The Black Jews of Harlem: Representation, Identity, and Race, 1920–1939

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Introduction

> Mr. M. Shapiro, a mild mannered Jewish business man, stopped to chat a few moments with his kosher butcher. The butcher was chuckling: "Funny thing," he explained, "Some colored people came in this morning and wanted some kosher meat. Real negro people from up in Harlem. They say they are Jews!" He laughed.
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> *The New York Sun* January 29, 1929

> Rabbi W.M. Matthew is celebrating his sixteenth year as head of the Commandment Keepers, the Harlem Jewish sect. . . . In defense of his program, Rabbi Matthews [sic] explains that the philosophy of the Jews is to acquire wealth and command respect. . . . Rabbi Matthew is certain that the sooner the black man is imbued with this philosophy, the sooner will come the race's forward movement.
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> *The Afro-American* February 8, 1936

IN THE EARLY DECADES OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, THERE APPEARED IN NEW York and other American cities a set of unusual religious congregations which came to be known as the Black Jews. African in ancestry, Jewish in faith, these groups claimed to be the direct and true heirs of ancient Israel. Although they did not forge strong ties with the wider African American or Jewish communities, they drew steady interest from both

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American Quarterly, Vol. 55, No. 2 (June 2003)

minority communities' newspapers.[1] Coverage in the black and Jewish presses, however, differed markedly. White Jewish journalists often viewed the sects with incredulity or amusement. Like the *Sun's* jocular butcher, Jewish observers marveled that "real negro people" might call themselves Jews. By contrast, black papers such as the *Afro-American* had far less to say. They reported matter-of-factly on the tenure of Rabbi Matthew and other Black Jewish leaders and provided a tolerant forum for their views on religion and racial uplift.

These differing journalistic attitudes reflected discrepancies between black and Jewish discourses of identity in the early twentieth century.[2] Jews, during the interwar years, were caught up in a struggle over racial definitions—of themselves and other groups—the outcome of which would bear heavily on their ability to move up the American social ladder. They faced a basic question: whether Jews, long depicted as a "dark" and different people, were a distinct or a white race? This issue raised mixed feelings that Jews played out in several venues, including the Yiddish press, which reported frequently on anti-black racism and argued that African Americans were, in effect, "America's Jews." African Americans, for their part, drew on long theological and nationalist traditions which identified black history with that of the biblical Israelites. Moreover, black leaders of the early twentieth century consistently pointed to Jewish immigrants as examples of communal, upwardly mobile capitalists whom African Americans should emulate.

Thus, both African and Jewish Americans bore traditions of thought linking "black" and "Jew." And both found, in Harlem's Black Jews, the unexpected embodiment of what had traditionally been a metaphoric linkage. However, because the metaphor of the "black Jew" had served different functions in the two groups' systems of religious and political belief, its incarnation in Black Jewish congregations played differently in the two community presses. This article argues that in white Jewish discourse, the figure of the black Jew was useful precisely because it *was* a metaphor, not meant to be taken literally, and was thus an indirect way of claiming American Jews' attainment of white racial status. Hence the discovery of "real" black people claiming Jewishness was an unsettling event, provoking laughter and dismissal. In African American thought, by contrast, black-Jewish identification was part of a spectrum of religious and political identities that did not rely on implicit distinctions between blacks and Jews or on exclusionary racial

categories more generally. As a consequence, the African American community could receive the sects with greater tolerance and solidarity.

The reportage, however, also reflects something more than disparate discourses within black and Jewish communities. In the 1920s and 1930s, African and Jewish Americans did not just inhabit different discursive arenas. They inhabited different social locations. In other words, not only did they have different ways of talking about and perceiving the world; they generally had unequal access to the economic, political, and cultural institutions that structured power relations in that world. Both groups were marginalized minorities within American society, but Jews enjoyed substantially greater exercise of citizenship rights and economic mobility than did blacks. Moreover, the interwar years—precisely the time when Black Jewish congregations achieved a consistent presence in Harlem—were a crucial period of transition in American ethnoracial ideology, when Jews were on the cusp of gaining still greater acceptance into the mainstream. Blacks had no such opportunity at that time. Consequently, the practical stakes riding on racial interpretations of phenomena like the Black Jews were significantly higher for Jews than for African Americans. Jews had more to lose from being linked with blacks, precisely because they had much to gain from being cast as whites. The fraught, ambivalent quality of Jewish writing on Black Jews, compared with the relatively straightforward portrayals in the black press, reflects this disparity in the social latitude available to the two groups during the 1920s and 1930s. Thus, Harlem's Black Jews provide an unusual opportunity to study the interwar struggle over racial definitions because their descriptions as both black and Jewish placed them at an intersection of diverse, changing, and socially consequential understandings of race.

Drawing primarily on contemporaneous news accounts, this article begins by describing the Black Jewish congregations that took form in New York in the 1920s. It then turns to questions of origin and authenticity which many observers posed to the Black Jews. It seeks to situate those questions within African American and Jewish ideologies and experiences. The African American settings include traditional and twentieth-century religion, black nationalism, and Harlem's early twentieth-century milieu. These cultural traditions and circumstances resonated with Black Jewish beliefs and hence made the congregations appear socially and ideologically situated to African American observers. By contrast, Jewish struggles over the nature of Jewish difference

and the racial designation of Jews produced debates and ideological instabilities that made it difficult, even undesirable, for white Jews to accept Black Jews as authentic.

Because the Black Jews' chroniclers were informed by these powerful ideological frameworks, and because the Black Jews articulated their own story in terms of divine causality and meaning, there are limits to the authority one can claim in writing a secular history of their movement. All historical facts are contested, but the facts of Black Judaism are particularly so.[3] This article does attempt a sketch of the modern Black Jews, using the tools historians apply to all documentary records. But it focuses on representations. In seeking to portray the Black Jews, both African and Jewish Americans projected their concepts of what it meant to be a black or a Jew. Juxtaposing those concepts helps to clarify how the two groups viewed, and wished to view, themselves and each other. Seeing those identities in the context of changing racial arrangements, in turn, helps us understand how racial discourses both shaped and reflected social power in the years between the wars.

i. Modern Black Jews appear

To trace the secular history of American Black Jews is to follow a series of early "sightings," which feed in to a more sustained historical visibility. Near the turn of the century a trickle of reports began to record the appearance in the New York area of black persons who presented themselves as Jews. In 1905 a Jewish newspaper noted:

> a Negro came to New York and asked for a ticket in poor Yiddish at a Jewish theater. The reporter questioned the man and learned that he was raised in a Jewish neighborhood and had assimilated a great deal from his neighbors. His everyday speech was Yiddish and only spoke English when he knew that his Yiddish would not be understood. The man kept all the Jewish holidays faithfully.[4]

Three years later a "Negro" named Samuel Johnson, detained in the Newark county jail, demanded matzoh instead of bread at Passover. "Sam Johnson spoke Hebrew and could recite the entire Haggadah. He claimed to have come originally from Jerusalem."[5] Another wayfarer visited the heavily Ashkenazic Lower East Side around 1910 and drew considerable local interest. "[M]y father fetched a Negro to supper,"

recalled Michael Gold in his autobiographical novel. The father reassured his wife: "Katie, do not be frightened. This black man is one of us. He is an African Jew. I met him in the synagogue. Imagine, he prays in Hebrew like the rest of us!"[6] The Golds' guest was welcomed in for an evening of food and theological debate among the family and their fascinated neighbors.

Such stories were sporadic; not until the 1920s did news reports begin to reflect a different kind of Black Judaism. This movement took the form of all- or mostly-black congregations designated in racially specific terms. "Negro Jews Win in Rent Suit," announced Harlem's *Amsterdam News* in December 1925. The story recounted a court victory by the "Beth Banai Abraham Congregation, a colored Jewish group, with headquarters at 459 Lenox avenue [sic]," in Harlem. The leader, Rabbi Arnold Ford, "comes from South America. To show his Hebraic training he spoke in Yiddish to Justice Panken."[7] The following year another congregation was portrayed more critically by the law and the press. A *Chicago Defender* article on "New Horrors Bared Among 'Black Jews'" revealed scandal within the "Ever Live and Never Die" group, a self-identified Black Jewish sect. The group's leader, Elder W. Robinson, was convicted under the Mann Act (known, ironically, as the "white slavery act") for maintaining a "vast number of . . . wives," "daughters of wealthy Harlem residents" who had been lured by the "handsome well-educated youths" in his employ.[8] But most news coverage was less sensational and reflected the concern Black Jews themselves took as central, which was not litigation but simply the practice of their faith. In a 1925 *Jewish Daily Forward* interview, a Professor Riechelieu, who helped lead a Harlem synagogue of two hundred members, spoke earnestly of the fidelity his community felt toward religious observance and learning. "We have spent priceless hours studying *Boba Kamah* and *Boba Bathra*. . . . We are familiar with the writings of *Rashi* and *Rambam*. . . . We observe every Jewish holiday. . . . In every possible way we try to live a truly Jewish life."[9] Black papers regularly recounted the rhythms and rituals of the Black Jews' observancy. An African American journal reported that the Moorish Zionist Temple ordained a new rabbi, Israel Ben Nooman, at its Harlem quarters in 1929.[10] The next fall, and in subsequent years, Harlem papers noted that the Commandment Keepers congregation welcomed Rosh ha-Shonah with ram's horn and prayer.[11] The congregation would make a procession to the Harlem shore of the East River

to observe the new year's custom of *tashlikh*, the symbolic casting away of sins upon the water.

By the 1930s, at least four such groups existed in Harlem. Extant descriptions allow only thin sketches of their histories and memberships, but a few patterns do emerge. Several congregations took form in the early 1920s. Nineteen twenty-one was the year of incorporation reported for two groups, the Commandment Keepers and the Moorish Zionist Temple.[12] Another, Beth B'nai Abraham, began in 1923.[13] The Ever Live sect was said to have begun as early as 1917; it appeared again, under the name Gospel of the Kingdom Temple, around 1931, when a newsbrief reported the death of its rabbi, Ishi Kaufman, from burns sustained in a fire at the temple building.[14]

Their total membership was small. In the 1930s it probably never surpassed one thousand, although claims varied and are difficult to assess. Moorish Zionist was found to be struggling in 1929, for "the movement cannot attract more than about fifty members," and the Commandment Keepers that year numbered one hundred.[15] One informant told the *New York Sun* in 1929, "[i]n all they have a membership of some 2,000."[16] Yet that figure is hard to support when the same reporter stated that he counted three synagogues, of which the hundred-strong Commandment Keepers was a leader. The Commandment Keepers' own estimate rose to two hundred by 1931 and to five hundred fifty-five years later.[17] The congregation also presented itself as the flagship of a larger movement. In 1930, the group told the *Amsterdam News* that its leader, Rabbi Matthew, "is the chief overseer of the congregation, of which there are already twelve branches scattered over this country and in the British West Indies."[18]

Like their numbers, the congregations' gender, class, and ethnic compositions can be glimpsed if not clearly seen. One visitor to the Commandment Keepers synagogue reported, "most of them [were] women."[19] But the rabbis and other "elders," who were most prominent in the news stories, were exclusively male. Moreover, photos from the 1930s onward document a substantial male presence at services. Likewise, photos of the Talmud Torah classes show both boys and girls at study. These images and the groups' own social teachings on the importance of stable, monogamous family units suggest a desire for conservatively structured community involving both men and women.

Black Jews were consistently described as poor and working people, with many of the women—like non-Jewish black women of the day—

employed as domestics.[20] Yet, although poor, they managed to avoid the extreme destitution which threatened so many Harlemites. The Commandment Keepers' Rabbi Matthew proudly told a journalist, "Not more than three or four Black Jews have ever received public relief."[21] Moreover, the synagogue members consciously pursued a strategy of communal economic uplift and petit-bourgeois investment. By 1943 they had "built up fifty-odd business establishments that include cigar and stationery stores, tailor shops, laundries, a gas-range repair shop, and restaurants serving kosher dishes. They patronize almost exclusively stores owned by Jews, whether white or Negro; and whenever possible, Black Jewish merchants employ Jews."[22]

Finally, an ethnic pattern appears among Harlem's Black Jews: the leadership and the congregants were markedly West Indian or otherwise foreign-born. "Most of them come from East Africa or South America," observed an early report on Beth B'nai Abraham.[23] Arnold Ford, the congregation's rabbi, was "educated in Barbados, South America, and Bermuda."[24] The Samuel Valentine family, which affiliated early on with Ford's congregation and later saw a daughter, Vertella, serve as valedictorian of the Institutional Synagogue's Talmud-Torah class, had immigrated from Jamaica.[25] Moorish Zionist's Professor Riechelieu traced much of his congregation to eastern countries. "[There] are a number of Yemen Jews. . . . Moroccan Jews; Egyptian Jews; Abyssinian Jews, about 200 all told. Riechelieu was born in Cairo, Egypt; [Rabbi] Hermens comes from Morocco."[26] A more elusive history surrounded Rabbi Wentworth A. Matthew, the Commandment Keeper leader and the Black Jew most often interviewed. He was variously said to hail from Sierra Leone, Lagos, and Ethiopia. Interviewers agreed, however, that Matthew, like many others, had spent time in the West Indies before immigrating to New York.[27]

ii. Where do they come from?

What exactly were the geographic origins of the Black Jews? This was a question that came up repeatedly in news articles, and in which both reporters and the Black Jews themselves appeared to have invested much significance. However, the investment varied among different parties. For congregants the question touched on a tenet that was central to their faith: the link between blackness and Jewish identity. Adherents of the Harlem movements did not see their Black Jewish status as a

coincidental intersection of two independent social categories. That is, they were not simply Jews who happened also to be black, or vice versa. Rather, their "dual" identity comprehended a single truth: "The black man *is* a Jew." This belief was articulated most clearly by the Commandment Keepers' Rabbi Matthew.[28] He explained the exegetical reasoning behind the principle that the "black man . . . is a direct lineal descendant of Abraham. Isaac, son of Abraham, was father of Esau (whose skin was hairy, like the white man's) and of Jacob (whose skin was smooth, like the black man's)." Jacob's descendant Solomon "mated with the Queen of Sheba, who returned to Africa, where she bore him a son, known in Biblical history as Menelik I." From Menelik sprang a line of kings who "ruled contiuously in Ethiopia for three-thousand-odd years. There has been an unbroken succession . . . to . . . Haile Selassie. . . . Hence, all genuine Jews are black men."[29] Leaders of the other groups also took the Jewishness of blacks as foundational.[30] This belief was exalted in a song, "Ethiopia, Land of Israel," which, to Black Jews, "was just as important and popular as the 'Hatikvah' song among the white Jews."[31] The lyric ran in part, "The truth is that we are Jews. Three tribes of Israel were lost. . . . They were away in the wilderness of Africa, the children of Israel. . . . Jews are you now, and Jews were you before. Time has not changed your blood."[32]

This vision of Solomonic ancestry was not unique to the Black Jewish congregations. It circulated within a wider tradition of African diasporic thought known as Ethiopianism, which drew on both Biblical references to Ethiopia and modern East African anti-colonialism to find in Ethiopia a symbol of black dignity and freedom. The tradition spread widely among enslaved and free blacks in North America and the Caribbean by the late eighteenth century; it gained further resonance with the western "discovery" of Ethiopian Jews, known as Falashas, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and with the crowning of Haile Selassie and the Ethiopian battle against Italian forces in the 1930s.[33]

But if Ethiopianism's story of Solomon and Sheba was current among many in the black diaspora, it was especially central to the religious experience of Harlem's Black Jews. Indeed, in 1930 Rabbi Arnold Ford traveled to Ethiopia to attend Haile Selassie's coronation and stayed on in an effort to found a permanent Black Jewish colony near the Falasha territory. (Sixty American congregants eventually followed him, but the colony failed and Ford died shortly thereafter, to be replaced in New York by Rabbi Matthew.[34]) The Solomonic tradition

remained vital among the Harlem congregations. Its repetition in liturgy and song indicates that congregants found it spiritually compelling. The story helped to secure religious identity within the framework of a faith, Judaism, that treated lineage as a criterion of membership. For believers in this Solomonic tradition, personal histories foregrounding African roots served to emphasize their Jewish heritage. A white Jewish visitor to the Commandment Keepers perceived such a concern when he told the *New York Sun* that only a minority of congregants would "admit not being Abyssinians."[35]

Indeed, it was usually observers like the visitor quoted above—an apparently Ashkenazic Jew named Shapiro—who elicited the most detailed genealogies from Black Jewish subjects. The *Jewish Daily News* reporter who visited Professor Riechelieu of Moorish Zionist recorded Riechelieu's catalogue of the African nativities of Temple members. The *Jewish Daily Forward* ran a feature story on Vertella Valentine, the black Talmud-Torah valedictorian, in which her family's saga from Africa to Jamaica to Harlem was recounted at length. The very title of the article—"The Converted Great-Grandfather and the Observant Grandfather of the Negro Girl of the Harlem Talmud Torah"—signaled its focus on family background, particularly with regard to Jewishness. And a Jewish academic, anthropologist Ruth Landes, conducted field-work among the Black Jewish congregations in which she questioned the leaders closely as to their origins and Jewish heritage.

Significantly, of the various observers who left descriptions of the Black Jews, reporters for African American papers were the least inclined to probe the congregants' backgrounds. When these reporters noted Black Jews' national origins, they presented the data in terse declarative sentences: "Rabbi Ford comes from South America." More often, they omitted such details altogether.

These contrasting strands of reportage—the probing conducted by white Jewish observers, and the relative lack of curiosity shown by black ones—had complicated roots. Both grew out of a tangle of racial ideologies that obtained in the United States and abroad during the interwar years. Historians of American racial thought have identified the 1920s and 1930s as a crucial period of transition between different paradigms of race. During these decades, a nineteenth-century racial spectrum composed of blacks, Anglo-Saxon whites, and intermediate "races" such as Jews, Slavs and Italians gave way to a more rigid,

bifurcated social system of whites and nonwhites. This shift ultimately brought palpable benefits to the intermediate groups who "became white" while hardening the constraints on those confined to the nonwhite stratum. But it did not occur overnight, and during the years of transition, multiple and even contradictory notions of race were often articulated side by side. Harlem's Black Jews highlight the range and interplay of these interwar racial discourses because their descriptions as both black and Jewish invited portrayals that used diverse understandings of race. These understandings drew on both the older multiracial scheme and the ascending black-white division. They also drew on racial conversations that took place largely within minority communities: an African American tradition of black-Jewish identification, and a debate among European and American Jews over the nature of Jewish difference. Together, this array of racial ideologies informed the questions reporters asked and the answers they accepted about the Black Jews.

iii. But are they really jews?

A growing scholarly literature has traced the historical development of American racial schemata, emphasizing the ways in which racial categories have changed over time in response to economic, political, and cultural struggle. Within this genre, the subfield of "whiteness studies" has focused on European immigrants whom elites once derogated as non-white but who "became white" in the eyes of American society as they gained political and economic power and actively adopted white identities.[36] While widely welcomed, this literature has also drawn fire for overstating its tales of racial transformation and agency.[37] However, it is not necessary to embrace all of whiteness scholarship to appreciate the best that the field has contributed: studies that powerfully illustrate the much-cited abstraction, "the social construction of race," precisely because they describe people's passage through a set of subtle racial categories that American society no longer maintains, and their attainment of racial privileges they did not always enjoy.

Matthew Frye Jacobson's *Whiteness of a Different Color* advances a conceptual and chronological framework for such histories by chronicling the cultural odyssey of those whom the author calls "probationary whites."[38] These descendants of Southern and Eastern European immigrants were, for the better part of a century, thought by elite and middlebrow commentators to occupy intermediate positions on a racial

spectrum that ranged from black to white. While not subjected to the consistent exploitation and disfranchisement visited upon blacks, probationary whites were nonetheless considered racially distinct from, and lower than, the "Anglo" and "Nordic" whites at the spectrum's upper extreme. Jews stood squarely in the probationary range. As rising Jewish immigration triggered nativist alarm in the late nineteenth century, Jacobson argues, respectable American periodicals, scientific treatises, and novels regularly cast Jews as a "a different race and nation," discernible by their "well-marked Israelitish features" and disagreeable because they were "filthy and ungrateful and riotous," and "a race of money-lenders."[39] Literary critic Daniel Itzkovitz offers a more complicated reading of such portrayals, contending that American commentators could never pin down "well-marked" physical or behavioral indices of Jewishness, but rather grappled with "indeterminacy and rhetorical incoherence in nearly every representation or theoretical consideration of 'the Jew.' . . . In a sense this indeterminacy *itself* became for many the signal of Jewish difference."[40] Both scholars agree, however, that Jews, along with other Eastern and Southern Europeans, remained targets of racially charged opprobrium from the nativist movement through the 1910s and early 1920s.

But the nativist tide subsided after winning passage of the 1924 National Origins Act, and probationary whites (having, evidently, served out their term of probation) soon gained admittance into the privileged category of whiteness. Over the next two decades a new social scientific and cultural consensus embraced Eastern and Southern Europeans as fully white, thus conferring upon them the substantial social and economic privileges of that status.[41] In democratic terms, this re-writing of racial descriptions was two-edged: it allowed the intermediate races to join Nordics, in what was now called the Caucasian race, on more or less equal terms; but it hardened the color line, relegating African Americans and other people of color to a distinctly second-class citizenship that would be maintained in law and custom for decades to come.[42] During these years of transition, racial meanings were contested with particular intensity. As "whiteness" became potentially attainable for descendants of non-Anglo or Nordic Europeans—and as Jim Crow restrictions on blacks grew increasingly harsh and rigid—intermediate races like the Italians and Jews felt an imperative to "become" white. Eric Louis Goldstein argues that Jews (especially the east Europeans who formed the majority of American Jewry by the

turn of the century) engaged this imperative with profound ambivalence. On the one hand, eager for economic security and social standing, "they increasingly learned that achieving the status of whites was central to their success." On the other hand, they were reluctant to abandon the notion of Jewish racial difference, which for years had "served as a potent means for expressing cherished Jewish commitments." Moreover, they "found themselves increasingly torn between their desire for acceptance in white America and their growing distaste for white intolerance" toward blacks.[43]

The resulting ideological tension led Jews to adopt ambivalent racial roles, both identifying with and distancing themselves from African Americans. In the cultural arena, Jewish actors working in the theatrical genre of blackface adopted a symbolic black identity while simultaneously mocking black people and relying on the audience to understand the running gag that the blacked-up men were really white.[44] Yet in other dimensions, Jews, while not casting themselves as actual blacks, did distinguish themselves from other segments of white America by their alliance with the black cause.[45] At the organizational level Jews were prominent among the leadership and financial backing of the NAACP, the Harlem Renaissance artistic associations, and other structures of black advancement. In the polemical realm, Jewish papers decried anti-black racism as a hypocritical betrayal of American ideals and urged readers to support civil rights.[46] Editors argued that Jews, by virtue of their own history as a despised minority, bore a natural sympathy and a special obligation toward African Americans. In story after story in the Yiddish press, the historical parallel between black and Jewish suffering was drawn out. Jim Crow was likened to Russian anti-Semitism, American race-riots were cast as "pogroms," and so forth. "Blacks seemed, in the eyes of the Yiddish writers, America's Jews."[47]

In her study of New York's Jewish press, Hasia Diner suggests that such polemics served two ends beyond simple altruism. One was the indirect criticism of anti-Semitism. By attacking racism while highlighting the similarity between blacks and Jews, writers could imply that bigotry against Jews was likewise wrong.[48] A second, more subtle, function was the articulation of an American Jewish identity. On the map of national membership, Jews positioned themselves as Americans when they presumed to speak as loyal critics about racism's conflict with American ideals.[49] Yet their polemics also addressed questions within "the Jewish community" regarding the nature and content of

Jewishness. Yiddish papers lauded Jews who took blacks' side; they condemned racist Jews or Jews who exploited economically vulnerable blacks as having "picked up certain 'un-Jewish' ideas."[50] Thus editors instructed readers that American Jewishness meant a commitment to ethical dealings with African Americans. Like blackface, antiracist polemic was a means by which Jews both identified themselves with blacks and secured their own fully American—hence white—status.

These artistic and political deployments of black-Jewish identity took place within material contexts that also created tensions between the two groups. In the first decades of the twentieth century, both European Jews and southern African Americans migrated in large numbers to northern U.S. cites such as New York. Often they abutted or shared neighborhoods. This was the case in Harlem, which housed a Jewish community until the 1920s, when whites evacuated in the face of the African American influx.[51] During the neighborhood's transition in the 1910s and 1920s, the demographic changes fed friction between the two groups. Many Jews who had moved out retained title to Harlem properties and hence were pitted as economic competitors against the African Americans to whom they rented and sold. This relation fueled antipathies—black anti-Semitism and Jewish racism—that contradicted the political and cultural sympathies and identifications between the two groups. One result of the antagonism appeared in the very newspapers that castigated unscrupulous Jewish proprietors who exploited blacks. Along with the sympathetic portrayals of African Americans and their struggle, Jewish papers ran frequent stories on blacks who robbed Jewish-owned businesses; they also re-printed sensational black crime stories ("Mad Negro Bites Policeman, Who Dies'") from the wire services.[52] Such portrayals established a socio-economic distance between the two groups, even while editors urged them to build political unity.

Several discursive and material currents, then, were stirring Jewish anxieties over racial status and closeness to African Americans. These anxieties help frame Jewish reporters' ambivalent and probing attitude toward the idea that black people could be Jews. White Jewish observers showed concern not merely with the exotic nature of Black Jewish congregants but also with their *authenticity* as Jews. This theme emerges in one of the earliest accounts, that from Michael Gold. After "the Negro" has been presented to Gold's family, he joins them for dinner. The meal quickly turns into a game of halakhic one-upsmanship:

> Before sitting down to eat, the Negro stranger washed his hands piously and muttered a Hebrew prayer. Before each course that was served he recited the proper Hebrew blessing. What an ultra-pious Jew. . . . Reb Samuel and others came in to witness the miracle. They questioned the stranger after supper. He proved to be a Tartar. Before the evening was over he had quarreled with every one. Harshly and firmly, he insisted that he was a better Jew than any one present. He was an Abyssinian Jew, descended from the mating of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. We others had wandered among the Gentiles, he said, and had been corrupted. But his people had kept the faith pure. For instance, we prayed only at morning and evening. His congregation prayed four times a day. . . . And so on, and so on. He was very dogmatic. He out-talked every one. Reb Samuel was dumfounded. My father hung his head in shame. At last the Negro left haughtily, kissing the *mezzuzah* again. By his manner one could see he despised us all as backsliders, as mere pretenders to the proud title of Jew.[53]

Gold's reading of the stranger's manner was probably right. Many Black Jews did maintain that white Jews were inauthentic. That the Golds' dinner guest was able to assert his superior Jewishness, however, represented a dramatic turning of the tables. Originally it was the Ashkenazim who thought to interrogate the Negro. It was their questioning that started the quarrelsome exchange. Gold's neighbors were not alone in their interrogative impulse. For many white observers, Black Jews' blackness did not answer, but rather begged, the question of authenticity.

A more subtle example of this kind of questioning appears in the *Jewish Daily Forward* feature on Vertella Valentine. The article opens with an account of Vertella's achievement in leading her Talmud Torah class, and her family's brimming pride in anticipation of her valedictory speech. But to understand fully the family's joy, we are told, we must know the history behind it. "Mr. Valentine's great-grandparents came from deep in Africa, and all were Jews and conducted themselves as Jews should. When a boy was born to one of them, they circumcised him and gave him a Jewish name, and raised him in Jewish belief." Indeed, the writer asserts, in Africa the Valentines were known as "der frumster yidisher neger-familiye"—the most observant Jewish Negro family. After moving to the West Indies, however, they lapsed: Vertella's great-grandfather became a Christian convert. It fell to the next generation, to Vertella's grandfather Chaim, to "redeem his converted father's sin." After initial rejection and much perseverance, he gained conversion to Judaism through a Jamaican synagogue. His religious

devotion grew to extremes. "He was more pious than a born Jew. His piety thence became fanaticism." Chaim's piety eventually landed him in jail—on charges trumped up by Christians who resented his proselytizing—but he was released and between 1918, and 1920 his family immigrated to New York. They carried on the edict, handed down from Chaim, "never to forget to tell their children that the Valentine family stemmed from the most observant Jewish Negro family in Africa."[54]

This article is genuinely sympathetic; it portrays the Valentines as sincere, resourceful people who are touchingly faithful to the Jewish religion. At the same time it shows a skeptical fascination with the black family's Jewishness. The distant generations' observancy must be spelled out—they circumcised their male children, etc.—even though the *Forward*'s readers would certainly have known what observant Jewish life entailed. The story of intergenerational sin and redemption echoes biblical themes of Israel's repeated disobedience to, and reconciliation with, God, almost as though this history had to be reenacted to be shared by blacks. The *Forward* writer may also have implied his amusement when he repeated the phrase, "di frumste yidishe negerfamiliye in afrike"; a convention of humorous Yiddish fiction in this era marked utterances as comical by repeating them throughout the text and at the ends of sentences, and Yiddish readers might have inferred a humorous content to phrases so placed. Yet the very need to say "Jewish Negro family" rather than simply "Jewish family" implied that the family's blackness was also problematic, something that placed it in separate category from "Jewish families" as generally understood.

A subtle mockery also tinges a 1929 *Morgen-Journal-Tageblatt* piece on Moorish Zionist's fund drive. "No less an ambition than making all Africa Jewish, that is the aim of the leader of the Moorish-Zionist Congregation, a sect of 'black Jews' who have a temple at 127 West 137th Street, Harlem." The writer's opening phrase implies that the temple's goal is grandiose; he seems not to consider that some ambitions of *Morgen-Journal*'s orthodox white readers, such as the hastening of the messianic age through universal Jewish observancy, might seem equally fanciful. The account quickly switches to a description of Moorish Zionist's mundane needs: three thousand dollars for a larger temple. Although the body of the piece expands on the congregation's theology of Ethiopian redemption, the closing image is of deluded dreamers. "And meanwhile, the appointed time for the dream of the leader of the black Jews of Harlem is still so remote

that they struggle pathetically, with great hardship, to collect three thousand dollars for a bigger temple, and the movement cannot attract more than about fifty members."[55]

The questioning of Jewishness in other reportage was far less subtle. The *Forward* writer who visited the Moorish Zionist Temple told readers of the cognitive dissonance he experienced on meeting Professor Riechelieu:

> He was a Negro, no doubt. But he wore a beard, and a skull cap was on his head. His clothes were threadbare. In front of him lay a large quarto volume. It was a copy of the *Moreh Nebuchim* ("Guide to the Perplexed") by Naimonidies [sic], to be sure!
> "*Mir Yidden seinen in Goluth!*" ["We Jews are in exile!"]
> The words startled me. They had a familiar ring. How often had I heard them from my father: But here, in the home of a Negro family, in "Darktown,"—how strange![56]

The story lingers on this theme of surprise, noting with incredulity Riechelieu's perfect Yiddish and so forth. But interestingly, it changes tone. Zalowitz, the reporter, starts to be swayed by Riechelieu's profession of Jewishness. He confesses, "I admit that I came to mock; but I remained to sympathize." Riechelieu's passion and knowledge finally convince him to the point of advocacy. "There *are* black Jews in New York—genuine, orthodox Jews." This discovery spurs him to scholarly research, where he encounters an authority, Joseph Jacobs, and his "famous work, 'On the Race of Modern Jews.'" Jacobs, a turn-of-the-century scholar of Jewish history, confirms the existence of African Jewry.

But not all white observers shared Zalowitz's openness to persuasion; some spoke of Black Jews with condescension or full-blown racist stereotyping. One white Jewish critic was trenchant in a talk at a Long Island Jewish center in 1931: "Dr. Salit declared 'that the Negro synagogues were based on a mixture of superstition and ignorance that has nothing to do with Judaism.' He described the Harlem temples as 'grotesque phenomena rising out of the mystic sensitivity of the Afro-American played upon by charlatans.'"[57] White Gentile observers, although less frequently interested in the Black Jews, could purvey equally invidious depictions. In 1934 a writer for the national magazine *Newsweek* visited the Commandment Keepers and wrote a story designed to highlight racial difference. "Their forefathers were not among those whom Moses led safely through the retreating Red Sea

away from the pursuing Egyptians' wrath. Their skins were black as night." The assertion that Black Jews did not share in the Egyptian flight was important, given the centrality of the Exodus to Jewish historical identity. By the article's end these markers of racial alterity had developed into openly pejorative terms: "Rabbi Matthew's day school to teach young pickaninnies Hebrew is close to his heart."[58]

Another white Jewish observer also embraced disparaging stereotypes while conducting the most extensive study of Black Jews in the interwar period. Ruth Schlossberg Landes, later a prominent anthropologist, was during the early 1930s a graduate student working under Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict at Columbia. Hearing of the Harlem congregations through a chance aquaintance, she undertook formal fieldwork among them. Her resulting paper cast the groups' leaders as pure charlatans and their followers as pathetic dupes, who, "bewildered and frightened" as new arrivals in the big city, had "stamped[ed]" toward various charismatic figures including Marcus Garvey, Father Divine, and the Black Jewish rabbis.[59] Indeed, Landes's interviews revealed that several Black Jewish leaders, including Arnold Ford and Mordecai Herman, had come out of Garvey's organization (Ford was said to have been expelled for challenging Garvey's leadership). Like other Jewish visitors, Landes pressed Ford on his background. She related his answers in tones of ridicule, highlighting the "non-sequiturs" and "inconsistencies" in his narrative of African Jewish descent.[60] She also presented Herman as a fraud; the latter was, she wrote, "a beggar and a pedlar of Jewish religious articles . . . [who] professed Judaism, and in alleged proof he spoke some Yiddish and grew a scraggly beard." At Garveyite events "he sought pupils whom he could 'instruct' in Hebrew, of which he knew practically nothing." For a time Ford and Herman collaborated; then they quarrelled and split. Based on interviews with congregants, Landes added that Ford's group, Beth B'nai Abraham, grew strained due to rabbis' autocratic ways, mishandling of funds and tendency to cause rifts between husbands and wives.[61] Her main argument was that the Black Jews counted less as a legitimate religious formation than as a symptom of urban blacks' economic and pyschological desperation. Their Judaism was "garbled pretence."[62] The congregant she found "more honest" than the rest was the one who confided, "We think the Jews are a great people! . . . They own all the money in the country. Their religion did that for them, and maybe it will do the same for us."[63] In conclusion she wrote of Black

Judaism, "To some it was a retreat of West Indian compatriots. To a few it was a field for exploitation. To others it was a passing show. To all it offered status in a promised land. It failed because it was rooted in confusion."[64]

Landes's paper is a singular source. Unlike other reportage by Jews, it was written for a scholarly rather than a popular journal and for a mixed rather than a Jewish audience. Based on extensive interviews, it offers valuable historical information such as the intertwined histories of Ford, Herman, and Garvey and the efforts of a number of local Ashkenazim (including "some prominent names," Landes notes[65]) to visit and tutor the black congregations. Yet in some ways the paper is of a piece with the Jewish press coverage of the Harlem groups. Landes, with her prestigious academic credentials (she held degrees from NYU and Columbia before beginning doctoral work[66]) approached the Black Jews with the same fascination regarding their orgins that the Yiddish journalists displayed. Her research appears to have focused on pointing up the leaders' dubious autobiographical claims and documenting inauthentic creeds such as the belief that Jewish observance brought wealth. Although it does not necessarily belie all her conclusions about Ford and other leaders, Landes's prejudice toward black people is evident. Although she wrote sympathetically of blacks' social and economic plight, she cast the ghetto residents as creatures who do not think but who "stampede"; she also asserted that New York's *de facto* residential segregation, which imposed a severe burden on blacks confined to crowded and crumbling ghetto housing, was "supported equally by most Negroes and whites."[67]

While charges of unorthodoxy could be informed by racism, they did sometimes gain credence from statements by the Black Jews themselves. At least some congregations appear to have been quite ecumenical in their theology. The Commandment Keepers, who were visited in 1929 by Shapiro, the sympathetic Ashkenazic observer, incorporated a saxophone and English-language hymns in their service. Moreover, "They accept Jesus. Some of the people accept Him as one of the prophets, of the rank of Moses. Others of them, it seems . . . accept Him as divine."[68] Moorish Zionist's Rabbi Herman was forthright about this wide embrace. "[He] described the movement as non-denominational and not conformed to the elaborate rituals and observances of orthodox Jewry. One can be a Baptist and enjoy pork chops instead of kosher steaks, if he chooses, the teacher said. Unity, brotherliness, aid for the needy, education in the Jewish language and economic practices were

declared the keynotes of the movement."[69] Such self-representations suggest that purity and orthodoxy were not priorities for all Black Jews, or at least were not the leading concerns at all times. Even the tenet that white Jews were not truly Jewish appears to have been inconsistently observed: Rabbi Matthew, the most vocal proponent of black Jewish authenticity, told a reporter that his congregation patronized white Jewish butchers because "there are no kosher butchers among the Commandment Keepers." Furthermore, Black Jewish domestics sought observant white employers so that they could work in kosher homes.[70] These practices imply that Black Jews accepted white Jewish observancy, if not white Jews themselves, as legitimate under Jewish law.

But if Black Jewish pronouncements sometimes suggested unorthodoxy, Black Jews were more often eager to counter that charge. They were aware that outsiders questioned them, and they often spoke to those questions, whether explicitly or implicitly posed. In the *Forward* interview Professor Riechelieu was greatly agititated over white Jewish doubts. "'*We are Jews, Jews, Jews!*' he pounded the table. 'We are not *Goyim*. Here we live in a strange, unfriendly atmosphere. Our white brethren know us not.'" His concern was exacerbated by a running conflict between his fellows and a group of black Seventh Day Adventists. Paraphrasing Riechelieu, Zalowitz wrote:

> Some of the Negro Adventists seem to have discovered that the Jews of New York are a sympathetic lot. A considerable number of them . . . have become *schnorrers.* They go from house to house in the Jewish sections, greet the housewife with a lusty "*Sholem aleichem, liebe Yidden!*"and ask for a donation. The Jewish housewife, thrilled at the sight of *black* Jews, contributes liberally. . . . Moredai Hermans and his group of *real* black Jews have had numerous quarrels with the Negro Adventists. . . . "I want to warn the Jews of New York," went on Riechelieu, "not to be taken in by thse Adventists parading as Jews. They can easily me [sic] unmasked. All that is necessary is to require them to write a receipt in Hebrew for the donation received. The members of Rabbi Hermen's [sic] congregation are all of them versed in Hebrew lore, and can write or speak Hebrew or Aramaic."[71]

Why was Riechelieu so vexed by these imposters? He made it clear that he did not begrudge them the money. "I don't want any one to think I am asking the Jews to refuse to help Negro Christians. On the contrary, the lot of the Christian Negro is bad enough, and every Jew should be glad of the opportunity to do something for the black men. But I am up in arms against the fakers that pretend to be black Jews." It was the

issue of authenticity that had hit a nerve. He did not want a public parade of supposed black Jews who could "easily be unmasked." These were a threat to him and his group because their imposture might be taken—primarily by the "white brethren [who] know us not"—to discredit the always-questioned veracity of the real Black Jews.

In the 1929 *Morgen-Journal* interview, Rabbi Hermans used a different strategy to address white skepticism. This time the white reporter received a detailed explication of the Black Jewish theology. Hermans recounted the story of lost tribes and Solomon's dalliance and spoke at length of Ethiopian redemption. It was in this interview that he shared his temple's African Zionist hymn, "Ethiopia, Land of Israel." His tone was less polemical than confiding. When the incredulous reporter asked, "Doesn't that mean that the whole of Africa is Jewish?" Hermans and fellow congregants invited him to follow his own inference:

> But from where did the ancient Jews of Eretz Yisroel take their Jewry, if not from Africa? Jewry is from the first, born in Africa, and therefore is the whole of Africa Jewish—the rabbi answered. I shall tell you another secret—put in Mr. West, the poet—Africa and Eretz Yisroel were once united. That was in the time of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. . . . But when King Solomon died, and the Jewish kingdom fell, the union with Africa also fell.[72]

These confidences, however, had little effect on the *Morgen-Journal* reporter. After recording the rabbi's words, he resumed his distanced posture as an observer, noting the "dreams" of the pathetically . . . struggl[ing]" group.

Yet if the congregants did not sway their visitor, they may have achieved another goal, which was simply to get their group's appeal for synagogue funds published in a major Yiddish newspaper. In addition to asserting their authenticity, Black Jews made at least sporadic calls for financial help via the white Jewish press. Although the 1929 *Morgen-Journal* piece made no direct plea to white readers, the need for three thousand dollars was repeated several times. A later piece in the same paper was more explicit. "*Shvartze Bronzvil Yidn Apelirn tzu di Yidn nokh Hilf*" ("Black Brownsville Jews Appeal to the Jews for Help"), ran the headline in 1931.[73] "The editor of '*Morgen-Journa*l' has received a letter from the Brownsville Black Jews, who have their synagogue and Talmud-Torah at 381 Barbie Street, Brownsville, that they are in great need and appeal to their white Jewish brothers to help them support their Talmud-Torah." The editor quoted from the letter, which stressed the school's role in teaching "Judaism, prayer, speaking

Yiddish," without which the children would "become lost among the Negro black Christians." It also explained, "Black Jews . . . come from Spain, from Africa, and . . . from Palestine." In this rare instance, the Yiddish editor did not probe or amplify on the Black Jews' statement of origin, presumably because the piece was not a feature or news article but simply a short broadcast of the Brownsville congregation's letter, buried on an inner page.

The Brownsville appeal aside, the great majority of Jewish press reports did question—whether in tones of sympathy, amusement or derision—the Jewish authenticity of Black Jews. Black spokesmen responded in various ways, sometimes emphasizing their similarity to Ashkenazim, at other times highlighting their Ethiopian heritage. But in these interviews, the white skepticism did not arise solely from the black elaborations of Jewish credentials. The skepticism came first. It reflected not only the inadequacy of Black Jewish behavior or learning but also the interrogators' tacit assumption of race. "Real negro people," as the *Sun* said, could not be real Jews. Jews were white.

The subtle determination with which Ashkenazic reporters sought to maintain that equation was not necessarily born of a secure belief that Jews were, indeed, white. Rather, it grew equally out of fear that they might be seen as black. During the 1920s and 1930s, the assumption that Jews were white was hardly a secure one for American Ashkenazim to make; the new, black-white racial schema was not yet firmly in place, and Jews' acceptance in America's privileged color caste was far from certain. Anxiety about racial standing may also explain another pattern of ambiguity in the Jewish news articles: a vacillation between religious or ethical sympathy and racial distancing. This tension did not play out uniformly in each portrayal. Zalowitz's feature on Professor Riechelieu fell farthest on the side of sympathy. Although Zalowitz inititially indulged in exoticist doubts about "a Negro family, in 'Darktown,'" he allowed Riechelieu's Yiddish fluency and Jewish pathos to convert him, so that in the end he declared "Negro Jews" to be "genuine, orthodox Jews." But such complete sympathy was rare. More common was the ambiguity of the *Forward*'s Vertella Valentine feature and the *Tageblatt*'s article on the Moorish Zionist Temple. By maintaining gently amused tones even while respecting Sam Valentine's piety and Moorish Zionist's Ethiopian "Hatikvah-song," these articles allowed their readers to feel both a religious recognition and a racial separateness. They could savor the sense of fellowship and righteous-

ness that came from sympathizing with co-religionists and innocent victims, while still tacitly signaling that white Americans should not literally equate blacks and Jews. They felt close but not too close. Michael Gold's dinner-guest narrative achieved a similar balance. Although the Negro visitor "out-talked every one" and proved "that he was a better Jew than any one present," he also made his exit at the end of the scene. The Ashkenazim, though temporarily shamed and shaken, still occupied the stage. It was with them that Jewish readers were left to identify as Jews.

Although Black and white Jews were the main participants in the authenticity debate, the African American press also commented on occasion. Sometimes black papers sidestepped the issue by simply noting observancy in matter-of-fact tones. The Harlem papers' regular coverage of black synagogue activities often reported the congregants' use of Hebrew prayer, yarmulkes, shofars, and the like. Indeed, the commonest occasions for black press stories were the annual rituals of Rosh ha-Shonah and other holidays. Such stories were inherently depictions of the Blacks Jews as observant Jews. Although Ruth Landes reported hearing "upper-class Negroes . . . condem[n] savagely" the Black Jews and other unconventional Harlem sects, such criticism did not appear in the main black press coverage.[74] Indeed, a few stories indicate that the African American press was aware of the skepticism among white Jews and sensitive to its larger meaning. One such account concerned the white critic, Norman Salit, who had charged the Harlem groups with fakery. An African American newspaper article quoted Salit's assertion that "[t]he services are mongrel and hybrid" and then paraphrased at length Rabbi Matthew's rebuttal.[75] The tone was neutral throughout, but the sympathetic repetition of Matthew's points suggested editorial support for the Black Jewish position. Resentment toward white critics came through forthrightly in an article from the *Pittsburgh Courier.* This piece was actually a story on a story: its subject was the appearance, in a white Jewish periodical, of a respectful portrayal of a black congregation. That such an event was considered newsworthy signals, by itself, an editorial sensitivity on the authenticity issue. The African American writer closed, "How unlike the arrogant and crass Nordic who takes for granted that all Negroes are thick-skinned and that their privacy may be desecrated at will for his amusement and entertainment."[76] Here it is plain that the reporter perceived the question of authenticity as more than an arcane theological disagree-

ment. He understood that white skepticism was suffused with assumptions about race—assumptions that a race-paper was bound to challenge.

iv. And how does one know?

The debate over authenticity was often engaged head-on: Black Jews asserted legitimacy, which whites either accepted or rejected. But beneath the surface of this debate stirred a related question: how to *establish* authenticity. How did one know who was really a Jew? Participants in the debate rarely acknowledged that the very criteria of authenticity could be in doubt. Instead, they would cite the presence or absence of some Jewish characteristic, such as synagogue attendance, and assume that its meaning was clear. Yet by the wide array of Jewish indicia they posited, both blacks and whites indicated that the nature of Jewishness itself was at issue .

The most-cited markers were knowledge of and adherence to Jewish law. In the *Forward* story on Professor Riechelieu, for instance, the first section is a virtual catalogue of Riechelieu's halakhic credentials: he wears a skullcap, he studies great texts, he observes every holiday, he drops the names of Judaism's most eminent commentators. The reporter Zalowitz is impressed by the tome of Maimonides that he can see in the Professor's room, and one may wonder if Riechelieu, who is clearly bent on proving his legitimacy, has not taken some care about where he lay down his book. But whoever took the initiative, both parties are interested: Zalowitz is as fascinated by Riechelieu's halakhic knowledge as Riechelieu is delighted to demonstrate it. A similar mutual interest appears in the feature story on the Valentines. As the conversation about family history draws to a close, Samuel Valentine, having ended on a sad note about fiscal and factional troubles among his rabbis, does one more thing: "And Mr. Valentine shows me a tallis and tfilin with a yarmulke and says to me—With no synagogue, I pray when I want to in my home, in a room, and when the Jewish holidays come, my sister and brothers and other family come, and we make a minyan in my home. God is everywhere."[77] The reporter offers no commentary on this statement of devotion. On the question of faith, Valentine has the last word.

Law and ritual observance, however, are not the only markers of Jewishness that carry authority. At several moments Black Jews seek — and reporters appear to grant—legitimacy based on Ashkenazic cultural

traits. Prime among these is the Yiddish language. Indeed, in the Zalowitz article, while it is Riechelieu's appearance (black, wearing a yarmulke) that first startles the reporter, it his his use of Yiddish that first charms him. Although many Black Jews did not know Yiddish (Reichelieu lamented this in his interview) they showed evidence of Yiddish influence. Not only did several leaders speak the language; they introduced its spelling and pronunciation into the very public representations of their congregations. Several articles record a second name for the synagogue run by the Commandment Keepers: "Bayis Tefeles." This is Hebrew for "House of Prayers." But, significantly, it is an Ashkenazic—i.e., Yiddish-linked—transliteration of the Hebrew. (Sephardic Jews use a slightly different pronunciation system, which would render these words as "Bayit Tefilot."[78]) Yiddish (as opposed to Hebrew) orthography also appeared in the large sign outside Moorish Zionist's building, announcing "*Moorish Tzion Tempel.*" These points of spelling and pronunciation aligned the Black Jews with specifically Eastern European traditions.

Finally, some speakers, both black and white, indicated that Jewish authenticity could be read in less formal, even comic, ethnic traits. One article in an African American newspaper noted, in addition to standard marks of authenticity such as Hebrew prayer, that "The Negro Jews . . . *swear by the herring*."[79] At other times it was white Jewish observers who endorsed the importance of comical characteristics. One example of this is in Michael Gold's account of the supper-table debate. After meticulously recounting all of the Negro's formal Jewish traits—his proper Hebrew prayers, his deep halakhic learning—Gold added, "And so on, and so on. He was very dogmatic. He out-talked everyone. Reb Samuel was dumbfounded. My father hung his head in shame."[80] Here the *coup de grace* is not strict observancy, but opinionated loquacity—a trait that Jewish humorists like Gold often associated with the community they affectionately portayed. A more serious version of the belief in a "Jewish type" occurs in Zalowitz's portrait of Professor Reichelieu. Here again a relevant attribute is talkativeness. But even more definitive are hardship and sorrow. As Reichelieu pours forth in Yiddish ("There was no stopping him, no getting in a word even edgewise") Zalowitz notes, "It was apparent that his heart was 'sore and heavy-laden' and he welcomed an opportunity to unbosom himself."[81] The cares weighing on Reichelieu stem specifically from the

dispute with the Adventists; but they have more generally to do with his very status as a Black Jew:

> It seems to be our fate to go through life despised by the non-Jews, misunderstood by and unknown to the white Jews. There's nothing, apparently, that we can do about it. We ask no charity; we demand no alms. We are prepared to be 'hewers of wood and drawers of water'—honest, hardworking men, pictures [sic], mechanics, janitors. We have no regrets. To be a Jew in a Christian world is martyrdom enough; but a *black* Jew in a *white* Christian civilization—ah, 'tis doubly sad.[82]

This passage plays on an old theme in Jewish thought: that Jews bear a special fate of suffering and a special status therefore. The concept of chosenness pervades Old Testament episodes in which God forewarns the Israelites of great suffering and persecution yet also promises protection through the covenant. It was expressed colloquially in the Yiddish saying, "*shver tzu zayn a yid*" ("It's hard to be a Jew"). By framing his own position as one of fated persecution—using religiously significant terms like 'martyr'—Reichelieu establishes a subtle claim to Jewishness. In asserting that his life is *doubly* sad, he may even be suggesting that he is more Jewish than the white Jews. Zalowitz offers no comment on these claims. Like the reporter in the Valentine article, he lets them echo by standing last and unremarked.

If traits from halakha to herring could signify Jewishness for both white and Black Jews, there was one characteristic that only African Americans acknowledged as meaningfully Jewish: capitalist accumulation. The success of Black Jewish small businesses was a matter of community pride. On at least one occasion, however, Rabbi Matthew suggested that it was more: it was an outgrowth, and hence a sign, of being Jewish. In a 1936 interview with the *Afro-American*, "Rabbi Matthews [sic] explain[ed] that the philosophy of the Jews is to acquire wealth and command respect. . . . Rabbi Matthew is certain that the sooner the black man is imbued with this philosophy, the sooner will come the race's forward movement."[83]

Significantly, Matthew made this statement only to an African American newspaper. Jewish papers contained no mention of this philosophy or of the businesses; indeed, they emphasized the poverty with which black synagogues struggled. (The one white Jewish observer to record the Black Jews' philosophy of wealth was Ruth Landes, who heard it slip in an unguarded moment from a congregant not an official spokesman.) Rabbi Matthew's choice of audience

suggests a dual awareness on his part. He knew that black readers could accept that Jewishness was about economic advance; this was precisely the stereotype, and to some extent the actual social role, of white Jews within the black community. Conversely, Matthew and other spokesmen seem to have known that Judaism-as-accumulation would play poorly in the Jewish press. For a variety of reasons—sensitivity to the myth of Jewish financial omnipotence, religious commitment to charity, socialist idealism—white Jews would likely have rejected Matthew's philosophy as un-Jewish.

v. The Jewish race

Questions of how to determine Jewishness did not spring solely from the white encounters with Black Jews. Lively disagreements about what distinguished Jews from Gentiles emerged widely among Jewish Americans and in the larger culture during the early twentieth century. These conflicts were fueled in part by specifically American Jewish experiences of assimilation and exclusion. But they also drew on political, philosophical and theological debates that had engaged European Jews for decades and on European racial ideas that were centuries old. The sum effect of these internal disagreements over Jewish difference was to amplify the uncertainty that American Jews—already on "probationary" status in Gentile society—experienced regarding their racial designation during the interwar years, and to put American Jewish identity itself into question. That question, in turn, heightened the ambivalence with which Ashkenazim viewed the Black Jews.

The mostly first- and second-generation American Jews who lived in New York in the 1920s and 1930s were influenced by European Jewry's major ideological currents: assimilation, socialism, and Zionism. Assimilation became a practical possibility for Western European Jews when they won citizenship rights in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; it gained impetus from the Reform and Haskalah movements which discouraged differentiating appearances and encouraged intellectual and commercial participation in Gentile society. These developments raised the possibility that Jews, long marginalized and considered "other," were not irreducibly different from their fellow Western Europeans. Among Eastern European Jews, who were mostly poor and bound by tsarist restrictions on residence and occupation,

civic assimilation was not a practical option. Yet a softening of the line between Jew and Gentile did develop in Eastern Europe as burgeoning socialist movements, which many Jews joined, highlighted class location rather than ethnoreligious extraction as the critical social determinant and hence provided a way for Jews to identify as something other than Jews.

At the same time as these assimilationist tendencies gained sway—and, indeed, partly in critical reaction to them—a nationalist movement was also finding a voice among European Jewry.[84] Modern Zionism is often remembered as the brainchild of Theodor Herzl, the Hungarian-born activist who convened the first Zionist Congress in 1897. But the broader movement comprised various "Zionisms," some of which rejected Herzl's pragmatic, political rationale and sought instead to make the project of a Jewish homeland an expression of cultural, religious, or socialist agendas. What is important here is that all shared a goal that required them to articulate *some* basis for a distinct Jewish identity.

Moreover, that identity might be conceived not only as a matter of culture or faith but in biological, even racial terms. As Ahad Ha-Am, a proponent of cultural Zionism, wrote, "'Why are we Jews?' How strange the very question! . . . Ask the tree why it grows! . . . It is within us; it is one of our laws of nature."[85] Other advocates of Zionism deployed racial claims in a different way, seeking to legitimate the Zionist colonial project by casting Jews as part of the civilized—i.e., white—race. Chaim Weizmann, later Israel's first President, wrote in 1914 of Zionist hopes that "England will chance upon an empty piece of land in need of a white population, and perhaps the Jews will happen to be these whites."[86]

These assertions of whiteness were partly an attempt at persuasion, for they were made within the context of turn-of-the-century Europe, where, as in America, the location of Jews on the racial map was a live question. According to Sander Gilman:

> The general consensus of the ethnological literature of the late nineteenth-century was that the Jews were "black," or, at least, "swarthy." This view had a long history in European science . . . "Covered from foot to head in filth, dirt and rags, covered in a type of black sack . . . their necks exposed, the color of a Black" . . . The Jews' disease is written on the skin. It is the appearance, the skin color, the external manifestation of the Jew which marks the Jew as different."[87]

Indeed, even Europeans who sought to defend Jews against anti-Semitic prejudice accepted the theory of their racial alterity. Joseph

Jacobs, an English Jew—and the same authority cited by the *Forward* reporter Zalowitz—published a work on "Jewish statistics" in 1891 that confirmed the distinctive "racial" difference between Jews and whites. This difference was so easily legible in the Jewish "countenance," he wrote, that "[e]ven the negroes of Surinam, when they see a European and a Jew approaching, do not say, 'Here are two whites,' but 'Here is a white and Jew."[88] By the turn of the century this color consensus was breaking down; some authorities maintained that Jews were not verifiably darker than "Germans." Yet, Gilman notes, it was "still assumed that Jews were a separate and distinct racial category. . . . [T]he more Jews in Germany and Austria at the fin de siècle looked like their non-Jewish contemporaries, the more they sensed themselves as different and were so considered."[89]

Together, the Jewish ideological movements and European racial scrutiny succeeded in making Jewish identity a profoundly unstable matter. Whether justified as a matter of belief, ethnic culture, racial lineage—or whether denied altogether—it was the subject of fierce debates. The debates, moreover, did not stay in Europe. They were carried—along with prayer shawls, candlesticks, and other appurtenances of Jewish life—across the Atlantic by immigrants who crowded into American cities in the early twentieth century. In America, Jewish anxieties over identity and race would take new forms in response to the specific contexts of American life.

Prime among those contexts was the American pattern of assimilation. To immigrant Jews, America seemed to offer assimilative opportunities surpassing those of even the most tolerant European state. Ideologically, the country espoused—even if it did not always practice—a civic ideal in which political allegiance, rather than ancestral heritage or religious profession, was the mark of membership.[90] Closer to the ground, urban centers like New York formed settings in which Jews were only one among a teeming cacophony of immigrants, none necessarily more American than the next. In this diverse and relatively fluid society, Jewish immigrants and their children could ascend the social ladder. By the 1920s Jews accounted for over 80 percent of enrollment at New York's City College, Hunter College, and New York University, which in turn served as gateways to middle-class and professional standing. For the second generation in particular, Jewishness ceased to mean confinement to a physical or social ghetto.[91] Furthermore, insofar as American Jews sought to preserve a sense of distinc-

tiveness, their "community" comprised so many variations of religious and secular belief—from pious Hasidism to moderate Reformism to ardent atheism, from Hebreism to Yiddishism—that "[h]ow to identify as a Jew—even whether to do so—became a free personal choice to a degree unprecedented in Jewish history."[92]

At the same time, American Jews faced frequent reminders that this choice was not always as free or as personal as they might like. In Jacobson's account, the early twentieth century change in racial schemata, which was necessary to unfetter Jewish racial standing, "would be a gradual affair, glacial rather than catastrophic."[93] Hence, to contemporary observers it sometimes looked as though the old racial regime were firmly in place. Others trace a less linear progression of racial thought, arguing that anti-Semitism actually grew more virulent in the years after World War I.[94] Some reminders of Jews' outsider status were found in the very social arenas that seemed to offer the most hope. For instance, during the same years when Jewish college attendance was skyrocketing, elite schools like Harvard and Columbia set limits on the percentages of Jews they would enroll. Similarly, while Jews entering some industries could benefit from family connections and ethnic networking, aspirants in more exclusive fields like publishing and advertising were required to "look . . . American" in order to "pass."[95] Most troubling was the powerful anti-immigrant agitation that traded in terms of scientific racism. In popular eugenic writing and in political polemic, American nativists cast Jews as "filthy . . . often dangerous in their habits . . . low physical and mental types" and possessed of a "peculiar mentality and ruthless concentration on self-interest."[96] The restrictionist movement culminated in the 1924 National Origins Act severely curtailing South and East European immigration.

Such signs of persistent and racialized antipathy caused many American Jews to grow increasingly concerned about their racial standing. Recent scholarship has attended thoughtfully to the ways in which such standing could be considered outside a color-based framework: Goldstein writes that the notion of a "Jewish race" appealed to nineteenth-century German-American Jews who had not yet been faced with hard challenges to their rights as white citizens, and Itzkovitz argues that the sense of "Jewish difference" was a slippery matter not easily confined to racial precepts. However, by the 1920s it was clear that in America the most consequential axis of racial standing was the color line. Any assessment of American racial identity had to stake out

a place with respect to that line. Hence, discussion of what made American Jews Jewish often implied the question of what, if anything, made them not black.

These tensions give added meaning to the inconsistency in markers of authenticity that appears in the Jewish press coverage of Harlem's Black Jews. The diversity of standards—from observancy to Yiddish to character traits—used to measure Black Jews' Jewishness made sense amid the great upheaval over identity within the wider Jewish community of the time. When opposing camps could and did insist that Jewishness lay in religious practice, or ethnic culture, or socialist ethics, it was not surprising that Ashkenazic Jews had no uniform yardstick to apply to Black Jews. Indeed, part of what journalists expressed when they employed a particular standard was belief in that standard's validity. Thus, the reporter Zalowitz's joy at Riechelieu's "perfect Lithuanian accent" celebrated the Yiddish language as a Jewish value. (That value was likely shared by readers of the predominantly Yiddish, socialist-leaning *Forward*.) Conversely, when the critic Norman Salit condemned the "ignorant" black synagogue service, he privileged halakhic learning as the essence of Judaism.

But the criteria betray more than disagreement over sacred and secular values: their very deployment reflects a color-based probing of the black congregations. Black Jews were scrutinized in a way that whites were not. The testing of Black Jewish orthodoxy is a case in point. During the years when Zalowitz was recording Riechelieu's Talmudic training and the *Forward* was noting Sam Valentine's tallis and tfillin, many white Jews had modified or completely abandoned religious observance. Yet their Jewishness was not seriously challenged, at least not in the way that Black Jewish authenticity was. The reason white Jewish writers had to invoke various criteria of Jewishness in the first place was their hesitation at the possibility that real Jews might be black.

vi. "Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands . . . "

In marked contrast to the Jewish press, with its litmus-testing approach to Black Jewish subjects, African American papers generally took Black Jews at their word. Like the Jewish attitude, the African American pattern grew out of several currents in traditional and contemporary thinking. One reason for the black reporters' matter-of-

fact tone was that from a black perspective, the link between black and Jewish identity was not novel but familiar, tapping long traditions in African American religious and political thought. These traditions formed several streams of symbolism, sometimes distinct, sometimes confluent, that linked Jewishness to ideological formulations of African American identity.

The oldest of these streams traced back to antebellum black religion. The Africans who forged a syncretic spirituality under American slavery drew heavily on the Christian teachings of their masters. But they foregrounded stories of the early Hebrews in ways that whites did not. Lawrence Levine argues that this "Old Testament bias" reflects the appeal that the earlier scripture's historical orientation held for believers whose temporal existence was so heavily oppressed. "It is important that Daniel and David and Joshua and Jonah and Moses and Noah, all of whom fill the lines of the spirituals, were delivered in *this* world and delivered in ways which struck the imagination of the slaves. Over and over their songs dwelt upon the spectacle of the Red Sea opening to allow the Hebrew slaves past before inundating the mighty armies of the Pharoah. . . . The similarity of these tales to the situation of the slaves was too clear for them not to see it."[97] African American identification with ancient Israel, particularly with the experience of Egyptian bondage and deliverance, appeared not only in spiritual lyrics but in sermons and in evocative phrases such as Harriet Tubman's moniker, "the Moses of her people."

Nor did the Hebrew imagery reflect miraculous hopes alone. A black nationalist strain of thought which emerged in the 1800s nourished temporal plans of resistance, particularly emigration to Africa and establishment there of an independent black state.[98] Crucial to this ideology was the principle that black people formed a racially connected "nation," and central to the explication of that idea was the paradigm of the Jews. David Walker's 1830 *Appeal*, a seminal black nationalist text, thundered open with the image of the Israelite ordeal. The Egyptians, "having got possession of the Lord's people, treated them *nearly* as cruel as *Christian Americans* do us, at the present day."[99] The emigrationist Edward Blyden reminded hesitant blacks: "So it was with another people who, like ourselves, were suffering from the effects of protracted thralldom. . . . 'Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once and possess it.'"[100] Alexander Crummell and Martin Delany took the Jewish paradigm further—

invoking the Ethiopianist tradition that was embraced by many nationalists—when they used the psalmic prophecy: "Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God" to emphasize the special role of black people in Old Testament.[101] As these examples suggest, uses of the Hebrew analogy did not fall neatly into sacred and secular categories. Indeed, Wilson Moses has argued that black nationalism is itself a kind of faith, casting doubt on the very distinction between politics and religion.[102] The metaphoric and overtly political versions may better be seen as two ends of a spectrum of spiritually based resistive positions.[103]

In the post-Emancipation era, the continuum of religious and political identification with Jews would persist, but both ends would assume new forms. On the secular side, Jews began to appear as an exemplary people not only for their ancient sufferings but for their supposed modern achievements in the expanding economy of the Gilded Age. In 1885 Frederick Douglass admonished: "A Hebrew may even now be rudely repulsed from the door of a hotel; but he will not on that account get up another Exodus . . . but will quietly 'put money in his purse' and bide his time."[104] This depiction of Jews as canny and communal businessmen was circulated most effectively by the leading proponent of black economic uplift, Booker T. Washington. Washington frankly urged African Americans to see in modern Jews, "a bright and shining example. . . . They have a certain amount of unity, pride, and love of race; and as the years go on, they will be more and more influential in this country. . . . [O]ne of the most noted banking firms in the United States is composed of Jews."[105] That Washington also sometimes played on anti-Semitic feeling[106] does not belie this admiring stance; envy and resentment can easily coexist. The image of the striving, solidaristic, successful Jew remained pervasive in the rhetoric of uplifters and "race men" into the twentieth century.

Such rhetoric circulated widely in New York's African American press during the period in which Harlem's Black Jewish groups were taking form. Editorials in *The New York Age* and the *Amsterdam News* regularly equated Jews with economic advance.[107] Articles varied in the moral stance they adopted toward Jewish business acumen; some echoed Washington's and Douglass's praise of Jewish exemplars, while others joined anti-Semitic whites in condemning "salesm[e]n" and "money-lender[s]" of "the Jewish race" as "parasitical and predatory."[108] They aimed particular criticism at "rapacious Jewish land-

lords."[109] But whether approving or denunciatory, these African American polemics showed Jews as a formidable people who had fought prejudice with financial ingenuity.

Furthermore, the discursive construction of Jews as shrewd businessmen gained reinforcement from material circumstances. Many urban African Americans in the early twentieth century encountered Jews primarily as economic actors. This was particularly true in Harlem, where the history of prior Jewish residence and continuing property-ownership meant that Jews and blacks often met through the relations of landlord and tenant, boss and worker, merchant and customer. These relations placed Jews one step above blacks on the economic ladder, which could inspire blacks to both envy and antipathy. In either case the roles confirmed the stereotype of the capitalistic Jew. Writing in 1942, historian and social critic L.D. Reddick reported precisely this pattern in popular thought among Harlem blacks.[110] In this context, the Black Jewish congregations' own practices of petty entrepreneurship and communally preferential buying and employment placed them squarely within their black neighbors' mental framework of what Jews were and did.

The religious side of African American identification with Jews also continued to develop. The early twentieth century saw, alongside the growth of "mainline" black denominations like the Baptists and Methodists, a profuse germination of small and unconventional sects. Some of these, while predominantly Christian, incorporated in their theologies elements of Jewish identity and law. Probably the earliest was the Church of God and Saints of Christ, a denomination founded in Lawrence, Kansas in 1896 by an ex-slave named William Saunders Crowdy.[111] Crowdy experienced religious visions instructing him to build an order following Old Testament practice. Thus his Church observed Passover and a Saturday sabbath, while it called itself a "church" and preached the divinity of Christ. It was a fusion religion that accorded prominence to its Jewish strain, and it spread from its western flagship to many East Coast cities. A sect with similar, although more militant, rhetoric was Prophet Cherry's Church of God in Philadelphia. Prophet Cherry articulated the thesis of black Jewishness with particular vehemence: "[The white Jew is a] fraud and interloper."[112] He used the Talmud as well as the New Testament in his service and preached the blackness of Jesus and other authentic Jews.[113]

A broad kinship with Black Jewish thought may be seen even in congregations that eschewed the Jewish religion but shared what one

sociologist calls the "chauvinistic cosmolog[y]."[114] Echoing Prophet Cherry's thesis of divine negritude was the Moorish Science Temple, founded in 1916. This group, the first American black Muslim movement, forged a religious nationalism that viewed Christianity as irrevocably white and held Islam to be the black man's true religion.[115] Such unconventional groups flourished in early twentieth-century Harlem. As the African American journalist Roi Ottley observed, "Perhaps nowhere in America . . . is religion so extensively and so variously expressed. Cults of every description abound. Closed picture houses, dance halls, empty stores, and lodge halls are converted into places of worship."[116] Ottley suggested that this abundance was enabled by a self-conscious local ethos of religious pluralism. "[The cults] enjoy . . . the freedom which is traditionally accorded to every religious group in Harlem."[117]

Finally, 1910s and 1920s Harlem was the stage for a social phenomenon that epitomized Wilson Moses' formulation of nationalism's politics-as-faith: Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). Prior to the 1922 collapse of its Black Star shipping line and contingent back-to-Africa plan, the UNIA was the largest black political organization the world had ever seen. Lyrical references to Ethiopia abounded in Garvey's speeches and writings; they exhorted black followers to embrace both pride and hope: "Even the great poets of old sang in beautiful sonnets of the delight it afforded the gods to be in companionship with the Ethiopians. Why, then, should we lose hope? Black men, you were once great; you shall be great again."[118] Such passages evoked the Ethiopianist tradition, in which, significantly, Ethiopia figured as a sign of black chosenness and redemption parallel with Jerusalem for Israelites.

This parallel was not lost on Garvey; he and his followers embraced the examples of both ancient and contemporary Jews, while also, ironically, endorsing anti-Semitic stereotypes. UNIA members spoke of Garvey as "the black Moses," highlighting their sense that his project of African redemption would follow the biblical precedent of Exodus. Garvey also consciously and strategically compared his emigration plan to the aspirations of modern Zionists. Speaking in 1924 of his hopes to establish an African colony, he said, "We are asking the world for a fair chance to assist the people of Liberia in developing that country, as the world is giving the Jew a fair chance to develop Palestine."[119] This would allow black people to emulate the Jewish

strategy of nationalist uplift: "We want to work out a plan like the Zionist so as to recover ourselves."[120] In advising African Americans on more modest modes of uplift that could be practiced prior to emigration, he likewise held out the example of the economically successful American Jews. Yet Garvey also criticized Jews, often for that very success. He subscribed to theories of Jewish political conspiracy—which he blamed for his 1923 mail fraud conviction—and warned: "Jewish finance is a powerful world factor."[121] He went so far as to praise both Mussolini and Hitler early in their careers, although later he would denounce them for their attacks on African peoples as well as on Jews.[122]

Given Garveyism's rhetorical proximity to Black Jewish thought, it is not surprising that the two movements overlapped—not only chronologically and ideologically but literally in the sharing of some adherents. Roi Ottley noted, "the Black Jews have aligned themselves with organizations like the U.N.I.A."[123] And as Landes and others noted, two of the founding Harlem rabbis, Mordechai Herman and Arnold Ford, were UNIA members, Ford having served as musical director at the UNIA headquarters before breaking with Garvey over Judaism.[124] Some coalition continued even after Ford's break. Rabbi Matthew's Commandment Keepers hosted a joint service for several groups, including the UNIA, "to pay tribute to Haile Selassie" during Passover week in 1931.[125] Matthew also addressed a UNIA street meeting the following year.[126] Ottley recognized the irony in Garvey's role as "a principal source of anti-Semitic propaganda," but he discerned a commonality between Black Jews and Garveyites—the belief in a black homeland, Africa—which he suggested was sufficient grounds for coalition.[127] The coalition, however, seems to have been short-lived; no organizational cooperation appears in the record after 1932.[128] Perhaps individuals who temporarily belonged to both movements felt ultimately compelled to choose between Garvey's emphasis on large-scale protest and capital endeavor and the Black Jews' more conservative strategies.

The Black Jewish congregations, then, developed against a set of pertinent backgrounds in traditional African American thought and in Harlem's contemporary religious and political life. For other blacks, these settings made the congregations appear conceptually and socially situated. These contexts of black religion, political thought, and local economic relations would have been known far better to black Harlemites

than to whites living outside the neighborhood. The black press's matter-of-fact reportage, so different from the Jewish papers' skepticism, reflects that familiarity.

Yet the gap between African American and white journalistic inquisitiveness suggests more than simply disparate knowledge of Harlem. For African Americans, the encounter with Black Jews highlighted a different context of social opportunity and identification. African Americans could not "become white." Although some light-skinned individuals could and did "pass," African Americans as a group could not escape their racial designation. Indeed, the very reason that Italians, Jews, and other European immigrant groups could become white was that African Americans could not. Blacks anchored the socioeconomic ladder that white ethnics climbed. As the most exploitable labor pool, they undergirded an economy of opportunity for other groups; as pariahs, they were the end point from which social distance was a measure of social success.

Because white society tried to maintain the black category so rigidly, racial status was not a dimension of mobility or choice for African Americans. But other aspects of identity were. Prominent among these voluntary dimensions were religion and political orientation. By choosing to be Baptist or Pentecostal, by endorsing the NAACP or Garvey, black Americans could and did claim distinct identities, both within their own society and *vis-a-vis* whites. Significantly, these were identities of *profession.* It was by professing a faith or a politics that one made oneself a member of the party or church. Ascriptive traits like skin color did not count. Indeed, "racial" criteria were generally the tools of whites not blacks. True, black nationalism spoke of a united "race," and Garvey declared that only "100% Negroid" persons could hold office in the UNIA.[129] But as a practical matter, such rhetoric did not enforce racial exclusivism because whites were not attempting to join black nationalist organizations. It was white society that established a system of ascriptive identity. Within its externally circumscribed sphere, Afro-America seems to have granted much credence to identities based on statements—and to the statements that established identities.[130] Perhaps this was especially true in Harlem. In Harlem the possibility for non-ascriptive identity was enhanced by the cosmopolitan ethos of New York, by the local norm of religious toleration, and by the dynamism of southern and West Indian migrants, who were arriving daily to recast themselves as northern, urban people. This orientation

toward identities of profession, along with the longstanding resonances between Jewish and black identities, helps explain the tendency of the African American press to take Black Jews at their word. Within a context of professive identity, their saying they were Jews was enough. Their blackness did not put their Jewishness in doubt.

Conclusion

The African Americans who pursued a Jewish life in Harlem in the 1920s and 1930s were a small, mostly self-contained movement. They were marginal politically, and, although enterprising, were largely poor. Perhaps not all of them were "prepared to be 'hewers of wood and drawers of water,'" as Professor Reichelieu claimed; some cherished dreams of wealth and pan-African redemption. But in their daily lives they concentrated on incremental economic gain, close community, and the details of Jewish observance.

Yet these modest congregations, by their location at the edges of the wider black and Jewish communities, cast light on identity relations between those larger groups. Journalists from both communities encountered Black Jews and sought to portray them in print. In formulating reports, these writers necessarily incorporated their own assumptions about the implications that blackness held for Jewishness, and vice versa. Thus they indicated how American blacks and Jews in this period viewed identity in each other and themselves.

Observers differed markedly in the degrees of credence they granted to Black Jewish subjects. Among African Americans, a traditional identification with Hebrew slaves, along with the Jewish imagery infusing modern political and spiritual movements, made Black Jews fit with the social and metaphoric landscapes. Among Jewish Americans, Black Jews touched a more sensitive and less accommodating nerve. The Jewish sensitivity reflected powerful internal debates over the nature of Jewishness—whether it was voluntary or ascriptive, whether religious, ethnic, political, or racial. These debates made Ashkenazim inconstant and divided in the standards they applied to Black Jews.

But their very drive to assess the black congregations also reflected a racial anxiety stemming from the pressures of Americanization and the social structures of American life. Many Ashkenazim, while sympathetic toward American blacks, wished to mark a racial distinction between the latter and themselves. If they perceived that "blacks were

America's Jews," they were anxious to ensure that Jews not become America's blacks. The stakes of this distinction were obvious: African Americans were relegated to the base of America's social order, a position no one would want to share. In the early twentieth century, Jews and other European immigrants had a chance to separate themselves more clearly than ever from that lower stratum, to become marked as "white." Yet during the 1920s and 1930s, Jewish claims to white status were still quite tenuous; Jews were successful in some arenas of assimilation but excluded from others. Hence they feared the costs of too strong an association with African Americans. Allowing blacks to count as "real Jews" might make the black-Jewish link too close for comfort.

An historical moment in which racial configurations became particularly unstable thus gave Jews and other European-descended Americans a chance to exercise what might be called racial agency. Through their own actions—the ways they presented themselves in word and deed to the wider society, the discourses and analyses of race they endorsed—they could help propel their own passage through the fissures that had opened within racial ideology. This is not to say that they controlled the process of becoming white. It was not Jews or other "ethnics" alone who created the opening to whiteness (indeed, Jacobson and others attribute that opening in large measure to historical events, including the 1924 immigration restrictions and the Nazi Holocaust, that Jews actively opposed) or who were the ultimate arbiters of white acceptance. But they played a role. To use Jacobson's metaphor of probationary whiteness, ethnic whites did not sit on the probation board, but they influenced its decisions by their advocacy and good behavior.

African Americans could not exercise racial agency in the same way. If the American racial order was becoming reconfigured during the interwar years, its main structure still firmly stood, and that meant blacks were marked as the different and lower race. The agency blacks exercised in the racial struggle, therefore, was not waged on the nuanced border between two subtly different categories, such as Anglo and ethnic white. It had to be fought either against the entire hierarchy or on the inner side of the color line. African Americans exercised both strategies. Anti-racist organizations such as the NAACP challenged the legal and political barriers that kept blacks from enjoying full citizenship in American society. Simultaneously, nationalist formations such

as Garvey's UNIA and a wide array of religious and secular organizations within black society worked to build solidarity and community power among blacks.

These limitations on the racial routes of black struggle—i.e., the fact that blacks could not change positions in the racial order, but could only militate within and against it—were part of the background for the encounters analyzed here between black journalists and Black Jews. This paper has suggested that African American papers treated the Black Jewish congregations in unremarking tones in part because they had no practical imperative to do otherwise. Their agenda did not benefit from drawing distinctions between Jewish blacks and blacks at large. If anything, they felt inclined to portray the Black Jews in the tolerant spirit of black unity that was part of Harlem's political culture. This reading of reportorial silence as indicating intraracial solidarity and acceptance gains confirmation when seen alongside certain vocal moments when the African American press reported on white challenges to Black Jewish authenticity. On those occasions, the black papers vigorously condemned the challenges. They executed a kind of racial closing of ranks, defending the veracity of an identity, Jewishness, on which they possessed no particular expertise. In so doing they showed their awareness that the contest over Black Jews was more than a question of Judaism. It was part of a larger twentieth-century struggle over the possibilities for freedom, and the freedoms foreclosed, within the changing American structures of race.

NOTES

Principal thanks to Susan Glenn for her tireless reading and unfailing guidance; thanks also to Algernon Austin, Jim Gregory, Ken Lang, Suzanne Lebsock, Robert Self, Jen Seltz, Lynn Thomas, and Richard White, Lucy Maddox, Jeffrey Melnick, Kate Sampsell, and an anonymous reviewer at *American Quarterly* for very helpful criticisms and suggestions; and to Sam Benson and Susan Bragg; to Xiomara Cruz of the New York University Downtown Hospital; and to Betty Odabashian, Michael Roudette, and Mary Yearwood of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture for assistance with books and archival sources.

1. Hasia Diner, in her study of the early-twentieth-century Yiddish press, writes of a "fascination" evinced by Yiddish papers, where "numerous feature-length articles discussed the black Jews and the kind of Judaism they practiced." Hasia Diner, *In the Almost Promised Land: American Jews and Blacks, 1915–1935.* (Westport, Conn.:

Greenwood Press, 1977), 69. I have not found a secondary source that remarks on the frequency of African American reportage on Black Jews, but the ready availability of clippings at the Schomburg Center and in contemporaneous newspapers indicates that black papers often found the congregations newsworthy.

2. Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper have recently criticized the extensive scholarship on "identity," a term they rightly note has multiple, and potentially contradictory, meanings. In particular these writers point out that while constructivists speak of identity as a socially created, often fluid and fragmented sense of self, other thinkers treat it as an entity that is "out there," with objective attributes, separate from individuals who embrace or fit it. See Brubaker and Cooper, "Beyond 'identity,'" *Theory and Society* 29 (Feb. 2000) 1–47. While I am not entirely persuaded that we must strike "identity" from the scholarly lexicon (only to replace it with "identification," "self-understanding," "groupness," or other terms Brubaker and Cooper suggest), I welcome the stimulus to think critically about how this word should function in the present essay. (And I hope that, like Humpty Dumpty, I can make a word mean "just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.") When I write of Jewish and African American identities, I mean senses of self, involving group membership and common attributes, that were socially constructed, both by insiders (Jews, blacks) and by the larger white and Gentile society. I see discourses as important means, although hardly the only means, by which identity construction took place. And I think that, within substantial constraints imposed by the larger society, Jews and blacks exercised a degree of agency in embracing, challenging, sustaining or modifying identificatory discourses. I do *not* mean that there are objective, correct definitions of Jewishness or blackness that exist outside of social conventions and practices. (I cannot improve on W. E. B. Du Bois's conclusion that a black man is someone who must ride Jim Crow in Georgia.) In this article I am primarily interested in exploring how African American and Jewish agents sought to shape discourses of identity, within and without their minority communities, in the social context of a charged and changing racial order, and in response to a phenomenon that challenged some earlier ways of talking about blacks and Jews.

3. Black Jews believed that blacks were the only true Jews; hence, from their perspective, "Black Jews" was a redundancy and "white Jews" an oxymoron. For the Ashkenazim and Sephardim who composed the vast majority of Americans claiming Jewish identity, however, it was Black Jews who presented a color conundrum. To speak lightly of Ashkenazim and Sephardim as white, moreover, is to risk overlooking the socially constructed nature of white status and the degree to which American Jews' racial designation in the early twentieth century was in flux.

Nevertheless, attempting to write readable prose and choosing from a limited lexicon that contains no completely satisfactory terms, I have used "Black Jews" to denote the communities composed of African American (including Afro-Caribbean and African immigrant) members who identified themselves as Jewish. In many places I have also referred to their congregations by their particular names, such as the Commandment Keepers.

When speaking of other Jews—those who did not claim and were not described as having African ancestry and who were predominantly Ashkenazic during the period of this study—I have often followed the prevailing custom of the contemporaneous press and called them simply "Jews.' In some places, however, I have referred to them as "white Jews" to stress the distance between their position and that occupied by blacks in the American racial schema.

4. *Algemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* 15 (April 1905): appendix 3, cited in Author Dobrin, *A History of the Negro Jews in America.* Unpublished manuscript in Schomburg Center, New York Public Library, 24.

5. *Dr. Block's Woschenschrift* (1908), 401; also *American Israel* (May 7, 1908), 1, both cited in Ibid., 25.

6. Michael Gold, *Jews Without Money* (New York: H. Liveright, 1930), 174, in New York Public Library Humanities Jewish Collection. Ashkenazim are the Yiddish-speaking Jews of Eastern Europe and their descendants. Sephardim, the other major ethnic group in modern Jewry, trace back to medieval Iberian Jews; their vernacular is Ladino.

7. *New York Amsterdam News*, Dec. 23, 1925. The word "Hebraic" was commonly used as a synonym for "Jewish" and in this example simply means that Ford's Yiddish served as a sign of his Jewishness; it does not mean he spoke to Panken in Hebrew.

8. *Chicago Defender*, July 17, 1926.

9. "Black Jews in Harlem are Loyal to Their Faith," *Jewish Daily Forward*, Mar. 22, 1925, p. 3. Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Itzhaki [1040–1105]) and Rambam (Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, better known as Maimonides [1135–1204]) were preeminent medieval commentators on Jewish law. *Boba Kama* and *Boba Basra* are tractates in the Talmud.

10. "Moorish Zionist Temple Ordains Rabbi to Lead Flocks of Israel." Unnamed periodical, June 19, 1929, in Schomburg Center "Black Jews" clipping file.

11. "Negro Jewish Sect Ushers in New Year with services at Synaguge in Harlem," *Amsterdam News*, Sept. 24, 1930.

12. *Ibid.;* "Moorish Zionist Temple Ordains Rabbi to Lead Flocks of Israel." The 1921 date for Moorish Zionist comes from this latter article, published in June 1929. A later report by Ruth Landes, discussed infra, says that the group was established in 1924. Ruth Landes, "Negro Jews in Harlem," *Jewish Journal of Sociology* (Apr. 1967), 181–82. (Landes wrote her paper in 1933 and submitted it to a German sociology journal, but the Nazi regime shut down the journal, and the piece was not published for more than thirty years.)

13. Landes, "Negro Jews in Harlem," 180.

14. "Head of Black Jewish Cult Dies of Burns," unidentified newspaper article in Schomburg Center's "Black Jews" clipping file, n.d. Landes reports that Ever Live and Gospel of the Kingdom, founded in 1917, were one and the same congregation.

Two congregations of a somewhat different character also surfaced locally in these years. Both the Synagogue Ansche Zedek in Brooklyn and the Institutional Synagogue in upper Manhattan boasted interracial memberships. At Ansche Zedek, established in 1930, "about twenty-five of 150 are colored. They come from New York, New Jersey, Long Island, Brooklyn, and East New York. . . . Rabbi Israel Ben Yamin . . . holds his services in Yiddish and English." ("Moorish Group President Describes Program of Mixed Body in Synagogue," *New York Amsterdam News* Jan. 13, 1932.) The Institutional Synagogue gave no racial breakdown of its congregants, but the apparently white leader, Rabbi Herbert Goldstein, stressed, "all are welcome." The synagogue ran a progressive summer camp for poor children, and "Negro boys and girls participated in all activities." ("Games, Gymnastics, Swimming, Art and Study Stressed at Rabbi Goldstein's Harlem Institutional Synagogue," *New York World-Telegram* Dec. 19, 1935.) Such integrated synagogues, however, did not self-identify—nor were they considered by others—as houses of Black Jews. This category was distinguished by the all- or virtually all-black congregations, of which Commandment Keepers was most consistently prominent.

15. "Schvartze Yidn fun Harlem Fongn On a Drayv far a Naye Tempel" [Black Jews of Harlem Begin a Drive for a New Temple], *Yiddish Morgen Journal-Tageblatt*, July 11, 1929; "Negro Sect in Harlem Mixes Jewish and Christian Religions," *New York Sun*, January 29, 1929.

16. "Negro Sect in Harlem Mixes Jewish and Christian Religions," Ibid.

17. "Harlem's Followers of Judaism Sound Ram's Horn and Chant Hebrew Psalms to Mark Rosh-ha-shanah," *New York Amsterdam News*, Sept. 16, 1931; "Harlem Leader of Black Jews," *Afro-American*, Feb. 8, 1936.

18. "Negro Jewish Sect Ushers in New Year."

19. "Negro Sect in Harlem Mixes Jewish and Christian Religions."

20. Roi Ottley, *New World A-Coming: Inside Black America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1943), 147. "Shvartze Yidn Fun Harlem Fongn On Drayv."

21. Ottley, *New World A-Coming*,147.

22. Ibid., 147.

23. "Negro Jews Win Rent Suit." Ruth Landes also noted the West Indian background of many Black Jews. Landes, "Negro Jews in Harlem," 179.

24. "Court Halts Sale of Harlem Stock By Negro Jews," unidentified newspaper, Dec. 9, 1930, Schomburg Center "Black Jews" clipping file.

25. "Jewish Negro Girl Honored," *New York Amsterdam News*, Dec. 20, 1933; "Der Geshamedter Elter Zeyde un Der Frumer Zeyde fun der Neger Meydele fun Harlemer Talmud Torah" [The Converted Great-Grandfather and the Observant Grandfather of the Negro Girl from the Harlem Talmud-Torah], *Jewish Daily Forward*, Dec. 13, 1933.

26. "Black Jews in Harlem are Loyal to Their Faith," *Jewish Daily Forward*, Mar. 22, 1925, p. 3.

27. "Black Israel," *New York Amsterdam News*, Sept. 8, 1934; "Black Jews Celebrate Rosh Hoshona With Hebraic World," *New York Amsterdam News*, Sept. 19, 1936; "Rabbi Wentworth Matthew, Led Ethiopian Temple Here," *New York Times*, Dec. 5, 1973.

28. Ottley, *New World A-Coming,* 144 (emphasis added).

29. Ibid., 144–45.

30. Dobrin, *A History of the Negro Jews*, 28; *Amsterdam News*, July 1, 1931.

31. *Morgen-Journal-Tageblatt* , July 11, 1929.

32. Ibid. The lyrics given here are my translation of the Yiddish version printed in the news article. The Yiddish, however, is itself a translation of an English original, in rhyme, which I have not been able to recover.

33. St. Clair Drake, *The Redemption of Africa and Black Religion* (Chicago: Third World Press, c.1970), 48–50; John Cullen Gruesser, *Black on Black: Twentieth-Century African American Writing About Africa* (Lexington, Ky.: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 2000), 1–14 and *passim.* Jake Homiak, "Dread History: The African Diaspora, Ethiopianism, and Rastafari," National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, *http://educate.si.edu/migrations/rasta/rasessay.html*; Yvonne Chireau, "Black Culture and Black Zion: African American Religious Encounters with Judaism, 1790–1930, an Overview," in Chireau and Nathaniel Deutsch, eds., *Black Zion: African American Religious Encounters with Judaism* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000), 25.

34. Chireau and Deutsch, eds., *Black Zion*, 26.

35. "Negro Sect in Harlem Mixes Jewish and Christian Religions."

36. Much of this work comes out of labor history: labor scholars set out to learn why white American workers would not ally with blacks, and discovered that the processes through which those workers came to see themselves (and be seen by others) as white were complex, contingent and changeable over time. See Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley, Calif.: Univ. of California Press, 1971); David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York, Verso, 1991); Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995). Gwendolyn Mink's analysis of turn-of-the-century labor politics, although it predated the genera-

tion of whiteness studies, anticipated the work of Roediger and Ignatiev by highlighting the role of divisions between old and new immigrants—those whom later scholars would read as white and not-quite-white, respectively—in forestalling working-class mobilization in the United States. *Old Labor and New Immigrants in American Political Development: Union, Party and State, 1875–1920* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1986). Neil Foley has argued in *The White Scourge* that marginal whites could not only gain white status as they acquired power but could also lose it if their fortunes declined. *The White Scourge* (Berkeley, Calif.: Univ. of California, 1997). These labor historians have also drawn on race-formation literature in other fields, such as sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant's seminal *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge, 1986).

37. The most comprehensive castigation comes from Eric Arneson, "Whiteness and the Historians' Imagination," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 60 (fall 2001). Arneson takes whiteness historians to task for using the term "whiteness" loosely; for warping the meaning of W. E. B. Du Bois' famous formulation of the "public and psychological wage" enjoyed by white workers; for exaggerating and poorly documenting the process by which immigrants "became white"; for employing spurious psychoanalytical reasoning; and for reducing an array of racializing forces to a single quantity, "whiteness." Two other ILWCH contributors, Adolph Reed, Jr., and Barbara Fields, endorse and amplify these criticisms. James Barrett, David Brody, Eric Foner, Victoria Hattam, Gary Gerstle, and Linda Gordon share parts of Arneson, Fields and Reed's assessments but reach more measured final judgments. Collectively, Arneson and respondents have written a powerful and illuminating body of criticism. It is largely persuasive. In particular, the charges that some whiteness studies rely on thin evidence to posit a ubiquitous racial ideology, and take whiteness as a transhistorical and presumptive category, sound warnings that will have to be heeded by future students of white racial formation. But these caveats need not preclude all possibility of valid work on the racialization of whites. In this article I have tried to incorporate critical perspectives by limiting claims and attending to the subtleties of the sources I examine. Although I have set my story within broad ideological backgrounds among American blacks and Jews, I understand that historical arguments based on a discrete set of sources such as news articles must be scaled accordingly. Although I analyze racial discourse, I agree with the critics that the political and economic contexts around that discourse are crucial to understanding its trajectory. And although I draw generally on the whiteness literature's notion of changing racial designations for European immigrants, I attempt to read what my primary sources say about those designations, rather than simply fit them into a ready-made category of whiteness. (All scholars' essays appear in the ILWCH issue cited above, except for those of Gordon and Gerstle, which were presented at a "live version" of the roundtable at New York University, Nov. 2001.)

38. Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1998).

39. "Different" from *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, Mar. 1984, 614. "Well-marked," from race-scientist Josiah Nott, quoted in ibid., 180, "filthy" from *The New York Times*, Aug. 1890. In a careful study of nineteenth century American depictions of Jews, Louise Mayo finds that the traditional Shylock stereotype persisted through the latter decades of the century but was complicated by a new genre of sympathetic portrayals. Mayo, *The Ambivalent Image: Nineteenth-Century America's Perception of the Jews* (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 1988), 148–78. "Money-lenders" from *Littell's Living Age*, quoted in Mayo, *The Ambivalent Image*, 154.

40. Daniel Itzkovitz, "American Modernism, Race and the Rhetoric of 'Jewish Difference,' 1880–1940" (Ph.D. diss., Duke Univ., 1997), 10–11.

41. Ibid., 92–109.

42. Some American westernists have criticized the whiteness literature for treating as paradigmatic an East Coast racial narrative that ill fits racial formations in other parts of the country. In particular some argue that while the black-white schema may have prevailed in the eastern United States, western racial ideology was complicated from the beginning by large populations of Native Americans, Mexicans, and Asians. Jacobson does keep an eye on racial constructions of West Coast Chinese (and, to a lesser extent, other groups). Neil Foley's study and other recent works have introduced multiracial and regional analyses to the new racial history. For present purposes, however, Jacobson's and other "eastern" formulations are suitable given the New York setting of this study.

43. Eric Louis Goldstein, "Race and the Construction of Jewish Identity in America, 1875–1945" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Michigan, 2000), 286, 60.

44. Cultural historians have argued that blackface, with its cast of predominantly Jewish actors (including Al Jolson, Eddie Cantor, and George Burns) was a crucial arena for expression of equivocal racial impulses. Roediger contends that blackface performance was a site of working-class formation in which a shared sense of whiteness was part of the class-conscious bond. Minstrels "creat[ed] a new sense of whiteness by creating a new sense of blackness." Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, 115. Michael Rogin has argued that the Jewish ethnic pattern was not a coincidence. Rather, insecure Jews, like the despised Irish before them, used blackface as a lever by which to propel themselves from questionable racial status into the secure category of "white." Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley, Calif.: The Univ. of California Press, 1996), 16. Other scholars have suggested a more ambiguous dynamic to blackface, in which the cross-race act might subvert rather than reinforce racial dualities. See Margerie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993). In either case, however, the white performers were executing a complex manipulation of their tenuous racial status by symbolically adopting a black identity. The symbolic link between "black" and "Jew" contained great potency.

45. Diner, *Almost Promised Land*, 20.

46. Ibid., 36.

47. Ibid., 74.

48. Ibid., 74–75.

49. Ibid., 47.

50. Ibid., 72.

51. Jeffrey Gurock, *When Harlem Was Jewish, 1870–1930* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1979), 145–46.

52. Diner, *Almost Promised Land*, 62, 65.

53. Gold, *Jews Without Money*, 174–75. *Halakha* is Jewish law.

54. *Jewish Daily Forward*, Dec. 13, 1933.

55. "Shvartze Yidn Fongn On a Drayv."

56. *Jewish Daily Forward*, Mar. 22, 1925.

57. "'Black Jews' Synagogues Attacked," *Pittsgurgh Courier*, Dec. 5, 1931.

58. "Black Israel!: Harlem Jews Keep the Fast of Yom Kippur," *Newsweek*, Sept. 29, 1934.

59. Landes, "Negro Jews in Harlem," 178.

60. Ibid., 182–83.

61. Ibid., 180, 185.

62. Ibid., 177.
63. Ibid., 186.
64. Ibid., 188.
65. Ibid., 184.
66. Guide to Ruth Schlossberg Landes Papers, National Anthropological Archives. Available on the World-Wide Web: *http://www.nmnh.si.edu/naa/guide/_l1.htm#jrg568.*
67. Landes, "Negro Jews in Harlem," 176.
68. "Negro Sect in Harlem Mixes Jewish and Christian Religions," *New York Sun*,Jan. 29, 1929.
69. "Moorish Zionist Temple Ordains Rabbi."
70. Ottley, *New World A-Coming*, 147.
71. "Black Jews of Harlem are Loyal to Their Faith," italics in original. A *schnorrer* is a beggar.
72. "Shvartze Yidn Fun Harlem Fongn On a Drayv."
73. "Shvartze Bronzvil Yidn Apelirn tzu di Yidn nokh Hilf," *Yiddish Morgen-Journal-Tageblatt*, 1931. The Brownsville Moorish Zion Temple was founded in 1899 by "Rabbi Riechlieu," likely the same "Riechelieu" who was later associated with the Harlem synagogue of the same name. Chireau and Deutsch, eds., *Black Zion*, 30, fn 13.
74. Landes, "Negro Jews in Harlem," 175.
75. "Harlem Negro Jews Branded Fakes by White Man Who Accredits Abyssinians," Dec. 14, 1936. Although the newspaper itself cannot be identified, the use of the the "white" descriptor, in the style of contemporaneous black reportage, indicates that the paper is African American.
76. "Black and White Jews," *Pittsburgh Courier*, Oct. 1927.
77. *"Der Geshamedter Elter-Zeyde."* A *tallis* is a prayer-shawl; *tfiln* are small pouches containing scriptural writing that are worn by observant Jews during prayer. A *minyan* is the quorum of ten adult Jews required for certain prayers.
78. There is also a technical error in this version of the Hebrew phrase; properly, it would be "Bays Tefilos" in Ashkenazic Hebrew, "Bayit Tefilot" in Sephardic. The error may have been made either by the Black Jewish spokesman or by the newspaper reporter who took down his words.
79. "Black and White Jews," *Pittsburgh Courier*, Oct. 1927, emphasis added.
80. Gold, *Jews Without Money*, 175.
81. "Black Jews In Harlem are Loyal to Their Faith."
82. Ibid.
83. *The Afro-American*, Feb. 8, 1936.
84. Quoted in Arthur Herzberg, *The Zionist Idea* (New York: Athaneum, 1986), p. 691.
85. Quoted in ibid., p. 699.
86. Quoted in ibid., 576. Itzkovitz adds the interesting point that Zionist claims sought to bolster not just whiteness but white masculinity, rebutting the stereotype of the physically weak Jew. Itzkovitz, "Race and Rhetoric," 61.
87. Sander Gilman, *The Jew's Body* (New York: Routledge, 1991) 171–72. The internal quotation is from the Bavarian Johann Pezzl's description of Viennese Jewry in the 1780s.
88. Joseph Jacobs, *Studies in Jewish Statistics, Social, Vital, and Anthropomorphic* (London: D. Nutt, 1891), quoted in Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 181.
89. Jacobson, 177–78.
90. See Lawrence Fuchs, *The American Kaleidescope: Race Ethnicity and the Civic Culture* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1990).
91. This did not mean that Jews ceased to live in Jewish neighborhoods or participate in Jewish civic associations; many in the second generation moved from the impover-

ished Lower East Side to new, largely Jewish, working- and middle-class neighborhoods in the outer boroughs. See Deborah Dash Moore, *At Home in America: Second Generation New York Jews*(New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1981).

92. Robert M. Seltzer, *Jewish People, Jewish Thought: The Jewish Experience in History* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1980), 647. See also Dash Moore, *At Home in America.*

93. Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 187.

94. Goldstein, "Race and Construction of Jewish Identity," 245–46. See also Leonard Dinnerstein, *Antisemitism in America* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press), 98.

95. Henry L. Feingold, *A Time for Searching: Entering the Mainstream, 1920–1945* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1992), 130.

96. "Filthy . . . " from testimony to the Secretary of State, quoted in Feingold, 25. "Peculiar . . . " from Madison Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race, or, The Racial Basis of European History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), 16

97. Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977), 50.

98. Wilson Jeremiah Moses, ed., *Classical Black Nationalism* (New York: New York Univ. Press), 2–3.

99. David Walker, *Appeal in Four Articles*, ibid., 73–74, emphasis in original.

100. Blyden, "The Call of Providence to the Descendants of Africa in America" (1862), repr. in ibid., 196–97; Delany, *Minutes of the African Civilization Society*, Nov. 7, 1861, quoted in Gayraud Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism* (Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1972), 155.

101. Wilmore, *Black Religion*, 16, 21.

102. Wilson Moses, *The Wings of Ethiopia* (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State Univ. Press, 1990), 112–13.

103. Moses argues further that this spectrum was not exclusively African American but rather belonged to a broader American tradition of belief in messianic and redemptionist political identity. Wilson Moses, *Black Messiahs and Uncle Toms: Social and Literary Manipulations of a Religious Myth* (University Park, Penn.: The Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1982).

104. Quoted in Wilson Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850–1925* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1978), 95.

105. Quoted in ibid., 96.

106. Ibid., 98.

107. Isabel Boiko Price, *Black Response to Anti-Semitism: Negroes and Jews in New York, 1886–World War II* (Ph.D., Univ. of New Mexico, 1973), 54–60, 139–40, 151–54.

108. *The New York Age*, Feb. 3, 1912.

109. *The New York Age*, Oct. 18, 1924.

110. L. D. Reddick, "Anti Semitism Among Negreos," *Negro Quarterly* 1 (summer 1942), 112–122. The article indicates that the symbiotic interaction of circumstance and stereotype had been at work for years.

111. Elly M. Wynia, *The Church of God and Saints of Christ: "A Black Judeo-Christian Movement Founded in Lawrence, Kansas in 1896"* (B.A. thesis, Univ. of Kansas), 1988.

112. Wilmore, *Black Religion*, 216

113. Ibid., 216.

114. Hans A. Baer, *The Black Spiritual Movement* (Knoxville, Tenn.: The Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1984), 161.

115. Joseph R. Washington, Jr., *Black Sects and Cults* (Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1972), 128.

116. Roi Ottley, "The Negro Renaissance" in *The Negro in New York* (New York: The New York Public Library, 1967), 251.

117. Ibid., 283.

118. Amy Jacques-Garvey, ed., *Philosophy & Opinions of Marcus Garvey* (New York: Atheneum, 1986), 77.

119. *Negro World*, June 14, 1924, quoted in Robert A. Hill and Barbara Bair, eds., *Marcus Garvey: Life and Lessons* (Berkeley, Calif.: Univ. of California Press, 1987), liv.

120. *Black Man*, Dec. 1937, quoted in ibid., lvi.

121. "Hitler and the Jews," *Black Man* 1 (July 1935): 9, quoted in ibid., lix.

122. Ibid., lvii–lx.

123. Ottley, *New World A-Coming*, 149.

124. Howard Brotz, *The Black Jews of Harlem: Negro Nationalism and the Dilemmas of Negro Leadership* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe,1964), 11. Chireau, "Black Culture and Black Zion," 23.

125. "Jewish Followers to Mark Passover," unidentified paper, Mar. 25, 1931, in Schomburg Center's "Black Jews" clipping file.

126. "Garvey Followers Charge Attack," *The New York Amsterdam News*, Sept. 7, 1932.

127. Ottley, *New World A-Coming*, 150.

128. By this time, certainly, there was far less of a Garvey movement with which to coalesce; UNIA membership had fallen off sharply in the late 1920s. However, a small New York branch remained viable until at least 1935. Judith Stein, *The World of Marcus Garvey: Race and Class in Modern Society* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1986), 255.

129. Ottley, *The Negro In New York*, 214.

130. An alternative reading of this evidence is possible. Some have suggested that black nationalist organizations *were* claiming an ascriptive racial identity that ran counter to the racial designation imposed by whites. The UNIA, which exalted Ethiopian ancestry, is one example. The Nation of Islam (NOI), founded in 1931, is another. Early NOI literature spoke of a race called "the Asiatic Black Man," which comprised Africans and Asiatics in one unified people of color; it said this was the true racial category to which black Americans belonged. Algernon Austin, "The Asiatic Black Man: Race, Culture and Identity in the Nation of Islam," presented at the Section on Race and Ethnic Minorities Refereed Roundtables at the 94th Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, Chicago, Illinois, Aug. 6–10, 1999. In positing these unconventional racial mappings of the world, UNIA and NOI members were appropriating an ideological tool—race—that European thinkers had invented, and seeking to put it to emancipatory use for black people. They were, so to speak, trying to beat whites at whites' own racial game rather than choosing to play a different game with different rules. Thus in the rhetorical sphere they were indeed exercising racial agency. I am grateful to Algernon Austin for pointing out this reading. For present purposes, however, there remains an important distinction between the kind of racial agency blacks could exercise—exalting eastern heritage to create a psychic counterweight and rhetorical challenge to American racial stigmas—and the kind white ethnics could exert, to win tangible social and economic gains.