garvey had foretold such a crowning and its significance, "Look to Africa when a black King shall be crowned, for the day of deliverance is near." ¹ Consultation with their Bible confirmed the Emperor as the 'true' leader:

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 saith unto 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. Revelation 5: 2,5.

Several missions quickly developed proclaiming the divinity of Haile Selassie. Leonard P. Howell is generally regarded as the first to preach the divinity of the Emperor of Ethiopia. He sold photographs of the Emperor all over the island, informing buyers that the photos were passports to Ethiopia. Two other individuals, Joseph Nathaniel Hibbert, and H. Archibald Dunkley, returning to Jamaica after travelling to Africa and America, each independently, also proclaimed that Haile Selassie was the 'messiah' who would redeem the Blacks - the children of Israel - in Jamaica. Members of these missions calling themselves Ras Tafari or Rastamen were recruited from the slum dwellers in West Kingston, which had the heaviest concentration of Jamaica's unemployed, underemployed and poor Blacks. Some had only recently arrived from the country districts,

1. See Marcus Garvey, *Philosophy and Opinions*, compiled by Amy Jacques Garvey, (London, 1967).

many of whom were unemployed and 'squatting' in the slum areas. Those who were employed were low paid workers in unskilled or semi-skilled work, domestic servants and street merchants. The unemployed 'scuffle' for a living - doing odd jobs, running errands, selling firewood and craft products, begging, gambling, stealing, pimping and prostituting.

In 1935, the confrontation of Ethiopia with Italy further occasioned publicity for the Emperor and his kingdom. Another consultation with the Bible confirmed that this confrontation 'fits' with the Biblical prophecy,

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. Revelation 19:19.

An account published in the Jamaican Times¹, revealed that the Emperor was also known as the head of the Niyabingi Order, the purpose of which Order was to overthrow the White domination in Ethiopia. Many who were already convinced of the divinity of Haile Selassie and who were describing themselves as Ras Tafari or Rastamen now also described themselves as Niyamen and regarded Haile Selassie as the leader of a racial war leading to the overthrow of the White 'race'. Others preserved their Ras Tafari title and were not committed to violence at all, but emphasised instead, the desire to live according to a doctrine of peace and non-violence.

From its origin the Ras Tafari cult took several forms - there is a wide range of belief, practice and differences of doctrinal emphasis among the followers - but all who call themselves Ras Tafarians accept

1. Magazine Digest,

Jamaican Times, 7.12.1935, pp. 22-23.

the basic doctrine that Haile Selassie is the living God - Ras Tafari; Ethiopia is the Black people's home; Repatriation is the way of Redemption for Black people, it has been foretold and will shortly occur; the way of life of the White people are evil, especially for the Blacks. All members also share in an open conscious reference to the self as a Black person rather than a 'Negro' and the unfaltering expression of wrath against oppression and continuing 'colonial White society'. According to Ras Tafari doctrine Black people are reincarnations of the ancient Israelites who were exiled to the West because of their transgressions. They have remained in exile in their 'Babylon' waiting for the final repatriation to the Heaven, Ethiopia.¹

Brethrens of the movement are identified by their physical appearance and they fall into various groups according to how they wear their hair. The 'locksmen' wear matted and plaited hair and observe the Biblical command strictly, by never applying the razor to head nor face. The 'beardsmen' wear their hair and beard but may trim them occasionally and do not usually have their hair plaited or matted. The 'baldhead' or 'clean faced' is not obviously distinguishable from the ordinary Jamaican, except by some article such as the yellow, green and red hat or scarf. It is difficult to distinguish the 'baldhead' or 'clean faced' 'true' Ras Tafari believer from the 'faker' and therefore difficult to assess the number of members of the cult. In 1953 Simpson estimated that there were twelve groups of Ras Tafarians in West Kingston with membership

1. G.E. Simpson, (1955) pp. 134-5.
2. M.G. Smith, F.R. Augier, Rex Nettleford, (1960), Ch.IV.

1. G.E. Simpson, (1955), p.133.

2. Rex Nettleford, (1970), p.49. Nettleford also cites that a survey carried out by Mr. Bruce Gordon of the Jamaica Penal and Correction Commission estimated a higher figure of 70,000.

3. See Appendix VII, p.77.

4. See Adrian Doot and Michael Thomas, Jamaica: Bahian on a Film strip, for a illustration of life in Jamaica.

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ranging from 20 to 150 in each group. More recent official estimates
concur that there are between 15,000 to 20,000 for the city of Kingston.²

Groups have been formed in various parts of the island, but most live in West Kingston; usually in camps where they hold frequent meetings and festivals. Among some believers, distinguishable physical appearance is accompanied by an open defiance of the 'unjust law' against smoking of ganja (marihuana) which is still prohibited by the rules of the wider society, but which is the 'holy wisdom giving weed' to the Ras Tafarians.

The birth of the Ras Tafarian cult took place in West Kingston, Jamaica, in a society deeply stratified with a high correlation between class and colour. This is a religion which appeals to the economically and culturally deprived and socially discriminated, which in Jamaica means the Black population. The crowning of Haile Selassie in 1930, the year of the Great Depression, was publicised in a country whose Black population, representing the vast majority of the population (78%) were conspicuously precipitated at the base whilst the Whites (less than 1%) were at the apex.³

In the towns, the poorest and the most deprived Blacks lived in the West Kingston areas where some of the worst slums were to be found. The living conditions here were grossly inadequate, the areas lacked such communal facilities as sewage disposal, running water, light, and roads.⁴ Politically, the population of this area lacked any muscle to push for governmental assistance and improvements. Some did not even

1. G.E. Simpson, (1955), p.133.

2. Rex Nettleford, (1970), p.49. Nettleford also cites that a survey carried out by Mr. Horace Gordon of the Jamaica Social Welfare Commission estimated a higher figure of 70,000.

3. See Appendix VII, p.77.

4. See Adrian Boot and Michael Thomas, Jamaica: Babylon on a Thin Wire, for an illustration of life in Jamaica.

have rights to settle there since they were 'squatters' on the land, many of whom were new migrants from the country who crowded into these slum areas unemployed and without poor relief.

The cult burgeoned into prominence throughout the 1940s and 1950s, and the decolonizing phase of the 1960s, during which time as data demonstrate, there was a persistence of colonial racial alignments, indicating the widespread activities of the White and Coloured elites to preserve their differential advantages and positions in the overwhelmingly Black populated country. The Jamaican Census of 1943 shows that 28.1 per cent of the Black population over seven years old were illiterate, compared to 3.2 per cent of Whites and 13.8 per cent of Coloureds.¹ At that date 1,793,668 acres of land were under farm in Jamaica, of which 13,318 holdings were of more than 100 acres, accounting for 70 per cent of the total areas under farm. Of these 13,318 large holdings, the Whites owned 411, which amounted to 42.2 per cent of all their land holdings; the Coloureds (representing 17.5% of the population) owned 605, which amounted to 4.9 per cent of their land holdings and the Blacks owned 366, which amounted to 0.7 per cent of all their land holdings.² Most of the land holdings of the Black population are of five acre size with low level of capitalization. The produce from their land was not sufficient to feed the growing population in the rural areas causing many to move to town.

It was estimated that 20,000 rural migrants move into Kingston annually.³ Though emigration provided an outlet for some, increasing

1. See Appendix VIII, p.80.

2. See Appendix IX, p.81.

3. Rex Nettleford (1970), p.49.

unemployment and underemployment in Jamaica which paralleled the growth in population limited the absorption of others into suitable and secure employment. Those who were employed were mostly in unskilled work with low income. In an average week in December 1942, over 80 per cent of Black workers in employment earned below 20 shillings ($\$10$ US) compared with 53 per cent Coloureds and 18 per cent Whites. There were no Black workers in the top income category of over 300 shillings ($\$60$ US) per week. By comparison 0.8 per cent Coloureds and 17 per cent Whites earned over 300 shillings, (per week) with over 3 per cent of the latter in the over 400 shillings category.¹

The unequal distribution of incomes followed the colonial distribution of occupations among 'racial' and 'ethnic' groups, as illustrated by data from the Jamaican Census of 1943. Most Black workers were in unskilled manual work. Out of 43,458 workers categorised as unskilled in January 1943, 38,326 (88.2%) were Black compared with 4151 (9.6%) Coloureds and 883 (2%) Whites. In contrast, less than 1 per cent of all Black workers were in the executive category compared with over 4 per cent of all Coloured workers and 38 per cent of all White workers.²

The situation was much the same in 1960, if one compares the wage distribution of employed males in Jamaica during April 1960 with that of December 1942.³ Although the Jamaican Census of 1960 does not indicate the distribution of wage incomes among workers of differing 'racial' categories, one can deduce that the bulk of the most poorly paid workers and unemployed were Black while the majority of those receiving high incomes were White. A comparison of Jamaican wage distribution

1. See Appendix X, p.82.

2. See Appendix XI, 83.

3. G.A. Brown, (1961), in Gumper (1961), pp.12-22; The West Indian Economist, (1961), pp.4-7.

of 1942 with 1960 would show that changes in the distribution of incomes among the Jamaicans workers of differing racial groups during this period were limited. In cash terms the average per capita annual income of Jamaica had risen from less than £50 in 1943 to over £100 in 1960; but this rise is largely offset by the fall in the value of the pound from \$5 (US) to \$2.80 (US) during this period. Taking into account this currency devaluation of 1951, we may compare the wage distribution of 1942 and 1960 more realistically by doubling earlier money values. Hence, while 80 per cent of the Jamaican wage earners of both sexes received less than 40 shillings a week in 1943, in 1960 70 per cent of employed males received less than 80 shillings (\$11.20 US) per week, and another 18.5 per cent earned between 80 shillings and 200 shillings weekly. By comparison with the data of 1942 which include all workers of both sexes, those of 1960 were also relatively inflated by the exclusion of female workers whose wage rates were on average lower than those of men. We must also take into account the subsequent steady decline in the purchasing power of money.

In a comparison of income distribution in Jamaica, with income distribution in Trinidad-Tobago, Ahiram concluded that the Jamaican pattern appeared exceptionally unequal, "Income accruing to the lowest 60 per cent of recipient units (in Jamaica) is among the lowest recorded - 19 per cent... The percentage of incomes received by the 15 per cent of units next to the top is higher than in all the countries listed." This implies that

1. G.A. Brown, (1961), in Cumper (1961), pp.12-22.
2. E.Ahiram, (1964), p.343.

despite increases in absolute value, the patterns of income distribution described for Jamaica in the 1943 Census persist substantially to the present, as part of the persisting social and 'racial' stratification inherited from the colonial period. Other indices of such structural persistence which have been reported include distribution of land and educational opportunities. It is true to say that the colour-class correlation in Jamaican stratification system reflects a great deal of the plantation and colonial order.

Early plantation society had a pyramidal pattern with White masters at the apex and Black slaves at the base with the free Coloureds forming a 'natural' middle class. When changes in the economic, social and political spheres took place and power and civic status were being allocated, it is significant that the people receiving the most power and civic status at the different stages of development came from groups distinguishable largely by their physical appearance, especially by colour of skin, and in fact were so described. In Jamaica it was the White planters and their managerial aides who first received control of representative government in the late seventeenth century. The free Coloureds next shared in the citizenship rights in 1832. Finally the Black Africans were freed from slavery to take up their positions at the lowest rung of the social hierarchy as labourers and small farmers. This plantation and colonial class-colour correlation has persisted, showing that those in power have maintained their privileged positions.

Unlike the American bi-racial system, the Jamaican colour-class correlation is complicated by complex colour differentiation. It is possible for those who possess European characteristics whether it is colour, wealth or culture to be syphoned to the higher echelon of the social hierarchy. Indeed, as the percentage of pure Whites dwindle, lighter skin Coloureds and even darker skin individuals who have had culture exposure through education have become hiers to the European position and power. This process in itself tends to contribute towards the persistence of the existing pattern of the Black population being at the bottom of the hierarchy. This is so because promising Black leaders - the possible champions for the rights of the people who share their colour - in being syphoned into the middle class category through economic and social advancement, tend to dissociate themselves from their Black compatriots, to join the Whites and lighter skin 'mixed bloods' in their efforts to maintain their privileged positions. The lack of leaders to push for Black emancipation, has meant that as a social group the Black population of Jamaica has remained those people who benefit least from society.

Some of these people who benefit least from Jamaican society, also experience the acuteness of being Black in a society and in a world where White is the most highly valued colour and Western culture the most dominant, while Black is denigrated and African culture the least desirable. In such a social environment many Jamaican Blacks develop an attitude of self-contempt and a lack of confidence in those who wear their colour as illustrated by Nettleford:

A maid insists that she would never work for black people; and well she might not, for the bad treatment meted out to servants by coloured and middle-class housewives is usually

topic for conversation among some visitors on the island. A watchman in a private compound coldly informs a black-skinned university student that he cannot proceed on the compound for the authorities have instructed him (the watchman) not to let 'any black people to pass there after six o'clock. A black doctor goes into stores in Kingston and fails to receive the civil attention due to every citizen until he pulls rank and invokes his status. A worker in an industrial plant finds it impossible to have any interest in plant because there's no hope for the black man and he resents the black supervisor in authority. The black supervisor in turn abuses his unaccustomed power in dealing with his own and toadies to the white boss. A young black woman destroys a photographic print of herself because it is printed too black, and an older black woman insists that she is giving her vote to a white candidate, 'for no black man can help in this yah country these days.' 1

Thus, the Blacks in Jamaica suffer from the same basic problem which has plagued lower class Black Americans.² There is much evidence of 'racial' tension in both societies, though it may be said that in contemporary United States 'racial' tension is a prime reason why poverty has become a major issue, whereas in Jamaica poverty has been a major reason why 'race' and colour has become a primary issue. The result is the same however, whiteness still connotes privilege, high social position, wealth and purity, (the latter is perceived to be ingrained in Christian mythology) while in contrast blackness has long been associated with poverty, manual labour, low status and ignorance.

In Jamaica the attempts by politicians to make 'non-racialism'³ into an important national symbol by declaring at home and abroad that Jamaica and the West Indies are 'made up of peoples drawn from all over

1. Rex Nettleford, (1970) p.34; see also F. Henriques, *Family and Colour in Jamaica*, (London, 1953), p.33-35.
2. See Drake and Cayton, (1946), pp.495-506; C.S. Johnson, (1967), p.243; W.E.B. Du Bois, (1905), pp.8-9.
3. Hon. Norman W. Manley, *Daily Gleaner*, 31.10.1960.; also *New York Times*, April, 1961.

the world to live in a multi-racial harmony', have not solved the 'racial' tension. In the minds of most Jamaicans, it is still a poor Black, a middle class privileged Brown or Coloured and a rich, wealthy and powerful White man. White, Brown, Coloured or Black are all aware or conscious of the notions of 'civilised Whitedom' over 'primitive Blackdom'. The Blacks are the decedents of the only group of immigrants which came to the New World as slaves and not as part of group which were permitted to maintain their identity, culture and custom through some religious or other institutions. Their memories of cultural achievements have deliberately been erased to instil a slave culture, a slave status and a slave expectation which the Black person is still identified with in present day's 'multi-racial' Jamaica. For decades the only answer for the Black Jamaican, if he aspires to carve for himself a dignified identity, has been to sink his racial consciousness and to acquire for himself education and other means of making himself as an individual socially mobile. The majority of Jamaica's Black population are at the bottom rung of the social hierarchy, most of whom farm for a living. As the population in the rural area increased, many young Blacks migrate to town to escape from the five acre farms and to look for something better than chopping cane and humping bananas. They come with high hopes for employment and an improved standard of living, but end up in the slums where people live "in oil drums and fruit crates and one-room plywood outhouses..."¹

The new arrivals are absorbed into existing communities and come to share their institutions, values and attitudes as well as their

1. Adrian Boot and Michael Thomas, (1976) p.25.

humiliations and experiences. This sharing of misfortune and kindness with its concomitant growing consciousness 'of a kind' can manifest into secular or religious organizations. In a situation where most people have been deeply steeped in religious tradition - most migrants from the rural areas are Christians - and the traditional religious beliefs and practices have lost their appeal, as they are perceived to be embedded in the whole system which favours the dominant group, an innovatory religious cult like the Ras Tafarian appears attractive. The young unemployed, underemployed and poor are those attracted to the Ras Tafarian cult. The social conditions make them align themselves with the established cultists, passing their time in euphoric escape by the smoking of ganja and in bitter contemplation of the injustices of a social system which threatens to keep the Black Jamaican forever at the base of society. The label 'Israelite' worn by existing Ras Tafarian is easily adoptable by this 'lost tribe' of homeless, unemployed, poor scavengers and vagrants. The significance of the Ras Tafarian cult is that a phenomenal number of low status Blacks have found facility in the cult's doctrine. These low status Black population subscribe to the world view of the Ras Tafarian in their anger against deprivation, and the Ras Tafarian doctrine of social rejection proves an attractive way of articulating their dissatisfaction with wider society's conception of a harmonious multi-racial and stable nationalism. The rhetoric of the cult accuses the wider society of the inherent incongruities of the Jamaican social system in which the poor grew poorer and the rich grew more

prosperous, and the poor tends also to be the Blackest. The Ras Tafari doctrine provides the oppressed Blacks with a channel for escape even if this is in the conviction that the only real escape lies in the Return to Africa.

Chapter 4The Prophet and the Message

In the last two chapters we have examined the milieu in which the Nation of Islam and the Ras Tafarian cults developed. In so far as these cults are led by a 'prophet' or 'prophets', this is also the milieu from which leaders emerge to the social groups that receive them readily. In this chapter analyses will be made on the nexus linking leaders and followers in one relationship.

In the examination of both the Nation of Islam and the Ras Tafarian cults, leadership can be comprehended as the result of the successful striking of a responsive chord in a given situation of unsatisfied aspirations. The relationship between leaders and followers is a dialectical one. Potential followers in a milieu of diffuse and unrealised aspirations create the leaders by selecting them out. Once selected, the leaders in turn take command on the basis of their newly accorded legitimacy. Followers then cleave to the 'appropriate' leader because he articulates and consolidates their aspirations.

The leadership role in any movement is significant mainly as catalyst, symbol and message bearer. As a catalyst, the role of the leader is to convert latent solidarities into active ritual and/or political action. The leader's role is to evoke more than private psychic responses; as a leader he must generate modes of action and interaction, create an organization or stimulate the creation of one. In this role then, the leader must have the ability to aggregate aspirations of potential believers into concrete and visible goals and

to organise and orient collective actions towards their achievement.

As a symbol for collective action the person of the leader may be unimportant, only the symbolic aspect of the leader becomes significant. Indeed, the leader may be absent from the local situation and in certain situations the occupant of the role of leader may be changed to ensure that 'suitable' individual or individuals fill the symbolic role. In the leader's function as a symbol, leadership may be embodied in single persons like Farrad or Elijah Muhammad or leadership may be divided amongst several persons as in the case of the Ras Tafarian cult. In either cases it is the meaning invested in the role which gives the leader legitimacy. In both cases the leader symbolises a new morality of simplicity, frugality and ascetism; and it is in these qualities that 'proofs' and 'signs' are sought from him.

Finally, it is the message of the leader that is all important, without a 'relevant' message there can be no serious content to be communicated. 'Relevance' consists of aggregating and articulating the unsatisfied wants of social groups and offering them some promise and eventual fulfilment. As Friedland puts it:

In sum, while there are plenty of people with messages, these must be relevant to social groups before they begin to be received and become the basis for action. 1

The message is 'relevant' if it embodies values and interests of the followers. The degree of relevance then, depends upon the ability of the leader to weave cultural and ethical values and economic and political aspirations of the potential followers into his message, in

1. W.H. Friedland, (1964), p.21.

1. See Basilian Olan, (1967), p. 100.

2. W.H. Smith, P.H. (1967), p. 100.

3. E.g. Edward Shils, (1967), p. 100.

4. W.G. Friedland, 'Deviant' (1967); Immanuel Wallerstein, (1967); Max Weber, (1917), p. 100.

such a permutation as to make it acceptable to the believers - his partner in a relationship oriented towards action.

Although both leaders and followers are in reality partners in the formulation of the 'relevant' message, this is not always an obvious factor. In some movements as in the Nation of Islam, the leader claims to be the sole vessel of inspiration of the message from an 'other worldly' authority. In such a situation the movement which develops tends to be based on a single authority structure.¹ On the other hand, where inspiration is open to many as in the Ras Tafariian cult, there tends to be a fissiparous dispersion of leadership.²

The emphasis on seeing the role of the leaders in the context of the social conditions within which they emerge, implicitly questions the notion of the monumentalised individual as the sovereign of history, which after Carlyle's 'Hero' and 'Hero Worship', and Weber's notion of 'charisma', influenced a great deal of nineteenth century history and a significant amount of sociological and political analyses today.³ The use of charisma in the Weberian sense as,

A certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader.⁴

has often been a substitute for a careful analysis of political organization and ideology. The charismatic leader has much too often been taken as the reason for the rise of movements without attempts to explain the social environment within which the leader is performing. Charisma

1. See Essien Udom, (1962), Ch. V, for an account of the authority structure of the Nation of Islam.
2. M.G. Smith, F.R. Augier, Rex Nettleford, (1960), Ch. V.
3. E.g. Edward Shils, 'The Concentration and Dispersion of Charisma: Their Bearing on Economic Policy in Underdeveloped Countries,' (1958); W.G. Runciman, 'Charismatic Legitimacy and One-Party Rule in Ghana,' (1963); Immanuel Wallerstein, The Politics of Independence, (1961).
4. Max Weber, (1947), 358-59.

is conveniently used, for example to explain Kwame Nkrumah's ability to command mass support, John F. Kennedy's popularity and Julius Nyerere's rise to leadership. The problem lies in reading Weber's conception of the emergence of leaders unambiguously when it is clear that there is a fundamental ambiguity expressed in Weber's work:

A prophet is any man who by virtue of his purely personal charisma and by virtue of his mission proclaims a religious doctrine or a divine command. 1

Too often attention has been focussed upon the former aspect - the personality of the leader, rather than upon the virtue of his mission, which is the leader's significance as symbol, catalyst and message bearer. Indeed, when observations of movements have been made, the emergence of certain persons as leaders are said to be 'inevitable' because of their inspiration, energy and charismatic personality. This is not always the case as Talmon points out. Frequently, the leadership role is almost forced upon a person or persons who happen to be in the milieu ripe for the emergence of movements,

Leaders function as a symbolic focus of identification rather than as sources of authority and initiative... In some regions, millenarianism is an endemic force and when it reaches a flash point it may seize upon any available figure. The initiative in such a case comes primarily from the community which sometimes almost imposes the leadership position on its leaders. Some of the leaders are, in fact, insignificant and their elevation to such a position seems to be accidental - they happen to be there and fulfilled an urgent need for a mediator. 2

An examination of the Nation of Islam and Ras Tafariian cults reveals that it is not the charisma of the leader - as an abstract mystical

1. Quoted from Reinhard Bendix, *Max Weber: An intellectual Portrait*, (New York: Doubleday, 1962); p.89.

2. Y. Talmon, (1962) p.149-64.

quality or attributes of individual personality that legitimises a relationship of loyalty and identification between leader and believers, but it is the leader's social support that informs us of the legitimacy of his position. The term charisma may be more usefully interpreted as a function of recognition or social realization. In this context, charismatic quality is recognised in the leader when he has provided 'signs' and 'proofs' that he is sincere and that his promises and goals are 'relevant' to his followers. When these qualities are 'proven' in 'test situations', the charismatic quality of the prophet or leader accumulates; on the other hand, if the leader cannot provide valid 'signs' to summon social recognition, existing charismatic quality may be eroded and eventually lost. (One should note that 'proofs' and 'signs' need not necessarily always be successful. Failure, death and disappearance and generally acts of martyrdom are also suitable 'proofs' and 'signs'.) In this sense charisma is that quality which is recognised as charismatic by believers and followers and is attributable to a leader by followers when the leader emerges and his words are 'relevant' and his sincerity is seen to be effective. It is this recognition that provides the basis for legitimacy. Legitimation based on this notion of charisma is grounded in a relationship of loyalty and identification rather than on an abstract mystical quality.

Elijah Muhammad the 'prophet' for the Nation of Islam gained recognition of his charismatic quality by a series of 'brave' confrontations

with wider society. In April 1934, Elijah Muhammad was arrested by the Detroit Police for refusing to send one of his children to the public school. He was charged with 'contributing to the delinquency of a minor.' This action 'proved' to followers the sincerity of the leader's preaching since he showed that he was prepared to put into practice his own recommendations. It also showed Muhammad's own faith in his trust in Allah, since the confrontation with the law is seen as an extreme act of bravery.¹ The movement was the focus of public attention again, in connection with Muhammad being arrested and charged with sedition and with inciting his followers to resist the draft. Though the charge of sedition was later dropped, Muhammad was convicted on the charge of encouraging draft resistance and sentenced to five years detention in the Federal Correction Institution at Milan, Michigan; being released in 1946. During his detention more than 100 of his male followers were arrested and jailed because they failed to register for the draft. Muhammad's imprisonment helped to establish his claim to leadership, enabling him to liken himself to the persecuted prophets of the past. For his followers his 'persecution' is evidence of his sincerity and the divinity of his mission, and the evasion of the draft was a 'relevant' act in a situation where the Black population were deprived of citizenship rights in other spheres of political life.

In the case of the Ras Tafarian cult, their doctrinal position on ganja smoking and their projection of anti-work ideology put them in constant conflict with the law and the norms of wider society. For the

1. Eric Lincoln, (1961), 106-09).

2. M.G. Smith, F.R. Augier, Rex Nettleford, (1960), p.24-25.

3. Ibid, p.26.

cult members this conflict is translated as the beginning of the 'war' between the 'believers' and 'non-believers' which will bring about the Armageddon. The Ras Tafarians' confrontation with wider society, as in the case of the Nation of Islam, took the form of harrassments and arrests from the police. Howell, the most successful of the early preachers of the Ras Tafarian cult was arrested several times for various crimes against wider society. One assault on Howell was in connection with his attempt to establish a Ras Tafarian community at Pinnacle. In particular, the 'law enforcement agencies' objected to the offensive and violent nature of his message and to the growing of ganja. The constant harrassment of Howell and his Ras Tafarian community, resulted in the dispersion of his followers at Pinnacle and finally in Howell's loss of credibility in the eyes of his followers. The message however, was still relevant. Many of Howell's followers did not leave the cult. The brethren moved into other Ras Tafarian missions or set up separate groups in West Kingston.

The successful communication of the relevant message to a people is directly related to the ability to make and to utilize the fullest measure of the environment of potential followers. This involves the understanding of historical and present concrete conditions of potential followers, and the ability to link together social group interests, traditional values, ideas and myths and an innovatory world view. A deep understanding of the deprivation of potential followers is essential, to enable the message bearer to aggregate their dissatisfaction and

1. M.G. Smith, F.R. Augier, Rex Nettleford, (1960), p.9.

aspirations so as to articulate in his message their needs.

Initially, the message and the messenger are legitimised by references to 'truth' revealing texts, (of the Bible, Quran, and other Holy Scriptures) amplification of the teachings of forebears and the echoes of the doctrines of dead and dying 'relevant' movements. Indeed, with regard to the latter, cultist movements among the Blacks in the New World, have usually arisen phoenix like from decaying or dead movements. The doctrines of both the Nation of Islam and the Ras Tafarian cults are echoes of the writings and speeches of Marcus Garvey, rising as they did from the still warm ashes of the Garveyite movement.¹ Garvey's call for the recognition of the dignity of Black people had taken the form of an appeal to mythical Africa. He saw that the destiny of the Black people lies in their eventual return to Africa or Ethiopia (Garvey often referred to Africa as Ethiopia). His rallying call was 'Africa for the Africans at home and abroad', under the unifying slogan of, 'One aim, one God, and one destiny'. The slogan, the Repatriation, the glorification of blackness and the invocation of the African past has been lifted wholesale

1. Marcus Garvey sought to found a Black state in Africa to which all Blacks from the West could return. He founded his Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in 1919, and claimed to have had two million members in his organizations. This success was mainly in America, in his own home Jamaica, UNIA's success was relatively modest. In 1927 Garvey was deported from America following a felony conviction. He returned to Jamaica and became involved unsuccessfully, in politics. Disappointed, he left for England and was to remain in relative obscurity until his death in 1940. His relationship with the founders of the Ras Tafarian movement between 1930 and 1935 remains obscure, though in retrospect the cultists claim that Garvey is a major prophet. Indeed, Jamaica itself recognised Garvey after his death, his remains were brought to Jamaica to be placed in a shrine as Jamaica's first national hero. See E.D. Cronon, (1964), Ch.7.

1. E. D. Cronon, (1964), Ch.7.

2. Ibid. p.905.

into the Ras Tafari doctrine, in fact in retrospect Garvey himself is said to be a Ras Tafari prophet. "Marcus Garvey," said a Ras Tafari preacher, "brought a philosophy to the Black man." Garvey was said to have laid the corner stone and the foundation of the Ras Tafari movement, "he was sent to cut and clear." 1

The Nation of Islam owed its immediate origin both to the teachings of Garvey and to the religious movement of Noble Drew Ali's Moorish Science Temple. As Muhammad consciously declared,

I have always had a very high opinion of Noble Drew Ali and Marcus Garvey and admired their courage in helping our people, the so called Negro, and appreciated their work. Both of these men were fine Muslims. The followers of Noble Drew Ali and Marcus Garvey should now follow me and cooperate with us in our work because we are only trying to finish up what those before us started. 3

According to Benyon as many as 10,000 to 15,000 ex-Garveyites were in the Nation of Islam movement in 1937⁴. Garvey had been the 'prophet' who had caught the ears of the listeners, having analysed that among the Blacks in the New World there was the existence of a dissatisfaction so deep that it amounts to helplessness of ever gaining a full life. His powerful phrases both in America and in Jamaica articulated this extreme dissatisfaction and disenchantment while at the same time they promise an imminent redemption. He spoke of the greatness of the Black 'race' and sang the triumphs of the Black nations - informing the Blacks that black skin was never a badge of shame but rather a glorious symbol of natural greatness.

1. G.E. Simpson, (1955), p.141.

2. Timothy Drew, a North Carolina Black man established the Moorish Science Temple in Newark, New Jersey in 1913. (see footnote 1. on page 15) Although the Moorish Science movement was essentially a religious movement, Drew was also concerned with the ideal that salvation of the Black man laid in the discovery of their national origin. At its peak the movement numbered twenty or thirty thousand. For a description of his movement, see A.H. Fauset, "Moorish Science Temple of America," in J. Milton Yinger, Religion Society and the Individual, New York, Macmillan Co., 1957), pp.498-507.

3. E. Beynon, (1938), p.898.

4. *ibid*, p.905.

These phrases were in themselves echoes ringing out from the call for liberation of the African slaves in the early days of slavery. The raising of the symbolic African banner and the cry for repatriation can be traced to the days of forced transportation of Africans to the New World. Early slave songs used to include clandestine references to conditions of slavery and to Africa disguised in Biblical terms. The consciousness of Africa was kept alive by the slaves who realised that they might not after all return to Africa in their lifetime. The Redemption and Repatriation dynamic was easily perpetuated by an oral tradition among illiterate slaves in prayers, hymns and in sermons. Biblical texts conveniently disguised the expressed dissatisfaction and secret dreams of the slaves, since the dynamic of Redemption is rooted in the Bible; the Scattering, the Exile, and the Return are all recorded in Biblical lores. Thus references to 'the millennium' when fulfilment will be realised in repatriation to Ethiopia or Africa could be relatively safely expressed within the wider society's framework of values.

Just as in the days of slavery Africa was a refuge from humiliation, a place where justice and freedom could be found and where blackness was not only acceptable but valued, so today in situations where hostile forces have been successful in their destructive role, there has been a continued maintenance of the orientation towards Africa or away from the West. This 'outward' looking has been prompted by the desire to preserve cultural values and to maintain a dignified identity against conditions of deprivation and denigration. It has been and is primarily, a defensive response against hostile forces which threaten the dignified existence of a people.

1. See Appendix XII, p.84.



For the Black man in the New World the search for and commitment to Black Africa has followed situations of economic deprivation, racial discrimination and segregation from the mainstream culture of society. It was a common response for the Black population in the New World to organise their own institutions when faced with situations of deprivation and when excluded from meaningful participation in the institutions of wider society. In the concluding years of the eighteenth century, two Black men Richard Allen and Absalom Jones formed the Free African Society after being forcibly ejected while praying in a White Church. This outward looking towards Africa was not difficult since Africa never fully faded from the minds of the slaves and their descendents. Melville Herskovits, in a painstaking research into African retentions in the New World, has shown that retentions of the African past can be found in language, religious custom and social organization. The captives who were brought in their hundreds of thousands across the Middle Passage kept alive the image of Africa in their marriage, birth and burial ceremonies and in other 'invisible' institutions.

While the constant barrier to a meaningful and dignified participation within society reorients the Blacks towards Africa, the debate as to the pros and cons of various 'back to Africa' schemes which dates back to the early attempts of White liberals to repatriate Blacks, in their anti-slavery campaigns, has kept the issue prominent in the minds of the Blacks in America and Jamaica. They are constantly confronted with this issue in their efforts to solve the problems of their everyday existence in White dominated societies.

1. 1941, p.203-5.

The raising of the African banner is symptomatic also of the lack of congruency between what society formally promises for all its citizens and the real conditions of the Blacks in America and Jamaica. Overt expressions of looking outward towards the Zion seem to follow situations of raised aspirations followed by disappointments. In the cases observed, the Blacks in America and Jamaica had hopes of a 'fairer deal' from society, but they generally found that there was no enhancement in either dignity nor affluence, and their participation in the political arena when accorded voting rights, had made little difference in their ability to improve their conditions and to redefine their status and identity. As social acrimony grew, once more the clamour for recognition of the dignity of a people took the form of an appeal to a mythical past.

The significance of both cults has been in the number of lower class Blacks who have been ready joiners, but recently it has been observed that many of the ideas and much of the mood of the movements have been absorbed by a wider social spectrum of younger generation Blacks in America and Jamaica. The appeal to Black middle and lower middle class and educated youths lies in the call to Black unity. These advocates embrace the creed of the cults because of their blackness. They tend to lift the 'Black Nationalist' tenets of the cults in their rejection of dominant White or Western culture, rather than subscribe to the Redemption, Salvation and Repatriation commitments of the cults. Nettleford noted:

Some of these exhibit a kind of brown guilt at being what they are and seem determined to correct their 'crime' for having enjoyed privilege and benefits in a system which continually denies these to the majority. Closely associated with these are the young intellectuals - many of them black and obvious beneficiaries of the social and political revolution of the late thirties. It is these people more than any other who have given Black Power its present form and intensity. 3

1. Eric Lincoln, (1961), p.211.
2. Rex Nettleford, (1970), p. 126.
3. Ibid. p.126.

For the majority of the members of the cults examined - the low status and poor Black population in the urban areas of America and Jamaica - the cults offer an escape from the concrete secular realm of wider society. The prophet or 'miracle man' has promised to deliver the faithful from whatever it is that ails them. His task is to formulate a 'final goal' which is inclusive and vivid for all who find their present circumstances painful and unacceptable. In performing this task the prophet has to appeal to the interests of this social group, so as to elicit social recognition of his role as a leader. It is the ability to elicit such social recognition from believers that legitimises his leadership role. Those who follow the prophet by joining the cult, participate in a common hope for a better future. Their hopes, expressed in the eschaton, reflect their traditional cultural values and ideological orientations and their concrete secular conditions rather than being drawn from a theological or 'other worldly' ideals. The Muslims for example are laying the foundation for a 'nation'; in the belief that in that nation they could enjoy freedom, fraternity, justice and a new dignified identity. They are concerned with the betterment of their lives economically, culturally and morally in the 'sweet here and now' not in the 'sweet bye and bye'. For the Muslims Heaven and Hell represent the state of mind, moral and quality of life of a people. The Resurrection is the acquiring of knowledge of one's dignified identity, nation and religion. To be ignorant of these information concerning oneself is to experience Hell. The Ras Tafarians on the other hand, hope to build their Heaven in Ethiopia where they hope to rule themselves and shape their own destinies. For them also Heaven is

in this world, in a nation where Blacks will be in control of their own social, economic and political institutions and where justice, love and a desirable identity shall be available to all Blacks.

Thus, in the Black ghettos and in the dirty streets and overcrowded tenements where life was cheap and hope was minimal and where Blacks were deprived of the common privileges of citizenship, Farrad and later Muhammad offered to lead the Blacks into the Millennium. Their message did not fall upon deaf ears. Within the values of American society Blacks had been judged and pronounced as social outcast and ascribed to the lowest social strata. These Blacks were ready therefore to follow a prophet who foretold the Golden Age that would be theirs, when the yoke of the White slave masters and their descendents would finally be thrown off. They were ready to challenge society's values, to repudiate American citizenship, to reject Western Culture and Western religious and political institutions in favour of a membership to an Asiatic confraternity. Similarly, the poor Blacks in the slums of Jamaica were ready to reject Western culture, established forms of Western Christianity and the political institutions of wider society in favour of an African brotherhood. For members of both cults life in the 'Babylon' can now be equated to the punishment of transgression of their forefathers. Their aim must be to prepare for life in another 'nation' - to Repatriate to the Zion (real or imagined) where they shall be in want no more.

creation on White skin. Against
of the ascribed identity. This
realms of the dominant

1. I am indebted to Eric Foner's *Free Soil, Free Men, Free States*
Lincoln, (1961) pp. 37-41

Conclusions

In the foregoing chapters we have looked at examples of societies which have not been able to provide a dignified identity and livelihood for some of its members in the urban areas. Many of these unemployed, underemployed and economically, politically and culturally deprived are also the Black population of these societies, a significant number of whom for several reasons have joined Black religious cults. In this concluding chapter an analysis will be made of the economic, social, political and cultural significance of membership in the Nation of Islam and the Ras Tafarian movements. We begin by examining the role of religious cults in situations of racial discriminations.

In general, groups faced with a constant environment of prejudice and discrimination on the basis of their identity, can respond by avoiding, accepting and rebelling¹ (by a show of aggressive behaviour) against the conditions. The most complete form of avoidance is to withdraw from being identified with a discriminated group. This is usually achieved by adopting another identity, by 'passing' into the dominant group or into a less discriminated group. 'Passing' is not possible where there is immediate 'visibility' as in cases where groups are identified by skin colour. In our examples Black skin unrelentingly acts as a barrier to total acceptability in societies which put a high premium on White skin. Another form of avoidance is to avoid the 'meaning' of the ascribed identity. This could be achieved by avoiding contact with members of the dominant group in wider society; the lack of contact

1. I am indebted to Eric Lincoln for this conceptual approach, Eric Lincoln, (1961) pp. 37-41.

minimises the frequency of reminders of one's lowly status. It also lessens the likelihood of being insulted and humiliated and reduces the occurrence of the breach of 'etiquette' of race relations, which may threaten personal security, harm psychologically and in the case of the South in the United States, may incur physical harm or death. Individuals seeking to avoid the 'meaning' of their ascribed identity, usually choose to interact in business and socially with members of their group only; and may move into towns or communities composed principally of members of their own group. Indeed, even when such residential segregation is initiated and enforced by the dominant group, those who are discriminated against, may prefer to live in the assigned residential area, rather than contend with the constant harrassment incident to living in the larger community. The relatively few Black intellectuals or 'Black Bourgeoisie' avoid situations of race relations and thus the 'meaning' of their ascribed identity by seeking to insulate themselves from contact with lower class Blacks and from the dominant group. They tend not to identify themselves with the common problems of their 'racial' group, but usually form a community unto themselves, organizing themselves into tight little cliques which play at being part of the wider society from which they are excluded. This group may also avoid the feeling of inferiority and futility by emphasizing and enhancing their status in terms of meeting the approved values of the dominant groups, which usually take the form of educational achievement and the acquirement

1. See O.G. Cox, (1948).

of professional skill. For many Blacks in the lowest socio-economic group however, belonging to a religious cult is one way of acquiring a new identity and of finding security within this identity. In addition, the communal aspect of a religious movement provides a substitute for associational life within wider society. Membership of a religious cult therefore facilitates the avoidance response of a discriminated group.

Acceptance as a response of the despised and discriminated against, is a difficult concept to define. In the context of 'race relations', acceptance cannot be seen as a whole hearted acceptance of the social conditions characteristic of the caste system of India¹. It is essentially an adjustment of behaviour in an attitude of resignation, futility or accommodation, retained among some deprived, discriminated against and disprivileged peoples. Exactly when acceptance has taken place and the degree of acceptance of a particular social situation is difficult to ascertain. Many individuals may appear to accommodate in order to survive, but may privately reject the whole status pattern and its implications. Indeed, while seemingly accepting a humiliating situation, they may show their rejection in other ways; whether consciously or sub-consciously. On the conscious level rejection may be shown by overt sabotaging at work, in acts of arson, spitting in food being served and on the sub-conscious level by prolonged absenteeism, apathy and disinterest. We can assume however, that while few Blacks will exhibit whole hearted acceptance of discrimination against themselves and special privilege for

1. See O.C. Cox, (1948).

White people, many will consciously defer in specific situations in which inferiority is implied. It is in this context that we translate accommodation or deferring behaviour in specific situations of racial discrimination or prejudice as acceptance; remembering that this should not be misinterpreted as whole hearted acceptance of inferior status or race. The role of religion in this instance is to make meaningful these acts of acceptance to the deprived, disprivileged and discriminated against Black people. The religious myths make meaningful the acts of acceptance by interpreting situations of deprivation and discrimination as the situation of 'test' before the eschaton - the conditions concomitant with the period of 'exile' in the 'Babylon' before the final Repatriation or Deliverance is made. Thus, acceptance, which for many has been the response in situations of racial discrimination and which has implied inferiority on the part of the disprivileged and discriminated against, can now be transformed by the religious doctrines and myths to mean the punishment of a 'chosen' people who await their imminent Deliverance, Repatriation and inheritance of the final goals.

The final response in our analysis is that of rebelliousness or aggression. Among the oppressed, aggression may be expressed in very different forms and like acceptance it is difficult at times to distinguish the difference between accommodative behaviour and aggressive ones. To speak, write, and to agitate against the force of oppression are common expressions of direct aggression. Boycott, inefficiency, apathy, sloppy work and

a refusal to observe the customary forms of 'etiquette' are direct means of expressing personal aggression. Not all expressions of aggression however, are overt, direct or verbalised. A refusal to be moved, to enter into 'a dialogue' and a general attitude of non-cooperation may also be regarded as aggressive action. Aggression may even take the form of meekness and deference as with apparent humility and self-efacement. The sufferance of 'turning the other cheek' is often translated as a means of ultimate victory, in that, from the suffering power is derived. Indeed, among the oppressed Blacks in the New World, 'aggressive meekness' has been a common device for ridiculing the White man. While the White oppressor egotistically accepts the meek behaviour at face value, the Black man may be laughing at him secretly for his gullibility. Aggression may also be introverted or misdirected: members of an oppressed group often turn their rage against themselves or against members of other oppressed groups.¹

Within this context of aggression we can say that the Blacks in the New World have frequently acted aggressively or expressed aggression. Despite the expressions and acts of aggression which the oppressed Blacks in the New World have displayed, the Black man has been portrayed as 'childlike', lazy, passive and content with his lot and as a character who adjusted easily to the most unsatisfactory social conditions, indicating that aggression as an expression of Black discontent has had little serious consideration. This is so because the myth of the docile Black was used to validate the concept of African inferiority based

1. See F. Fanon, 1967, p.40 ff. and Ch.5.

on the argument that tribal identities and the moral strength of Black people were submerged in slavery and that African cultures were so inherently weak that faced with the 'superior' culture of the White West, they capitulated leaving the Black man without any moral caliber or worthy cultural past. This argument was used by Whites as a weapon of scorn against the Blacks to the extent that the Blacks in the New World, as products of many generations of people ashamed of their African past, have developed a hate for residues of their Africanness. The development of the Black cults of liberation has been in part successful attempts to disprove the 'old lie' of the docile Black. Affiliation to and a reassertion of their Blackness and Africanness combined with the rejection of the 'American creed'¹ and the Jamaican ethos,² are acts of aggression which belie the stereotype image of the docile Black. The unease shown by many members of wider society towards the members of the cults indicates that they regard members of the cults as aggressive. The role of the religious cults here is to provide a means for Blacks to rebel against the stereotype image and the values of society by whose terms they have been allocated an undignified livelihood and identity. Thus, the religious cults provide a successful means of expressing the customary response of aggression against racial discrimination.

In situations of oppression, the oppressed accepts, avoids and militates or rebels against the oppressive conditions imposed upon him. It is beyond the scope of this paper to attempt to show when individuals

1. For an excellent interpretation of the American creed see Arnold Rose, *The Negro in America*, (1957), pp.1 ff.
2. The Jamaican motto, 'Out of Many One People', reflects its multi-racial ethic.

or groups would choose to avoid, accept or rebel against oppression. This may be a useful area for future research, since there has been no attempt made by sociologists to show the characteristics of groups or individuals who are likely to choose one or other, or all methods of responding to their oppression. At this stage we may draw the conclusion that in the everyday activities of most Black individuals or groups in the New World, many acts of avoidance, acceptance and aggression are present, for example, during the course of the day a Black person may avoid situations of discriminations, he may also accept some of the 'etiquette' of behaviour imposed upon him by travelling 'Jim Crow', and while at work he may display aggression by sabotaging the work situation by 'going slow', faking illness, dropping tools etc. The degree of each response and the various combinations of responses would change according to the economic and physical conditions of the individual and his social environment. It is hypothesised here, that members of an oppressed group would attempt all three means of resolving their conditions at one time or another, joining one or other communities, movements, associations, or even acting individually to facilitate the response of avoidance, acceptance and aggression. The significance of the religious cults is that they offer a combination of all three responses as shown above, which provide us, if not with the reason as to why the oppressed seek a religious salvation, at least with an explanation as to what being a member of a Black religion can mean to the oppressed Black. It is in the role of provider of the means for suitable responses in situations of racial

3. In 1938 Boyson observed that
among the Muslims and that they were
of living. B. Boyson, (1938)

discrimination that Black religious cults play an important part in the 'race' situations of America and Jamaica.

More specifically, the fundamental attraction of the Nation of Islam and the Ras Tafariian religious cults is their passion for group solidarity. The stress upon the outward manifestation of fraternal responsibility is a strong attraction for many Blacks whose economic and civil insecurity is often extreme. For example, when a member of the Nation of Islam was arrested in New York, and several hundreds of his Muslim 'brothers' turned up at the precinct in a New York police station, in a quite show of fraternal solidarity to insist that 'justice be done', waiting patiently and quietly until the accused man was released, then taking him away with them; membership to the local Temple immediately spiralled.¹ Their show of solidarity had impressed the Black community. Similarly, with the Ras Tafariians as police drives against the cultivation and traffic of marihuana (ganja), and prison sentences of this crime increased, so locksmen acting together in a solidary group against the law increased; as the University Report said,

...the police have stimulated their sense of common grievance, and may have strengthened rather than weakened the ideological respect for violence.²

In the context of socio-political and cultural-ethical deprivation a particular motive for joining the cults is to improve one's self or one's own social group.³ This improvement is sought by those who are sensitive to the inadequacies of their immediate environment in comparison

1. Eric Lincoln, (1961), p.32.
2. M. G. Smith, Augier, and Nettleford, (1960), p.36; see also Rex Nettleford, (1970), pp.81-85.
3. In 1938 Beynon observed that there were no known case of unemployment among the Muslim and that they were beginning to improve their standard of living. E.Beynon, (1938), p.905; see also Essien Udom, (1962), p.10.

to the middle class 'style of life' and who are also aware that the inadequacies are remediable. Membership of either cult could mean the membership of an organization which aims at establishing private business and organizations for the benefit of members. Both cults in their attempts to be economically independent from wider society, have made efforts to establish private business enterprises which employ and serve members of the movements. The Nation of Islam has been particularly successful in establishing economic enterprises and in providing economic support. In the Nation, individuals who observe the doctrines of the cult, can expect to be assisted in times of unemployment, financial difficulties, sickness, death or other distress. A few may also enjoy a steady middle class job in the administration of the Nation's business. Though the Ras Tafarians have not been as successful in establishing economic enterprises, (mainly because their disdain for wage earning in wider society prevents them from acquiring money and accumulating funds for organizing economic enterprises) those who have managed to establish private businesses have employed Ras Tafarians in an effort to provide economic support for their members.

More generally, the Nation of Islam and the Ras Tafarians cults with their open church doors to Blacks, offer to the uprooted and abandoned people in America and Jamaica, some kind of community, either to replace the older rural community patterns which the new migrants had left behind, or to provide an entry into a new community in a new town; giving men and women some place in an otherwise hostile world.

The cults also provide at small costs to people with meagre means, a channel for important creative recreation. The rituals and myths construction activities which involve the construction of stories, songs, poems and speeches, release the economically poor and stigmatised from the drabness, drugery and humiliation of everyday living in economically and socially depressed areas.

Members of both cults are also given opportunities for political action. Religious meeting places are often the venue where officers speak at length on political issues. The subjects discussed include White people and their relationship with Black people, Western cultural and economic systems, and the political, social and economic remedies members should seek. At religious meetings the powerful oppressors are denounced, Black symbols are exalted and members rejoice over the knowledge that the existing power relationship is nearly at its end - the deliverance is at hand.

The cults thus offer a good deal of group solidarity and an exaggerated sense of consciousness of kind. They have also deliberately moulded a new identity for their members. This identity is seen in terms of spritual cleanliness and renewal, in part in opposition to the denigrated 'Negro' image and also, with the aim of bringing to the attention of the Blacks and Whites in society, the urgent need to recognise the origin of the Black population, in order to redress the imbalance of history's systematic weakening of any claim to achievements by descendents of Africans in the New World. In this role the cults have been a 'revitalizing' force,

both movements have played major parts in the development of Black pride and Black confidence which can only be nurtured in an independent Black movement, if we accept Professor Toynbee's observation that in Modern Western Protestant societies, a man who happens to be born with a different colour skin could not hope to be accepted whatever his spritual or intellectual merit. The Black skinned convert,

may have found spritual salvation in the White man's faith he may have acquired the White man's culture and learnt to speak his language with the tongue of an angel, he may have become an adept in the White man's economic technique, and yet it profits him nothing so long as he has not changed his skin.¹

Although one may not share the Professor's pessimistic view totally, there can be no doubt that many Blacks must have experienced much of this hopelessness in the course of their everyday lives as they confront the numerous unrelenting barriers against their advancement. For many Blacks this sense of hopelessness in the 'race' situation is exacerbated by economic and political privation. Membership to the cult has helped to provide economic security, an outlet for political action, a sense of pride and confidence and a reassertion of the value of blackness. On the ideological level both cults provide explanations for the plight of the poor, miserable and degraded, and offer a hope in the millenium when life would be more meaningful and enduring.

From the above it could be concluded that in meeting the economic, political and religious requirements and ego needs of hundreds of lower class Blacks, the cults foster escapism and withdrawal from involvement with wider society, thus making no effort to change the existing conditions

1. A.J. Toynbee, (1935), p.224.

in these societies. The economic and political activities of cult members are confined within the stigmatised and deprived communities, representing a withdrawal from the mainstream economic and political life. Further, their ritualistic call to look towards the millennium diverts attention away from the institutions of wider society. And, their ritualistic practice of hymn singing, exaltations and verbal violence serves to exhaust the members emotionally - draining their energy from its possible use in attempts to modify the institutions in wider society. Finally the heightened brotherhood bond for members of an 'in group' counterbalances the antagonism felt for the oppressors thus dissipating the possible conflict situation which could bring change.

In making these statements we enter into the classic debate in sociology, that concerning the relationship between religion and social change. For over a century historians and social scientists have been concerned to explain the role of religion in society. In particular, efforts have been made to explain why people of the lowest economic strata in urban areas turn to religion. Writing in 1824, William Cobbett accused the Methodists of diverting the attention of deprived people in the industrial areas in England from examining the possibilities for changing their social conditions, by continually telling them to thank the Lord for the blessings they enjoy. Cobbett described the Methodists as the 'bitterest foes of freedom in England'.¹ In 1870 W.E.H. Lecky claimed that Methodism by its 'civilizing mission' among the working classes, saved England from violent revolution in the late eighteenth and early

1. Cited in E.P. Thompson, (1968), p.434.

nineteenth century: a theory which was given greater support by the French historian Elie Halevy, in which he claimed that the great Methodist Evangelical revival in the eighteenth century, provided England with an extraordinary stability during a period of revolution and crises.¹ This argument is linked with the often repeated accusation that religion engenders quietism, which is summed up in Charles Kingsley's epithet to religion as 'the opium of the masses'. The notion behind the epithet is that people turn to religion for the same reason that they use opiates, that is, to seek consolation, or as an analgesic for soothing their ailments. Religion is seen as providing consolation in its optimistic eschaton.

This view has led many social scientists to share Halevy's conclusion that religious movements may act to inhibit societal change. In a summary of the debate on the role of religion among the working class in England, Thompson cites how the Methodist has been accused of diverting the attention of the English working class, from examining the possibility for changing their social conditions, by preoccupying them with sabbatarianism and eschatology.² Thompson adds that Methodism was guilty of weakening the poor from within, by adding to them the active ingredient of submission.³

The clearest recent statement of this 'opiate' view is made by the functionalist theorist Kingsley Davis:

The greater his (man's) disappointment in this life, the greater his faith in the next. Thus the existence of goals beyond this world serves to compensate people for frustrations they inevitably experience in striving to reach socially valuable goals. ⁴

1. Cited in E.P. Thompson, (1968), p. 386.

2. See *ibid*, Chapters 2 & 11.

3. *Ibid*, p.390.

4. Kingsley Davis, (1948), p.532.

The restraining influence exercised by religion can be exaggerated, religion does not always exercise a baneful influence in their believers. We only have to remind ourselves of the great diversity in religious doctrines and of groups within a religious movement itself to avoid making such a generalization. The extent of involvement with wider society differs between the Ras Tafarians and the Muslim. And among the Ras Tafarians and the Muslims there are those who remained conservative in politics and respectable and pious in behaviour and others who are found in the ranks of the radicals. The splits within religious movements are precisely because the more radical members are often opposed to the conservatism of leaders and other members. Indeed, it could be argued as Hobsbawm did, that religious movements run parallel with social and political consciousness. Hobsbawm noted that the Methodist recruitment in England in 1850, were rapid in periods of mounting popular agitation and conversely as popular agitation declined, so did the recruitments of the sect. This parallelism Hobsbawm explained by saying that either, radical agitation drove other people into religious movements as a reaction against the radicals, or that people became religious and radicals for the same reasons.¹ According to Hobsbawm, in the case of the Methodist in 1850, there are evidence to support both views. In the case of the cults in our discussion, it is difficult to measure the extent of parallelist development of the religious movements with other movements of popular agitation as in Hobsbawm's thesis, since the waves of recruitment to both religious cults have either not been carefully kept, as in the case of Ras Tafarians, or have been a deeply guarded secret as in the Nation of Islam. Furthermore,

1. E.J. Hobsbawm, (1959), pp.129-30; see also E.J. Hobsbawm, 'Methodism and the Threat of Revolution,' History Today, February, (1957), VII, p.124.

to trace the claim of parallelism is beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that before any conclusions can be arrived at, the cults must be examined and analysed in the context of the whole spectrum of Black protest movements which have risen as mechanisms for survival and resistance to racist oppression and socio-political and economic deprivation.

However, attempts have been made by observers of these cults to relate these religious movements to social change. For Nettleford, the Ras Tafariian cult serves as an agent for revolutionary change. Nettleford's conclusion derives from his observation that the dynamic relationship of the Ras Tafariian cult with wider society has brought about significant changes in society's institutions and environment.¹ It is important to note here that when sociologists make their analysis of the various religious cults or sects as they relate to social change, they seldom use the same definitions for terms like 'change', or 'revolution'. Nettleford's concept of 'revolution' for example is a relatively narrow one. For Nettleford revolution is interpreted as any attempt by people to reform their own institutions to meet new demands or to withstand new pressures.² Clearly, this definition of 'revolution' is usually given to 'reform' since it suggests slight modifications rather than a radical change in society's major institutions of production and consumption.

For Orlando Patterson the Ras Tafariian movement as a millenarian cult is neither an agent for revolutionary nor reformist social action, but serves as an outlet for suppressed involvement. The cult acts as a safety valve in situation of extreme tension, dissipating the rising tension of incipient revolutionary tide. Patterson sees the emergence of millenarian

1. Rex Nettleford, (1970), p.109.

2. Ibid, p.45.

movements as symptomatic of a passionate need to be accepted by and to be involved in society. Thus, he claims that these movements, 'the manifestation of the psychology of withdrawal' are likely to arise where people have been excluded from meaningful participation in social life, and that the emergence of the Ras Tafari movement indicates a total involvement in the society born of a passionate need to be accepted by it. Lanternari's conclusion concurs with Patterson's, in that both found that the Ras Tafari cult is essentially an escapist movement. Neither however, undertook detailed studies of the West Kingston cult to arrive at their conclusion. Lanternari made his analysis on the basis of Simpson's study of 1953, since which time a more extensive study has been carried out by Smith, Augier, and Nettleford. According to Smith and his colleagues, it is not possible to speak of the Ras Tafari cult as a group embodying one social dynamic. Some cultists are revivalist in orientation and origin, some are quietist, others are committed to a political and military struggle, though all are involved with their poverty and deprivation and are concerned with the underprivileged groups of Blacks in Jamaica. Their demand for repatriation however, reflects an idealistic notion of reforms rather than a desire to change the system of production and consumption. According to Smith and his colleagues, from this demand it might be possible to conclude that the cultists are essentially showing a desire for withdrawing from society and that therefore, the cult is an escapist movement.

There is not much debate regarding the orientation of the Nation of Islam. Most observers are agreed that the Nation represents a struggle to provide a meaningful social, cultural and moral life for the Blacks in America. It seeks an outlet for Black advancement and assists its members to strive for traditional American middle class goals, whilst maintaining

1. Orlando Patterson, (1964), pp.15-17.
2. V. Lanternari, (1963), p.136.
3. (1960), Ch. IV.

the identity of Black men within their community. Under Elijah Muhammad, the aim has been towards the capture of self sufficiency and socio-political power. What Garvey saw in principle and on the level of a whole continent for Blacks, Muhammad set to work at the level of small business enterprises and small time agriculture. Under his guide however, Muslims are expected to live within the American law, for Islam means a submission to a supreme law and according to Muhammad, no discipline of submission is possible if lawlessness is encouraged. He emphasised that Blacks must not only live by the law of American wider society, but they must also pursue all that law can give them, showing as Eric Lincoln pointed out a pragmatic adjustment to political reality.¹ Though the rhetoric of the Nation is against Whites as 'possessors' of vital social, economic and political power, the cultists do not question the legitimacy of their monopoly of power, nor have they sought to alter the system of production and consumption.

The Nation appears to be playing the age old role of the Black church by mitigating the utter hopelessness of the Blacks and by being the prime source of strength and leadership for Black dissent. It is certainly clear that the prime concern of the cult has been in the regeneration of 'fallen' persons, in which role the cult has had many successes as Malcolm X said,

Mr. Muhammad has succeeded... where Western Christianity has failed. When a man becomes a Muslim, it doesn't make any difference what he was before as long as he has stopped doing this. He is looked upon with honor and respect and is not judged for what he was doing yesterday. And this, I think, explains why we have so many men who were in prison following Mr. Muhammad today.²

1. (1961), p.274.

2. Quoted in *ibid*, p. 31.

If the Nation of Islam appears to be 'militant' or 'revolutionary', it is because the cult is essentially an activist movement. Indeed, it is the movement's emphasis on action that makes it appealing to youths and Black men who are not bound by the accommodationist principles of traditional Christianity. Most youths who joined the cult were those without strong roots in Christianity, and the men had usually already dissociated themselves from the Christian doctrine they were brought up within.¹

To sum up, it remains to be said that in this paper, an attempt has been made, to outline the themes for understanding the Black cults which developed in America and Jamaica during the Great Depression and which are still flourishing today, in countries where the Blacks remain a deprived group. These themes have not been exhaustive, but they have helped to show the dilemma of lower class Blacks in American and Jamaican societies. Faced with institutional weaknesses and contradictory values the deprived Blacks of these countries have formulated their manifesto of identity, marking the beginning of their attempt to tear away the 'mask' or 'veil' so as to reveal their black skin with a new pride. This manifesto, drawn up by and for people in desperate situations, is summed up in the doctrines of the cults, which made a philosophy of 'Black nationalism'; which proclaimed the Black 'race' as the primogenitor of all civilization and which saw in blackness all that is good.²

As a general conclusion it can now be pointed out that the emergence of Black cults is not a sign of any inherent religiousity of the so called Negro as Herskovits³ and others have postulated, it derives from the comparatively meagre participation of Blacks in other institutional forms of society's culture. And, though religious resolution to deprivation may

1. See footnote 4, on page 50.

2. For the Nation of Islam see Eric Lincoln, (1961), p.77; for the Ras Tafari see G.E. Simpson, (1955), pp.134-139.

3. M. Herskovits, (1938).

The Bank's share of ...
not facilitate 'real' change, the resentment expressed in an ideology which
rejects and radically devalues the society at least symbolically transforms
society making it temporarily bearable.

- Wall patriots
- Managers, clerks and other bank
- Local and national politicians
- Perhaps the most important
- Scientists
- Lawyers and doctors
- Firemen (except fire departments)
- Other laborers
- Education and training systems
- Scientists, engineers and inventors
- Director tenets
- Whisper network
- Embassy and consulates
- Agents (not elsewhere)
- Chauffeurs and truck and delivery drivers
- Travellers, transporters and shipping agents
- Officials and inspectors (local)
- Police
- Teachers and gas attendants
- Advertising agents and other
- Baristas, waiters and floor sweepers
- Lawyers, judges and justices
- Doctors, dentists and opticians, etc.
- Newspeakers and cronies
- Baristas
- Bookkeepers and other clerks
- Management and systems
- Officials and inspectors (local)
- Office appliance services
- Local teachers
- Officials and inspectors (local)
- Police
- Plans of machinery
- Relatives
- Engineers (mechanical)
- Soldiers, sailors, etc.
- Accountants and auditors
- Street cleaners
- Civil engineers and architects
- Firemen (fire dept.)
- Officials and inspectors (local)
- Carpenters
- Electricians

Source: Taken from ...
Political ...
Table 12, p. 27.

Appendix I

The Black's share of selected Public Service Jobs; Chicago, 1930

	Number of Black workers	Per cent which Blacks were of all workers	
Porters and cooks	16	66.1	
Janitors and sextons	116	27.0	
Mail carriers	631	16.0	
Messengers, errand and office boys	8	17.4	
Social and welfare workers	5	11.9	
Garbage men and scavengers	42	11.7	
Mechanics	10	11.5	
Charwomen and cleaners	3	10.7	
Firemen (except locomotive, Fire Dept.)	20	9.5	
Other laborers	384	9.5	
Probation and truant officers	17	8.8	
Chemist, assayers and metallurgists	6	8.5	
Elevator tenders	5	8.2	
Trained nurses	8	7.5	
Marshals and constables	3	7.1	
Agents (not elsewhere classified)	14	6.9	
Chauffeurs and truck and tractor drivers	35	5.7	
Draymen, teamsters and carriage drivers	13	5.3	
Officials and inspectors (U.S.)	43	5.2	
Clerks	185	4.9	
Plumbers and gas steamfitters	8	4.4	
Advertising agents and others	43	3.9	
Guards, watchmen and door keepers	20	3.8	
Lawyers, judges and justices	9	3.6	
Cranemen, deckmen and hoistmen, etc.	1	3.3	
Housekeepers and stewards	2	3.3	
Sheriffs	14	3.1	
Bookkeepers and cashiers	7	2.9	
Stenographers and typists	29	2.7	
Officials and inspectors (city)	48	2.5	
Office appliance operators	1	2.4	
School teachers	45	2.3	
Officials and inspectors (state)	7	2.2	
Policemen	152	2.1	
Oilers of machinery	1	2.0	
Detectives	13	1.9	
Engineers (stationary)	9	1.7	
Soldiers, sailors, marines	4	1.6	
Accountants and auditors	3	1.4	
Street cleaners	8	1.2	*
Civil engineers and surveyors	5	1.0	
Firemen (Fire Dept)	27	1.0	
Officials and inspectors (county)	3	0.8	
Carpenters	1	0.8	
Electricians	3	0.6	
* Total: 2,433		4.5	

* There were no Blacks in 621 Public Service Occupations.

Source: Taken from H.F. Gosnell, Negro Politicians, the rise of Negro Politics in Chicago, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1935. Table XIX, p.377.

How the labour needs of Midwest Metropolis were met
between 1920 and 1930*

Type of employment	Number of workers absorbed	How Black labour was utilised
Unskilled labour in stockyards, packing plants, steel mills, stores, warehouses, and Wharves.	10,000 men	Black labour of both sexes supplied virtually the whole demand as Whites moved up.
	2,670 women	
Servants	28,000 men	10,000 Black men supplied about one third of the demand for men servants. Black women supplied almost all of the demand for women servants. Two thirds of Black women migrants became servants.
	14,000 women	
Semi-skilled factory workers	36,000 men	8,000 Black men were employed: 500 in the stockyards; 2,000 in garages; 1,100 in laundries, others went into general factory work. 8,000 Black women were employed, supplying three quarters of the demand; 5,000 in laundries; 1,100 to garment factories; while others went into general factory work.
	11,000 women	

* Taken from H.R.Cayton and St.Clair Drake, Black Metropolis,
(1946) Table 10, p.229.

Appendix III

Manual labour Jobs with highest proportion of Black men: 1930

Occupation	Black's share of work (%)	Number of Blacks	Conditions of work
Garage labour	58.5	1,860	Low pay, exposure, very dirty.
Coal yard labour	40.5	1,525	Low pay, exposure, very dirty.
Stockyard labour	34.2	1,640	Very heavy and dirty
Labour in stores	31.8	3,360	Low pay.
Packing and slaughter labour	28.7	1,960	Very dirty.
Laundry operatives	26.3	1,470	Low pay, extreme heat, dampness.
General labour	25.0	7,500	Low pay, insecurity, exposure.
Steel mill labour	15.0	4,000	Heavy work often very hot and hazardous.
Railroad labour	14.0	1,815	Low pay, exposure.
Building labour	13.3	2,850	Insecurity and intense competition from foreign born.
Road and street labour	13.0	567	Low pay and intense competition from foreign born.
Total number of Black men employed		28,547	

Source: Adapted from H.R. Cayton and St.Clair Drake, Black Metropolis, 1946, Table 8, p.222.

Unemployment among Blacks in Midwest Metropolis, five years after
the Depression began, compared with unemployment of the
White population

Occupation	Colour	Number of persons at work in 1930	Number of persons still at work	Number of persons displaced	Percentage displaced	Excess of Blacks displaced
Professional, proprietary, and managerial	White	229,000	223,000	6,000	3.0	5 X
	Black	7,000	5,900	1,100	15.0	
Clerical	White	245,000	230,000	15,000	6.0	3 X
	Black	5,000	4,000	1,000	20.0	
Skilled	White	236,000	216,000	20,000	9.0	3 X
	Black	9,000	7,000	2,000	30.0	
Clerical semi- skilled	White	273,000	247,000	26,000	10.0	3 X
	Black	27,000	18,000	9,000	33.0	
Unskilled	White	134,000	116,000	18,000	14.0	2 X
	Black	29,000	22,000	7,000	24.0	
Service	White	89,000	78,000	11,000	12.0	2 X
	Black	46,000	34,000	12,000	26.0	

Source: Adapted from H.R.Cayton and St.Clair Drake, Black Metropolis, 1946, Table 4, p.217.

Appendix VPercentage distribution of family income in
Chicago, 1935-36

Income Scale	All families	American born White	Foreign born White	American born Black
Under 500	13.7	12.0	13.1	30.9
500-900	18.4	14.7	19.6	37.0
1,000-1,999	39.8	39.7	42.0	25.9
2,000-2,999	18.2	21.1	16.9	4.3
3,000-4,999	8.0	9.7	7.3	1.1
Over -5,000	1.9	2.8	1.1	0.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Adapted from Family Income in Chicago, 1935-36,
United States Department of Labor, Bureau of
Labor Statistics, Bulletin No. 642, Vol. I
Washington, D.C., 1939, Table 3, p.8.

Appendix VI

Available workers who were seeking work
in March 1940 (Percentage)*

	** Seeking work
American born White.....	21.7%
Foreign born White.....	15.9%
Blacks.....	40.4%

* Percentage based on total persons 'in the labour market' for each
'racial' group.

** Seeking work refers to persons without regular or emergency jobs

Source: Census of 1940, cited in H.R. Cayton and St. Clair Drake,
Black Metropolis, (1946) p.216.

Appendix VII'Racial' composition of the population of Jamaica: 1960

Black	78.1
Coloured	18.3
East Indian	1.7
Chinese	0.6
White	0.5
Other	0.8
Total	100.0 %
Total population: 1,609814	

Appendix VIIIEducational experience of Jamaican residents,
over 7 years old, classified by 'race', 1943

	Illiterate	Elementary school	Secondary or technical	Pre-professional or professional	Total Number of People
Black	28.1	70.5	1.1	0.3	794,574
Coloured	13.8	75.1	9.8	1.3	179,532
White	3.8	35.0	48.1	13.1	12,477
Chinese	13.9	73.6	12.0	0.4	9,234
East Indian	48.6	49.1	2.1	0.2	21,387
Syrian	5.6	46.1	46.4	1.9	857
Total Percent	25.6	70.4	3.4	0.6	1,018,955

Source: Eighth Census of Jamaica, 1943, Table 108, p.54.

Percent distribution of wages in Jamaica
 week ending 12 December 1947, by race of worker and amount

Wages in shillings	Landholdings in Jamaica, 1943 classified by size and landholders' colour					Total Holdings	Total Acreage	All
	Black	Coloured	Indian	Cyprian	Other			
Holdings by Size	Whites	Blacks	Coloured	Others	Total Holdings	Total Acreage		
100-199 acres	73	193	222	9	497	67,149		
200-499 acres	89	99	170	23	381	120,074		
500-999 acres	81	38	88		207	146,294		
1000 acres +	168	36	125	4	333	921,203		
Total large holdings	411	366	605	36	1,318	1,254,720		
Total landholders	969	51,163	12,398	1,062	66,173	1,793,668		
Large holdings as percent of total	42.2	0.07	4.9	3.4	2.0	70.0		

Source: Eighth Census of Jamaica, 1943, Table 200, p. 306, and Table 211, pp. 325-7.

Percent distribution of wages in Jamaica
week ending 12 December 1942, by race of worker and amount

Wages in Shillings	Black	Coloured	White	Jews	Chinese	East Indian	Syrian	Other	All
0-10/-	58.5	32.1	1.8	1.7	6.1	49.7	2.5	24.0	52.4
10-20/-	26.35	21.7	16.2	11.1	13.3	35.1	9.2	13.3	25.6
20-40/-	10.65	19.8	9.4	15.1	41.0	10.9	18.5	24.0	12.3
40-60/-	2.94	11.2	11.1	14.1	24.0	2.3	27.6	22.0	4.7
60-80/-	0.94	6.3	10.2	15.1	7.3	1.1	13.5	6.9	2.1
80-100/-	0.33	3.2	8.9	9.4	3.4	0.4	11.0	2.0	1.0
100-150/-	0.23	3.8	15.1	13.8	3.8	0.3	11.6	2.0	1.1
150-200/-	0.04	1.1	9.2	9.4	0.4	0.1	3.7	---	0.4
200-300/-	0.02	0.7	10.0	6.9	0.4	0.05	1.8	2.0	0.3
300-400/-	---	0.1	3.8	1.7	---	0.03	0.6	2.0	0.1
400/- +	---	---	3.3	1.7	0.3	0.02	---	---	---
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total workers	151,101	33,630	2,990	233	1,526	4,770	163	45	194,458

Source: Eight Census of Jamaica, 1943, Table 125, pp.220-1.

Male wage-earners and unpaid workers by occupation and race,
Jamaica, January 1943

Occupation	Black	Coloured	White	Jews	Chinese	East Indian	Syrian	Other	All
Managers, farm	20	42	44	1	--	--	1	--	108
Managers, factory	11	36	45	6	9	--	--	--	107
Managers, construction	14	18	9	--	--	--	--	--	41
Managers, transport	26	31	25	1	--	1	--	--	84
Total managers	71	127	123	8	9	1	1	--	340
Trade, wholesale	6	27	49	9	21	--	5	--	117
Trade, retail	41	90	33	3	46	6	16	--	235
Total, commercial executive	47	117	82	12	67	6	21	--	352
Finance, managers	2	7	41	--	--	--	--	--	50
Teachers	626	324	49	1	6	5	--	2	1,013
Accountants	34	217	103	7	7	2	0.2	1	373
Other professionals	374	496	283	11	10	2	0.1	11	1,198
All professionals	1,034	1,037	435	19	23	29	3	4	2,584
Civil Service officers	34	118	54	4	--	1	--	--	211
Military officers	2	2	48	2	--	--	--	--	54
Total Public Services	36	120	102	6	--	1	--	--	265
Unskilled manual workers	38,426	4,151	48	2	27	794	2	8	43,458
Total workers	162,332	31,225	2,310	185	1,512	5,404	127	41	203,358
Total executives	1,190	1,408	883	45	99	37	25	4	3,691
% of all executives	32.2	38.2	24.8	1.2	2.7	1.0	0.6	0.1	100.0
Executives as % of all workers in racial category	0.73	4.52	38.2	24.3	6.52	0.68	19.7	9.3	1.82

Source: Eighth Census of Jamaica, 1943, Table 92, pp 179 ff.

Appendix XII

A selection of written slave songs which survived, illustrating
the clandestine infancy of an image of Africa.

Deep River, my home is over
the Jordan, Deep River
Lord I want to cross over
into camp ground.

From J.B.T. Marsh, The Story of the Jubilee
Singers with Their Songs, Boston, 1880, p.196.

I cannot stay in Hell one day,
Heav'n shall-a be my home;
I'll sing and pray my soul away,
Heav'n shall-a be my home.

From Allen, W.F., Ware, C.P., Garrison, L.M.,
Slave Songs of the United States, New York,
1867, p.7.

I asked my Lord shall I ever be the one,
(I asked my Lord) shall I ever be the one,
Shall I ever be the one,
(I asked my Lord I be),
To go sailin', sailin', sailin', sailin',
Gwine over to the Promised Land?

ibid, p.102.

De trumpet sound in de oder bright land,
And I yearde from heaven today,
De trumpet sound in de oder bright land,
And I yearde from heaven today.

ibid, p.2.

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